The people of the Northeast are the guardians of its most precious asset: its uniqueness. Which other area has such beauty among its people and its environment? Which sees such a range of religions, creeds, communities, lifestyles and traditions? Which other area can match it in the sheer raw power of nature: whether it is the Brahmaputra that resembles a great sea during its rain-swollen, flood-hungry days, or the force of its gales and the grace of its waterfalls, the lushness of its forests and bamboo thickets and the solitude of its spirit, found in the mist of the mountains. (Hazarika 1994: xx)

Prose Writing in English from India’s Northeast is a powerful genre. There have been a number of writers, both in fiction and non-fiction, who claim serious attention. Nationhood, identity, insurgency, ethnic violence, corruption in the bureaucracy, home, migration, exile, memory are some of the dominant themes that the novelists of this region deal with. They have been also dealing with the ecology of the region. An ecological concern is inherent in most of the writings. Ecology has been consciously used to attain an identity --- an identity that is legitimate, powerful as well as unique. A study of these writings from an ecological perspective helps not only to evaluate the writers, but also to understand this vibrant region of India – the Northeast.

Some of the representative prose writers of the region are Mamang Dai, Yeshe Dorji Thongchi (Arunachal Pradesh), Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Hem Barua, Indira Goswami, Arup Kumar Dutta, Mitra Phukan, Dhruba Hazarika, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Sanjoy Hazarika, Sanjib Baruah (Assam), Arabam Ongbi Memchoubi, Thingnam Kishan Singh, Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh, Pradip Phanjoubam, Yumlembam Ibomcha (Manipur), Patricia Mukhim, Siddartha Deb,
Anjum Hasan (Meghalaya), Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, Margaret Lalmuanpuii Pachuau, Mona Zote (Mizoram), Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu, Charles Chasie, Anungla Aier (Nagaland). Apart from dealing with some of the core issues of the region, these writers explore through the history and the mysterious ecology of their native states in particular and the region in general. This eco-consciousness is a significant feature of their writing.

Mamang Dai’s *The Legends of Pensam* is a novel that has a strong ecological concern. History, myth, tradition, memory and fiction merge together in this novel which showcases the unique ecology of Arunachal Pradesh. Revolving around the myths, legends, tradition and culture of the Adis, one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the book re-invents that part of history which is yet unexposed. Dai also conveys through this book, the clash between tradition and modernity that can well be studied from an ecological viewpoint. The very nature of the tradition of the land can be felt in these poetic lines at the very beginning of the novel:

In our language, the language of the Adis, the word ‘pensam’ means ‘in-between’. It suggests the middle, or middle ground, but it may also be interpreted as the hidden spaces of the heart where a secret garden grows. It is the small world where anything can happen and everything can be lived; where the narrow boat that we call life sails along somehow in calm or stormy weather; where the life of a man can be measured in the span of a song.(Dai 2006:vii)
For her inquisitive odyssey through the ecology of the vibrant tribal world of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai chooses the Adis, the community she herself belongs to, as this tribe has a rich cultural and ecological heritage: “Like the majority of tribes inhabiting the central belt of Arunachal, the Adis practise an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world.” (ibidem 1)

The landscape of Arunachal Pradesh, its geographical as well as topographical position and its environment find expression in a number of passages in the novel. The pristine environment of the region is referred to in the following passage:

The river cuts through our land as before in its long journey to the sea. In spring the red flower still blaze against our sky. But the old people now, the few of them alive, turn slowly in their sleep as the fires burn down to a heap of ash. In the middle of the night a bird swoops low and calls out in a wild, staccato note. The thatch rustles. The bamboo creaks. The darkness is full of breath and sighs. (ibidem 4)

This aforesaid passage is also a portrayal of the clash between the pristine past and the polluted present. The mysteries engulfing the tribal world, its faiths and beliefs, its oral traditions, myths, legends, folklores, rites and rituals are presented in a labyrinthine web of nineteen stories depicted in the four sections of the novel. This ecological portrayal of the land is in a larger sense, a conscious way of asserting an identity of the indigenous people of the region, the marginalized voices. Dai also talks about the ecological degradation of the lands as well as degeneration of traditional values during the colonial period. The novel advocates the revival of tradition and
restoration of the age-old bond between the human and the natural world as a way of retaining the identity of the tribal communities in this age of globalization. Here too lies the significance of *The Legends of Pensam*. “Mamang Dai through her chain of stories called ‘Legends of Pensam’ has asserted an identity of Arunachal and its tribes by associating the tribal life and activities with nature. All transactions assume unlimited dimensions here in the bosom of nature. The natural surrounding and human and nonhuman transactions assume unlimited dimensions.” (Das 2011:283-284)

A world with ecofeministic ideals is clearly seen in the novel. The third section of the novel entitled “daughters of the village” deals with such tribal myths, legends and folklores those have a powerful note of ecofeminism in them. The nature-women relationship, the basic tenet of ecofeminism, is reaffirmed through these traditional tales. Women have a tender care for the society at large and for her immediate family. Like nature, they too sustain life and their close proximity with the world of nature as it shapes a caring attitude in them. But again, like nature, it is the women who are kept in the periphery and remain unheard by the patriarchal society:

The women stirred uneasily. It was a big thing to invoke the sun and the moon. Words have magic, and powerful words have powerful magic. We knew, in these villages, that the men slept peacefully with no blame to touch them. The laws of birth, life and death were fixed and unchangeable. And despite everything women always prayed. ‘Let no harm come to our men.’ (ibidem 77)
The changing scenario of the world at present has brought radical changes to the environment and even to the life-style of the tribal people. A kind of a cultural hegemony in the name of globalization has pushed these people to the margin. There seems to be confusion in their traditional world and they are at a loss in this topsyturvy new world. Identify crisis, sense of alienation and loss have started haunting these people. Mamang Dai, as a novelist, believes that an ecomystical way of living is the only solution to these problems. Going back to their roots is the key to their resistance against these winds of changes. Worshipping and preserving nature, living with complete harmony with nature would help them to restore an identity in this period of transition and crisis. This note of Deep Ecology as well as Creation Spirituality is heard time and again in the novel. The sub-section entitled “the scent of orange blossom” of the third section of the novel has a resonance of this ecomystical tone:

Nothing was complete. But there was comfort in looking at the green hills and the river that she had crossed to become Kao’s wife. Together, they would raise a family, guard their land and live among their people observing the ancient customs of their clan. Surely these were enough gifts for one lifetime. (ibidem 120)

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, a prominent literary figure of Assam, and a Jnanpith awardee tells “a story that had never been told” (Bhattacharyya 2005: blurb) in his novel *Love in the Time of Insurgency*. Set in Nagaland during the World War II, the novel talks about war, love and life in a large dimension. The landscape and the ecology of Nagaland as well as the Northeast India come to life in this novel. Natural beauty of the land has references in many places in the novel and the environmental
degradation due to the war is also talked about: “Far away towards the northeast, the Shiroi peak looked as calm as ever, home to most of the rivers that originated in its many crevices and slopes and flowed through the village and its surrounding areas” (ibidem 17). But that calm and serene atmosphere is no more. It has been disturbed and degraded by the ravages of war, a man-made hazard that destroys the ecological equilibrium. Sharengla, the main female character of the novel climbs up a hill and what she sees from the top of it is the impact of war on the ecology as a whole:

Slowly she climbed a nearby hill and reached the top. She looked at the village at her feet, looking so sad and devastated in the midst of the softly rippling hills, the ribbons of streams and rivers. Some houses were still burning, pigs and chicken scurrying helplessly around. The village church, too, burned. The spire was licked by small shooting flames and bits of burning wood beginning to fall from it. The cross was no longer visible. (ibidem)

Again in the following passage ecological ideas are used to depict the inner self of a character:

The way to the field was lonely. His thoughts turned to Khatingla. Strange that he should think of her when his thoughts were on motherly love. But then, the loneliness of hill roads and lanes always made him think of his loved ones. The season was not chilly but the leaves and flowers were wet with dew. A scent of pine trees wafted in the air, reminding him of the girl he
The human world has a deep relationship with the world of nature. The world of nature is responsible in shaping a frame of mind in human beings. This ecomystical concept on the human-nature relationship is seen in many occasions in the novel. Even a single sentence, taken casually from any part of the novel substantiates the ecomystical concern of the novel: “The glorious weather evoked strange feelings, and once again he felt free and inspired” (ibidem 170). The arrival of the missionaries created a clash of cultures, a confrontation between the old tradition and a new faith. People debated on the issue and some of them felt that their age-old tradition and culture had been ruined in the name of development and modernization. The novel voices the views and sentiments of both these generations, the old and new:

“But don’t you see how Christianity and education have widened our outlook, released us from the bondage of a superstitious and parochial existence?” Khating asked, impetuously. “Thank god for Reverend Pettigrew and Dr Brock. They opened schools and churches in the villages and gave us new ideas, and the benefits of modern medicines and machines. The government has set up a modern administration, built roads, ended things like head-hunting. Are these not the very things that we wanted? ....” (ibidem 36)

To this the older voice that believes in the necessity of grasping to their age-old tradition, replies:
“Pettigrew! Ngazek barked out. He comes here and makes us all cowards. You call his work, work? Because of your ideas people will no longer remain real Nagas. To be modern means aping your masters. Puny white men. Puny black men. Mental Slaves. You see the sahibs laugh at you when you ape them. They don’t consider you their equals. Are you not ashamed of it?”

(ibidem 36)

Ecofeminist ideas pervade this novel. There are many passages which can be seen from the canons of ecofeminism. Sirala, an old woman is disgusted with the war. Her disgust finds expression in the following lines which can also be the voice of nature that has been ravaged by wars and battles from time to time: “Oh, the war!” Her tone was bitter. “What are you fighting for, tell me? To sacrifice the little you have, for others? This killing business is terrible.” (ibidem 33). A close look into the long history of wars and battles in human civilization shows that warfare is primarily a man’s business, where, most of the time, women have nothing to say. So it is basically the males who are responsible for degrading nature, and in that way degrading women. This is expressed in this sentence: “….I don’t understand politics and war. They are primarily a man’s business” (ibidem 26)…Sharengla, like nature, voices her ‘feminine’ sensibility: “You have to be a woman to realize what war means” (ibidem 32). Love in the Time of Insurgency is full of passages that portray the natural landscapes, the entire ecology of the land, clash of traditions and cultures. The novel also consciously deals with ecofeminist and ecomystical ideas.
Dhruba Hazarika’s *A Bowstring Winter* is a novel on the life in Shillong, the capital city of Megalaya during the 1970s. Meghalaya, more specifically Shillong, with all its ecological features, can be said to be the main character of the novel, which is divided into three chapters named after three months of the year—“*U Naiweng*” (November), “*U Nohpah*” (December) and “*U Kyllalyngkot*” (January). Description of the natural landscape of Shillong is found in many of the places in the novel:

It was not a very big field. To the left, a stony track curved down from a cleft between the low hills that screened off the highway from the valley. Shrubs and thin bamboo stems hung over the entrance, the dirt road roughened by tufts of grass gone brown …. Beyond the rise the floor dipped down once again to a forest and then half a furlong ahead the two sides merged, swelling hill, thick with pines, spruce, and juniper. (Hazarika 2006: 40)

Or

From the forests above the town, the smell of wood smoke drifts through trees and shrubs into streets and houses. In the hills the undergrowth burns at night, uneven lines of fire spreading in wide unpredictable stretches …. Against the dark of the night, they look like miniature creatures in red dresses….The woods are thick with pines, tall with wide trunks and leafy tops, which shed their leaves in October …. (ibidem 77-78).
Such descriptions of the environment and ecology of Shillong are numerous throughout the novel.

Ecomystical sentiments are heard in many places of the novel. The affinity of the tribal people with nature and sharing a deep ecological relationship with it is celebrated in many occasions in the novel. In one such occasion Charley, the Khasi gangster says: “I’m of the hills, and the hills are in me” (ibidem 118). Here the presence of a ‘green self’ can be marked and this greening of the self is typically an ecological consciousness. Hazarika reflects the urge of the tribal people of going back to their roots for retaining their identity. Dor Kharkongor, the Khasi “teerman” or archer advises John to teach their mother – tongue Khasi properly: “Also, John Dkhar, it is not enough for you to have a Khasi name if you do not speak Khasi. So, you must try everyday to learn one Khasi word…” (ibidem 133)

John, who is an ethnic Khasi but raised and educated in Delhi, is called by the local people a dkhar, a foreigner as he, after his long dissociation from the tribal society, becomes a stranger to the traditional khasi culture. To the advice of Dor Kharkongor John replies in a lamenting tone, “Yes, I must improve my Khasi.” (ibidem 133)

Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, the Jnanpith Award winner litterateur from Assam has a strong ecological concern as reflected in her novels like Pages Stained with Blood or The Man from Chinnamasta or The Shadow of Kamkhya, a collection of short stories. Insurgency in the region, especially
in Assam, complexities of modern life and, above all, an all pervading love are some of the major themes of Goswami’s writings. The plight of women in a patriarchal society and their trauma has been touchingly portrayed in most of her writings. Hiren Gohain, an eminent litterateur and critic, while commenting on the creative world of Goswami, observes:

Her writing is like a stifled cry of pain at man’s inhumanity to man, which modulates sometimes in quiet bitterness and at times into poignant pathos. An obstinate feudal way of life has survived into our times, which crushes the soul with rigid dogma and inhuman ritual and squeezes into a husk the life-blood of healthy emotion. The results are a staggering inferno of broken lives, frustrated dreams, wasted promises and monstrous distortions of humanity.

(Gohain 1994: 26)

The novel entitled *Pages Stained with Blood* is written in the diary form. The setting is Delhi, the capital city of India during the communal rioting immediately after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. The pathetic condition of the innocent victims, as presented by Goswami, is heart-rending. She talks about terrorism, separatist movements, bombings, killings, extortions and communal clashes. Although she talks about all these with a setting in Delhi and with references to Punjab, the readers cannot shift his/her attention from the Northeastern context. India’s Northeast has been experiencing all these ghastly experiences since many decades. All these have been the part of regular news from this region. Terrorism in the context of Northeast India, as Goswami feels, has one of its roots in a general feeling among the local people of the region, of isolation from the ‘mainland’,
of a sense of being ignored, neglected and deprived of an equal treatment with the ‘mainstream’. To substantiate her point she refers to the bias ever in writing history: “….I have grown up reading about the Richard the Lion Heart, the Vijaynagar Kingdom, the Kalinga War, the French Revolution, the downfall of the Mughal Empire. All on British history and Indian history – but there is nothing about Assam or the 600 – year old Ahom rule, the same dynasty ruling a huge state for 600 years. Even a major uprising like the revolution of common people against the Ahom monarchy where, it is said, one lakh people died in the Moamoria Revolution is not mentioned.” (Sen 2006: 295).

The landscape of Assam has been explored in many of Goswami’s short stories in the collection The Shadow of Kamakhya: “On either side were distant hills. The paddy fields were a riot of brilliant colors, flaunting golds …. the fields or forests that teemed with cotton, khaira, sisoo, holong poma, bogi poma, bokul and teak trees. Evening wrapped the teak in shreds of silk that the stippling sun seemed to turn magically into deer skin” (Goswami 2005:2). But this beautiful landscape has been disturbed due to insurgency: “Last year, this road was smeared with blood. There was always crossfire of machine guns, exploding grenades.” (ibidem 2)

The biodiversity of the region, with a rich flora and fauna has been presented time and again in Goswami’s writings:
There were many different trees, some with wild creepers twining themselves around trunks of muga silk. Some trees looked like majestic ruins dressed in shimmering gossamer. All around the monochromic green, ranging from the richly succulent to those that remind me of puthi, the tiny fish. Some leaves were round, like the heavy silver coins with Queen Victoria emblazoned on them. And the birina trees were smothered in white blossoms that looked like clouds flirting with the earth. (ibidem 3)

Or,

The bulbuls on the Hijol tree started chirping noisily. The sun rose above the Brahmaputra. Wreaths of violet and brown clouds clung to it…. (ibidem 38)

The peaceful co-existence of human beings and animals, an enviable feature of Northeast India, and their mutual congenial relationship have been expressed is many of these stories. This ecomystical ideal is a significant feature of the stories. This has consciously been explored by the writer to assert a distinctive identity of the region through its ecology:

“Did you have a chance to see tigers in Kaziranga? People say there were only twenty tigers there is 1966. Now there are about sixty. Rhinos have grown in number from three hundred to one thousand and five hundred. There are some five hundred elephants too, (ibidem 8)
Besides many such passages on the flora and fauna of the land, other references such as “A flock of wild ducks” (81), ‘a horde of bats” (81), “long –tailed monkeys” (3) and the like, are also made time and again in these stories.

The nature-women relationship can be explored to a deeper extent through these stories. In many of the stories women are presented not as parts of nature, but as nature itself. With this point of view the stories have strong claims to be studied from an ecofeminist standpoint. In one of the stories in that collection entitled “The Beasts”, the nature-woman relation is beautifully presented: “She knew each and every holong, bonsom, Shisham, and catechu tree in the area. She was also familiar with the herds of barking dear and swamp deer which frequented the forest in that region” (ibidem 84). The female body is described in terms of objects of the world of nature: “Her body glowed like a fresh young mango sapling ….Have you noticed her lips? They are like ripe slices of guava” (ibidem 83). Such descriptions of the female body can be traced in the other stories of that collection. In the story entitled “The Offspring”, a man called Pitambar longs for a physical relationship with Damayanti, a widow. He casts his amorous eyes on her and conceives of her with detailed physicality: “In Pitambar’s eyes, the moon became Damayanti, naked and voluptuous, her breasts soft and rounded like the stomach of a pregnant goat. And the shaft of her body, like a tender bamboo shoot” (ibidem 23). The comparison of the female body with that of the world of the nature has significance. This type of physical description is also reflective of the typical male gaze of the female body.
Her novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* is a story that depicts, to quote the blurb, “the hoary history of Assam’s most famous temple of the Sakta cult, Kamakhya.” It is the story of Chinnamasta Jatadhari, a hermit who leads a movement against the ritual of animal sacrifice and is supported by some spirited young men like Ratnadhar. The novel also deals with the relationship between Jatadhari and Mrs. Dorothy Brown, a British lady, who comes to Kamakhya in search of peace of mind. The novel can be read in a political level insofar as its voice of protest against the ritual of animal sacrifice before the goddess Kamakhya is concerned. It has also a strong ecological perspective as it intelligently talks about the disturbance on the ecological equilibrium due to the age-old ritual of animal sacrifice.

Here in this novel Goswami vividly depicts the landscape, people, myths and legends of Assam like she does in many of her other novels. The natural landscape has come to life through her unique prose style. The flora and fauna, the rich vegetation, the mystery of the jungles, a sense of mysticism all around nature, and overall the ecology of the region has been explored in this novel. There are numerous references to the natural world that shows a conscious ecological sense of the writer:

> Seuli flowers cast forth distracted fragrance to soften the raw odour of butchered flesh. A hushed whisper of dewdrops brushed the kendur shrubs, the round flat outenga leaves that snakehooded them, the ripple leaved ashoka, the vast khokan. (Goswami 2006:1)

Like Goswami’s many other writings, this novel can also be studied from ecofeminist ideals. The novel has a number of references to events and incidents
where nature and women become synonymous. Goswami’s treatment of the myth of Goddess Kamakhya exploring through traditional beliefs, myths and legends heightens the ecofeministic note of the novel. Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped by the people in her different manifestations, and it is believed that she protects and sustains human beings like a caring mother or like nature:

The jatadhari closed his eyes and meditated for a while. Then “Ma! Ananga-kusuma protect the space before me. Ananga-mekhala protect from behind. On the left, Ananga-madana protect me…Ananga-rekha always, and forever, shield me from above. Ananga-kusha always protect me from all directions!

Ma! Ma! ” (ibidem: 12)

In the Kamakhya temple an annual festival known as “Ambubachi” is celebrated during which the doors of the temple are closed for four days “because the Goddess is believed to be going through her menstrual period” (ibidem 14). This traditional belief of the goddess having her menstruation bears great significance considering the fact that the goddess is worshipped as a mother; she is also the embodiment of the ‘mother’ earth. This is very much suggestive of the vitality of earth and also of its capability to produce, procreate and sustain life. Goswami consciously uses these myths and beliefs in this novel and it draws attention of the reader to study it with an ecoferminist perspective.

Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped as the mother who gives birth and sustains life:

The blood from your womb spawns
Myriad forms of life.
The milk from your breast
Makes life immortal.
Mother, I know that you will come by this path

Where this fair skin of my body I will lay down…

(ibidem 167)

The native land is also revered as the mother: “This country is our mother and superior even to heaven” (ibidem 73). There has been a tradition of worshipping women as the manifestation of the Goddess. In the Kamakhya temple there is a ritual called ‘Kumari Puja’ is performed where girls, who have not attained their puberty are worshipped as they are supposed to be the embodiment of the Goddess. It bears great significance that even the prostitutes are worshipped as incarnations of the Goddess:

“Yes, they are prostitutes. They have brought the little girl to offer Kumari Puja. The most exquisite form of the goddess is the beautiful virgin Tripura. The scriptures say that those who offer puja to a prostitute’s daughter will be greatly benefited.” (ibidem 87)

In the same line people also have reverence for nature. There are many references to the ecology of the region that portray people’s love and respect towards nature. The following description of a particular spot in the majestic Brahmaputra is suggestive of ecomystical fervour:

….He looked back at the mighty Brahmaputra — just where it veered off its course, to take the shape of a sacrificial machete. The waters had receded around Urvasi an island in the river, revealing carvings of Vishnu in his half-lion form, the Narasimha avatar. A strip of sand also lay exposed, like the pelt of a white goat laid out to day after the sacrifice. (ibidem 17)
The novelist intelligently explores the nature-women relationship in many occasions in the novel: “The full moon rippled on the fair woman trapped naked underwater.”

The flora and fauna of the region has been referred to by the novelist in many occasions like in her other novels. Here is a reference to some of the indigenous fruits:

The fruits in Assam have a special flavour – She eats Indian palms, ripe bakuls, jamuns and figs. Even ripe jackfruit. (ibidem 69)

So the Goddess, the motherland, women and nature — all are bestowed upon with the mother image and hence they all are worshipped. The novelist shows this reverence. But she also talks about exploitation of women which is suggestive of the violation of the natural order. It is the women who are always the soft targets of the society in any given circumstances. They are the first to suffer for any social taboos and they are also the first to be victimized in the name of any social custom. This irony of worshipping women as the embodiment of the Goddess in the one hand, and to exploit, torture and oppress them on the other, has been touchingly presented by Goswami in this novel. The treatment of a ‘drunken husband’ towards his wife and the language he uses for her are very much suggestive of the plight of women in an essentially male-dominated society:

The man, pounced on her, and grabbed her by the hair, hurling abuses. “You bitch! You should be pounding the paddy at home. How dare you come to this charlatan who has abducted a foreign woman. You whore!”

(ibidem 27)
There are other such incidents in the novel where a woman is tortured both physically and mentally suggesting how vulnerable position a woman holds in society:

Men rushed in. They were ransacking the room. Two ruffians pounced on her, ripping open her nightgown. Before Dorothy even knew it, her sensibilities were violated. Darbhanga House Reverberated with echoes of pain. Then with some miraculous burst of strength, Dorothy, spread eagled on the floor, brought one knee up hard into the groin of the man about to mount her. When the police came, she was lying there, half naked, scrapings of human skin and blood under her fingernails. (ibidem 67)

This violence against women can also be seen as violence against nature. The violence against the natural order is further emphasized by the novelist by referring to the practice of animal sacrifice. There is ancient history that tells us that there was a time when Goddess Kamakhya was worshipped with human sacrifices. Even the scriptures contain the rules and rituals of human sacrifice. Although this ritual is no longer in practice, the practice of animal sacrifice started in course of time. The novel has a long debate over this issue presenting both the traditional view advocating animal sacrifice and the modern one that advocates offerings of flowers in stead of animal blood before the altar. The novelist taking her own position argues that animal sacrifice is to be abandoned in the greater ecological interest. In this era we live in anthropocentric ideals have given way to ecocentric principles due to human beings’ growing sense of awareness for preserving and protecting the ecology of the planet. This concern is well reflected in the novel. The idea of Creation Spirituality pervades throughout the novel. The voice advocating peaceful co-existence of all the creatures
is the voice of that ecological consciousness with a strong sense of Deep Ecology and also Creation Spirituality:

Man is god’s creation. Man has many on thing to learn from animals. Only when men and animals live in harmony will the world become a paradise.

(ibidem 180)

Goswami by using myths and legends and with the power of her mesmerizing language recreates an atmosphere of ecological mysticism in this novel. With the sheer power of her minute observation, her emotion and sensitivity as a writer, Goswami builds up a mystic world of awe and wonder centering round the Kamakhya temple and the life around it. The description of the typical local ecology with rare species of flora and fauna can be seen as identity marks for the region, and at the same time become instrumental in creating an ecomystical sense. Here in this place people have been living with nature empathizing with the jungles and with birds and animals. People have been coming here to attain a sense of absolute peace, in search of the ultimate reality, in quest of a solution to unite their disjointed lives as “Life is a passage of separation; a heartless journey of disunion” (ibidem 76). This is what the basic tenet of ecomysticism is all about. This ecomystical concept has been reverberating throughout the novel. In many pages of the novel there is depiction of the age-old peaceful co-existence of all the creatures of nature:

Once only the chirpings parghumas and mynahs came at dusk to feed on the seeds of the seleng trees. Now, dawn broke to the sound of the sahibs’ guns. Wild shrubs and evergreens covered the hill, all the way down to the river. Along its banks the smoky blue jacarandas blossomed. This side of Kalipur
was the tiger’s domain. Their roars were blown across by the winds in the
daytime. (ibidem 28)

The idea of evil has been there in the human mind since the dawn of human
civilization. Cultural studies explore and analyze a number of myths and legends
relating to the idea of evil in any communities around the world. Goswami explores
through the myths and legends of Assam showing the traditional notion of evil and
some of the rituals to get rid of the evil eye. Because of the very notion that evil is
also sustained by nature, people have been worshipping various natural objects like
the rivers, the mountains, the trees, the rocks etc. Nature, besides being treated as a
benevolent mother, has also been creating a sense of awe and wonder in the human
mind since time immemorial. There are many passages in the novel that refer to such
human notion that creates a mystical sense. The following passage is an example of
the novelist’s use of myths, legends and traditional faith in creating an ecomystical
atmosphere:

…Softly the hymns drifted in - homage to the sixty four goddesses. … O
Mother, Violent and Impetuous One, O Golden Goddess … Raudri, Indrani,
goddess of wrath, ever-youthful Mother of all. Vaishnavi … Durga.
Narasinghee. Chamunda … The sixty four names of the divine yoginis
spilled over, seeping into every nook and cranny of the Nilachal Hills, like
fragments of enchanted music. (ibidem 5-6)

This ecomystical sense is further heightened by the portrayal of characters,
which are very close to nature. One of them is described like this:
It was said that this period he had lived at one with nature. Venomous serpents had nested in his matted locks. Wild birds had perched on his arms. (ibidem 179-180)

Such conscious use of ecology by the novelist is significant and owing to this the novel demands a serious study also from the perspectives of Deep Ecology.

Mitra Phukan is a celebrated Assamese novelist writing in English. Her novel *A Collector’s Wife* is a touching story of a young lady called Rukmini, the protagonist of the novel by probing into her inner life. With this story on the surface, the novelist also deals with the atmosphere of terror, violence and insurgency that has been pervading in Assam’s recent history especially during the last three decades. Phukan speaks of the agitation of 1970s and 1980s and the gradual development towards a full blown insurgency. She also speaks of the threat and the sense of insecurity among the indigenous people posed by the illegal migration from Bangladesh, one of the burning issues in Assam’s contemporary politics.

The novel also deals with ecological issues. There are rich portrayals of the landscape of Assam with rivers, mountains and woods. There is a description of the Brahmaputra as seen by Rukmini from the window of their bungalow at the hill top:

As she ate her rice and fish curry alone, Rukmini looked out at the river below, a swathe of silver which seemed deceptively still and silent from this height. A half-moon shone down on the scene from above. While the river as well as its banks were bathed in the soft, milky glow, the craggy mountains behind the river stubbornly refused to succumb to the light of the moonbeams, and remained dark and forbidding. What was it about them, Rukmini wondered, that always kept them in such deep shadow? She felt the
same, familiar flicker of unease and quickly averted her eyes from the jagged
tops that seemed to pierce the silver sky. (Phukan 2005:65).

The same river is again described from the same position i.e. from Rukminis
Bungalow atop the hill at different point of time:

Rukmini gazed at the placidly-flowing Red River below the house … The
river was now a tamed, shriveled band of water, with barren wastes of empty
sands forming wide white expanses on both banks. After the monsoons
deluged the earth, and the icy mountain-tops where the Red River had its
origins melted in the summer heat, these banks would be swamped by the
fertile flood of water which would bring life-enhancing silt from the hilly
regions, upstream. (ibidem 84)

The landscape is described in many occasions:

But the view from the hillock was marvellous … To the north, below and a
little away from them, the Red River, or the Luit as it was known here,
snaked its way past Parbatpuri in deceptively lazy loops. (ibidem 19).

The following lines drawing the landscape during the monsoon are as if the artistic
strokes of a brush:

The monsoon in Parbatpuri was always impressive. Rain-bearing clouds,
black and heavy-bellied, billowed in from the south. The thousand-kilometre
journey over ocean and rivers, over the paddy-fields of another country, over
the range of low hills that bordered the district, brought them straight into
Parbatpuri, where the clouds deposited their burden. For days, weeks, the sky
was blotted out by wave after wave of cumulo-nimbus clouds that came rolling up, black and heavy, from beyond the southern end of the town, intent, it seemed on drowning Parbatpuri. (ibidem 279).

There are also reference to the people around the river, their life and living. This reflects an ecological concern of the novelist as well as her conscious use of the ecology of the region that bestows a definite identity on it:

Rukmini never tired of gazing at the tiny boats that floated past. Some had hoods made of woven bamboo strips to protect the boatman from the weather. Others had along tail of logs that floated, comet-like, behind the boats as they headed downstream. Whole families lived on these floating logs as they were taken down from the vast forests further upstream to the timber mills of the big cities downstream. The sight of faded cotton saris strung up to dry, of a woman washing cooking pots even as her man poled the raft past Parbatpuri, always fascinated Rukmini. Often, there would be dark, chubby children playing in as carefree a manner on the logs as though they were within the secure confines of a park, or a school playground.

(ibidem 19-20)

There is also vivid description of the hills. The beauty, grandeur and mystery of the hills are elaborately depicted. That the novelist is consciously using the ecology of the region also as a means to attain a self-identity can very well be marked from this passage:

There was something forbidding about these hills. Though she had spent less than two years in Parbatpuri, Rukmini had lived much of her life in other towns in this region of hills. She was so used to hills forming a part of the landscape wherever she went, that she missed their presence when she
traveled out of the region. The long beaches of Goa and Tamil Nadu had attracted her immensely when she had first gone there… But soon, she had begun to miss the familiar landscape: the thickly-wooded green hills suddenly rearing up to cut off the expanse of sky before her… Flatness in a landscape made her uncomfortable, whether it was the blue-green flatness of the ocean, or the khaki sameness of a desert. (ibidem 20).

These hills bestow on the region a typical identity of its own. They make this region different from other parts of the country such as Goa and Tamil Nadu and make this land a unique one— the essential Northeast. Such treatment of ecology is remarkable and this consciousness can be marked in the works of many of the writers from this region.

Rukmini is told by her husband Siddhartha that she is infertile. One of their consulting physicians also confirms if. Frustrated Rukmini takes on medication and other measures based on traditional beliefs like wearing an amulet in order to overcome her infertility. This barrenness and infertility in this woman can be studied as violence against nature or the natural order. In the novel there is a strong parallelism between Rukmini and the external nature. In many occasions Rukmini feels a close affinity with Nature. This is reflected in the following lines where Rukmini not only finds a similarity with the river, but as if she becomes the river herself:

Rukmini gazed at the placidly-flowing Red River below the house, and wondered whether she wanted a child badly enough to endure all that would take place once she took the route charted out for her by Dr. Rabha. The river was now a tamed, shriveled band of water, with barren wastes of empty sands
forming wide white expanses on both banks. After the monsoons deluged the earth, and the icy mountain-tops where the Red River had its origins melted in the summer heat, these banks would be swamped by the fertile flood of water which would bring life-enhancing silt from the hilly regions, upstream. But how did the stretches of sand feel about the floods that obliterated their very existence every year? Did they not miss the warmth of the sun, the birds that pecked around on them, searching for food? To be drowned by Science, or the river, for the sake of fertility. What would ribbins of bleached sand say about that if they could give voice to their feelings? (ibidem 84)

Here words or phrases like 'barren wastes of empty sands', ‘fertile’, ‘life-enhancing silt’, the Sun’s warmth or the pecking birds— all are used to describe the river’s condition. But they are also very much suggestive of Rukmini’s predicament, the very condition of her inner self. Thus the river becomes a metaphor for Rukmini’s life. This intelligent use of language heightens the overall effect of the novel and, at the same time, adds an ecofeministic dimension to it.

But Rukmini suddenly discovers that she is pregnant and does not have a dysfunctional womb as has been told by her husband and Dr. Rabha, their physician. That she is capable to conceive makes her overjoyed. It is a fulfillment of her heart’s desire and she finds a meaning of her life. Her joy is depicted with images from the world of nature:

She was surrounded by the chirps and thrills of feathered creatures she could neither see nor identify from their calls. There was a hum of music everywhere, a low thrumming, an unbelievably pleasant sound. She could see no birds moving, yet the air was full of movement, it was invisible to her, yet
she could feel it in the vibrations all around her, the pulsating air in synchronous melody. She felt she was inside a drum which was being gently touched from outside to yield up, not rhythm, but cascades of melody. The only visible movement on the hillside was the gentle stirring of the leaves around her. And if she leaned down, below, under the green canopy she could see clouds of sunshine-yellow butterflies, rising and falling, falling and rising, their wingbeats keeping perfect time to the music all around them. They were engrossed in their dance, oblivious, like the invisible birds, to the gunshots and strife around them. This was a joyous celebration of life ….

(ibidem 261)

Siddhartha’s ignorance for her and his affair with another woman called Priyam is a shock for Rukmini. The ignorance from her husband makes her closer to Manoj, one of her friends and she becomes impregnated by him. It seems that Rukmini has been deprived of love, tender care and a genuine concern all through her married life. Even her mother-in-law Mrs. Renu Bezboruah’s concerns for her seem not as a genuine love for the daughter-in-law but as a responsibility for the bearer of her son’s heir. Such attitude of her immediate family members plays as a catalectic force in Rukmini’s relationship with Manoj. The novelist consciously draws a parallelism between Rukmini’s world and the world of nature. There are many occasions in the novel where the novelist deliberately uses images, metaphors and other references from the natural world to reflect the private world of Rukmini. This has a strong claim of studying the novel from an ecofeministic perspective. The closeness of woman with nature has been shown in many a times. Both women and nature create and sustain life. This parallelism between nature and women can be marked also in the following lines.
There were never any women in the funeral processions. Males, of all ages, would form long, straggly lines as they walked towards the cremation ground. Women were forbidden to witness the actual act of the body being consigned to flames. Birth belonged to women. But death (…) had been appropriated by men. (ibidem 50)

Our traditional rituals have always a male perspective in them as they have been framed by the male-dominated society where the female voice is often silenced. This patriarchal attitude finds an ironical reference in the following passage:

The dead, if they were female, were consigned to flames amidst a crowd of men. Rukmini sometimes wondered if the souls of the just-dead women missed the company of other women at this juncture. Surely the female soul would want to be surrounded by a sorority of grieving women friends, at this critical moment of its entry to another world? Instead, what she got was a circle of males, many of whom she barely knew, who looked surreptitiously at their watches out of the corners of eyes suitably somber, even as the corpulent doms hovered around and the lean Brahmin priest chanted his mantras over the leaping flames. And if the woman had had misfortune of not bearing a son, her mouth would be fed flames by a male relative of her husband’s, possibly somebody whom she had not even liked. (ibidem 50)

Nature also has a devastating aspect. A sense of awe and wonder for malevolent nature has been prevailing in human beings’ mind since time immemorial. This awesome aspect of nature has been manifested in the images of some of the ancient deities suggesting the destructive force of nature. Because of this sense of mystery and mysticism in nature human beings have been worshipping it in the forms of some idols. The following reference to goddess Kali, a Hindu deity shows the
violent aspect of nature, or the ‘mother’ image that destroys disorder and paves the way for a new order:

The people of Parbatpuri were proud of their cremation ground. A large image of Kali stood to one side of the entrance. On the other side, a small park had been developed. In season, roses, marigolds and tuberoses grew in carefully-cultivated rows. Little children played under the watchful eyes of the skull-draped, scimitar-wielding Kali, unperturbed by the processions carrying dead men and women on pallets. The entrance to the cremation-ground-cum-park had a large arched gate, on which was written, in a somewhat macabre fashion, “Welcome”. (ibidem 22)

The novelist is also concerned of the present ecological degradation. Terrorism and other such hazards created by human beings have posed a great threat to the environment. It has a tremendous impact on the present ecological crisis. This concern of the novelist finds an expression in the following lines:

But the main aspect of the landscape here, dominating sky as well as mountains, was the river itself. The Red River is spate, wearing its full monsoon regalia. It was indeed red here. Red with the topsoil washed down from the high mountain plateau above. Red with the tumultuous volume of water that rushed through this cleft between two hill ranges. Red with fury at being thus confined. Red with violence that raged on it banks. (ibidem 342)

This can well be seen as a voice of protest against ecological degradation. This protesting voice is remarkably common to contemporary writers writing in English from Northeast India. This seems to make their writing canonical.
Siddhartha Deb is considered to be one of the representative novelists from the region. His first novel *The Point of Return* was adjudged a New York Times Notable Book of the year in 2002. Set in an unnamed town which is presumably based on Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya, one of the states of India’s Northeast, the story of the novel revolves around the father-son relationship. This partly autobiographical novel also delves deep into a world of corruption in the bureaucracy, communal violence and ethnic clashes that have taken place in Meghalaya. The novel also has a few passages from which one may have an idea of the ecology of the region:

> In the spring, the gardens flowered from house to house, and in the backyards, along with shrubs and weeds, there were vines of squash, their prickly golden-green skin rough with fiber and indentations and little hollows like a piece of the earth itself. There were butterflies, berries, and rare orchids in the forested walks up toward Laitkor Peak, crabs that scuttled along the slippery, stony beds of streams. (Deb 2002: 257)

Divided into four parts entitled “Arrival”, “Departure”, “Terminal” and “Travelogue” the novel also talks about history, maps and memory. Dr. Dam, the father is ethnically connected to Bangladesh, the former East Pakistan, and who is in search of a ‘home’ in a land where they are a part of a cultural minority. Even after staying in that region for so many years and rendering their service for its development, they are still marginalized and treated as the “other” by the local people. The local people also have their own points of view as they feel that they themselves are being treated as the “other” by the Indian ‘nation’ in many occasions. Thus this novel can be studied with a postcolonial perspective. It is also a saga of the displaced people and the insider-outsider dichotomy. This undoubtedly has far-reaching impact.
on the ecology. Displacements, communal violence or ethnic clashes greatly influences the ecosystem. Hence *Point of Return* can also be studied as postcolonial writing.

Deb’s another novel *Surface* is also set in one of the regions in Northeast India. This unnamed remote part of India is referred to as ‘the region’. However, a close study shows that ‘the region’ might be Manipur, one of the states in India’s northeast. Amrit, a reporter for *The Sentinel* has been sent to the region by the Kolkata head office with a particular assignment. It is through this journey of the scribe contemporary politics, economics, society and life in Manipur are presented. Through the eyes of Amrit the ecology of the land is also unveiled:

…a national highway that disappeared into the hills of Meghalaya where the green of the river valley gave way to a more ethereal blue.

(Deb. 2005 : 49)

There are such other references to the land through which one may gather an idea of the ecology of the region. One of the characters, a bureaucrat, who once served in this land speaks about it:

There you go. Manipur. The Moirang Lake, perhaps as remarkable a water body as you will even come across.....The people there live on floating huts in the lake, with this incredible environmental sense, in complete harmony with the ecology. (ibidem 34)

Such references present the unique ecology of the land as well as the peaceful co-existence of the local tribes with nature. Both of them have been accommodating each
other in their respective worlds and have been providing a ‘place’ and a ‘space’ to each other. This inherent attitude of the tribal people of Northeast India is seen in the contemporary writing in English from this region. This attitude makes a significant study from Deep as well as Spiritual Ecology and also from postcolonial ecological studies.

The novelist is also concerned of the ecological degradation due to insurgency. This pristine and serene land where ‘hibiscus and jacaranda flowers were in bloom’ (ibidem: 44) is nowadays on headlines for ‘encounters between insurgents and the army, political scandals, a mortar attack on the state assembly….’ (ibidem 58). News such as the seizer of ‘one thousand four hundred numbers of gelatin, five hundred numbers of detonators, and sixteen numbers of bundles carrying fuse wires’ (ibidem 43-44) are some of the regular news items from the land these days in stead of its ‘Hog deer, Barking monkeys, jungle fowl’ and other such rare species of animals present in the land and are vital ingredients of its ecology. The ecological degradation can be felt from such passage where the protagonist speaks of his immediate reactions on his arrival to the land:

That initial, aerial view of a green and fecund valley gave way to the camouflage of army uniforms and the dour faces of soldiers once I set foot in the city. The monsoons had turned the ground soft and squishy, and the brown silt of the valley lapped at the black boots of the soldiers. (ibidem 6)

While going through such passages readers along with the protagonist, feel a pain within and this degradation of ecology appeals to their consciousness.
The novel also talks about ethnic violence in present day Manipur. The clashes and violence have effects on the political, economic and social level. But above all, these have adverse effect on the ecology as a whole. One of the characters in one occasion speaks of such violence:

In Manipur, the Kuki tribe has been fighting the Nagas for all of last year. Villages burnt on both sides, passengers pulled out of buses and gunned down…. (ibidem 47).

Such references clearly show the serious threat posed by violence and insurgency for ecology. The novelist, like his counterparts from the other parts of the region, seems to be writing with a strong and conscious ecological sense. Such writing can also play a canonical role in creating an ecological awareness among the masses.

Anjum Hasan is a poet, novelist and a chronicler from Meghalaya and is presently based in Bangalore. She has published two novels Lunatic In My Head (Zubban-Penguin, 2007) and Neti, Neti (Roli Books, 2009), a book of poems entitled Street on the Hill ( Sahitya Akademi,2006) and a number of short fictions, reviews and essays in many books and journals. Her debut novel Lunatic In My Head was shortlisted for the Crossword Book Award 2007 and her second novel Neti, Neti was on the longlist for the 2008 Man Asian Prize and was shortlisted for the Hindu Best Fiction Award in 2010 and the 2011 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. In Lunatic In My Head, she talks about roots, identity, clash of culture, home, etc. The novel is divided into nine sections entitled “Wonder”, “Sadness”, “Love”, “Courage”, “Disgust”, “Fear”, “Anger”, “Joy” and “Peace”. Siddartha Deb, another leading novelist from Northeast India, while commenting on Hasan’s novel, which is set against Shillong during the 1990s, opines: “Anjum Hasan’s novel is haunting, lyrical
and daring, bringing fresh air into the stale confines of Indian writing. A deceptively quiet portrait of a hill town, it is one of the finest works to have come out of the forgotten territories of the North-East.” (Blurb)

There are voices in the novel raised on the issue of identity born out of the outsider-insider conflict. The outsider also has an identity crisis, a fear of losing its originality. The parents of a young girl, who are outsiders to this land, are worried of their daughter’s future: “You stay here for eight, ten years and then you can’t go anywhere else. You get used to this place….She will lose her culture….Ask her about the Mahabharata, why Diwali is celebrated, who Meera Bai was---nothing. Zero” (Hasan 2007:243). This difference of culture is reiterated while a non-Khasi girl is proposed by Ibomcha, a Khasi young man: “You, your homeland, your tribe, your love for your mother, your dozens of cousins, your schemes, your beliefs--- I share nothing of this.” (ibidem 143). Issues of home and exile are also raised, which again, in a way, brings forward the cultural conflict: “….why don’t you apply for a job elsewhere, outside Shillong? Where is it written that we have to stay in Shillong? There’s nothing in this place anyway. No jobs, no culture. I have no one to talk to. And look at Sophie---she’s picking up all sorts of tribal habits.” (ibidem 241). This is undoubtedly not the Shillong in Dhruba Hazarika’s A Bowstring Writer.

The dichotomy of the insider-outsider conflict has predominantly a burning issue of politics in India’s Northeast since Independence. Politics of displacement, migration, and ever-raising voices for new homelands have been ravaging the entire region. The polemics of power seems to be very much functional in creating an
atmosphere of doubt and distrust between the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’. The divide between them may also be seen as the postcolonial distance between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. This issue of insider-outsider dichotomy is addressed in Anjum Hasan’s *Lunatic In My Head*, or more visibly in Siddartha Deb’s novel *The Point of Return*. Migration, displacements, and separate homelands are dominantly postcolonial issues, and besides others, they have a great impact even on ecology. The issues of migration, displacements, or new homelands in contemporary politics of Northeast India are to be seen from their historical perspective. In the words of Sanjib Baruah:

The regime of citizens and denizens that has evolved in Northeast India has to be understood in a historical context. It began as an attempt by the colonial state to insulate some of the peoples organized in pre-capitalist social formations from the devastation that the initial onslaught of global capitalism had brought. Given this history, one can argue that a model of formally equal citizenship would only reinforce discriminatory outcomes and that the only way to protect such vulnerable groups of peoples is a regime of differentiated citizenship. But whether a particular regime of differentiated citizenship can achieve its intended goals has to be a matter for investigation. For the costs of sacrificing the basic principle of equal citizenship are high; and there are intended as well as unintended consequences of regimes of differentiated citizenship. (Baruah 2005: 187).

*Lunatic In My Head* has occasional references to the ecology of Shillong. There is a passage that talks about an earthquake:
Deep in the old rocks that make up the Khasi Hills, some blind and minute shifting of century upon century of stone, transmit its vibrations to the earth’s surface. The tremors spread outward – north to a little highway town called Nongpoh, west to the Garo hills, south to escarpments standing high above the plains of Bangladesh. Wave upon wave, fanning out across the hills like a tremendous bout of shuddering, though no one can tell what emotion it is that the stones are expressing – horror, revulsion, fear? (ibidem 267).

A rich oral tradition of folktales, myths and legends is a vital source for modern Mizo literature. In the words of Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama:

This oral tradition has also proved to be an invaluable source of data for the tracing of their [the Mizos] cultures and structuring of their history, in the absence of written historical records. They help throw light on their long migration trail from Central Asia, their way of life, important events like wars and famines, while at the same time expressing their deepest sentiments and aspirations. Their early songs and chants, seemingly a natural outcome of their poetic and nostalgic nature, first originated as couplets which later developed into longer, more complicated forms. They seem to have emerged not out of a conscious effort to compose but rather out of a spontaneous need. (Zama 2011: 207).

After the arrival of the Christian missionaries to Mizoram (then known as the Lushai Hills, a district in the province of colonial Assam) in the year 1894 ‘the Mizo got their present Roman script’ (ibidem: 205), which was adopted for the Luesi dialect. Like the contemporary poets, in the works of the representative prose writers
from Mizoram like C Thuamluaia, Biakliana, K C Lalvunga, Vanneihtluanga, Kaphleia, Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, Margaret Lalmuanpuii Pachuau, Mona Zote there seems to be an urge of going back to their tradition in search of roots and identity. They seem to deal with contemporary issues and the socio-cultural milieu of their people in particular and of humankind in general drawing inspiration from their rich oral tradition and cultural heritage. Contemporary writing from Mizoram can be studied by using the tenets of ecocriticism.

“Lali”, the first ever Mizo short story (Zama 2004: 9) is written by Biakliana, the writer of the first ever Mizo novel *Hawilopari*. Apparently a story of a girl called Lali it portrays the hopes and aspirations, pain and pleasure, agony and conflicts of human life. It also gives us an impression of some of the traditional beliefs of the Mizo society. The writer also presents, sometimes directly and sometimes obliquely, the predicament of women in a male-dominated society. Regarding the fate of women in a patriarchal social set up, it is said in the story:

For, finally, we remain but simple hillfolk, and our economic conditions are pathetic to say the least. Our women bear the burnt of it, for they are sold off like cattle, and cattle buyers buy the best and the most hardworking of them all. It is as if we auction them off. And even after we possess them, the adage —Women and fences are but disposables! — still holds good. We men beat them and leave them at a whim. In the olden days, the value of slaves was dependent on their health and strength. We look at our women today in much the same way … The dreaded habit of slavery was abolished due to the painstaking efforts of Christians and other noble hearted men who invested
time, labour, money and talent for the cause … Who shall lead Mizoram’s enslaved women into the light of freedom? (Biakliana 2004: 203).

A sharp note of irony as well as a strong voice of protest can very well be marked in such observations. In any social set up where patriarchy dictates terms, the women voice is always marginalized and hence remains unheard. This silencing of the voice of women has parallelism in the silencing of the voice of nature. Because the ever-growing market economy tends to devalue their position by treating both of them as mere commodities.

Vanneihtluanga’s short story “Thunderbird” is a celebration of the invincible human spirit that has been inspiring human beings all through the ages to stand against all odds of life. The story can also be studied with a Deep Ecological perspective. It seems to portray the age-old bond between the human world and the world of nature and the peaceful coexistence of these two worlds. The story depicts a man who is bound to a wheelchair after he was attacked by somebody for speaking against corruption publicly. Dejected and frustrated with life this man sometimes even thinks of committing suicide. Sitting all alone in his wheelchair he watches a flock of martins through the window. He starts to feel an affinity with them and suddenly discovers a new meaning of life:

Everyday I would fly with them, their small wings holding me up. The martins taught me freedom, and showed me how to be carefree. I grew to know each one of them individually and they never tired of what I had to say. Because of them I began to look forward to each new day. (Vanneihtluanga 2004: 240).
The martins fly away as the season changes and it was the sparrows that appear before this man as his companions. Finally this man overcomes his physically challenged condition and stands on his own feet. When his surprised, overjoyed elder son asks him whether he will be able to walk this man simply replies:

I don’t know. It all depends on that sparrow down there. (ibidem: 245).

Here the martins or the sparrows become metaphors for the life of the protagonist of the story. This relationship between the human and the natural world as suggested in this short story bears significance and keeps avenues open to study it from an ecocritical viewpoint.

In some of the prose writings there are beautiful depiction of the landscape of Mizoram. There are also references to Mizo myths and legends as well traditional rites and rituals. In a short story entitled “Chhingpuii” written by Kaphleia quite a good number of Mizo traditional songs are used that makes its reading enjoyable and enriching at the same time. In this story there are also references to the wonderful landscape of Mizoram. The Mizo landscape comes to life in the following lines:

The next morning, the autumn sun lit up the Tawitlang slopes and struck aflame the hills of Darlawng. The morning mist hung low over the Tuirial river, enveloping it in white. At a glance it appeared as if one could walk on these soft clouds. From there, one could detect the shadow of Darlawng hills. The day sparkled clear and the hills loomed much closer. No wind blew, and so quiet and still was the air, as if the eastern sun had bid all of nature to be still and calm. The sky was a clear azure blue, save for a couple of dark
shapes looming at the southern horizon like the pointed tips of a spear and a pipe. After a while these too vanished. (Kaphleia 2004: 251).

Such portrayal of the landscape also provides an idea of the ecology of the region.

More than half a century of bloodshed has marked the history of the Naga people. Their struggle for an independent Nagaland and their continuing search for identity provide the background of Temsula Ao’s *These Hills Called Home*, a collection of stories. It is the saga of ordinary people in an atmosphere of violence and bloodshed. Here she talks about the predicament of children, housewives, older people, or even the militant in a violent atmosphere of insurgency. Ao believes that in such a war zone “there are no winners, only victims and the results can be measured only in human terms.” (Ao, 2006: x). The oral tradition of the Nagas, their myths and legends and also the ecology of the land are depicted in these stories apart from portraying the problem of insurgency. The conflict of traditional faith with Christianity is also felt in some of the stories: “Though the whole village had embraced Christianity long ago, some of the old superstitions and traditions had not been totally abandoned … “So what, we are still Nagas aren’t we? And for us some things never change” (ibidem 30). The fate of women in a male-dominated social setup is beautifully presented in the story entitled “The Night”. An unmarried girl called Innala is impregnated and deserted by a man. Being a woman, this incident has changed her life drastically, but the man, responsible for the whole act, goes on living a normal life. The patriarchal concepts of illegitimate motherhood and paternal security are presented in this story:
The one consolation amidst the chaos of her life was that her unborn child had been given the right to call some one “father” in a society where acknowledged paternity was crucial for a person born out of wedlock. (ibidem 56)

Here the underlying note of irony and satire is unmistakably strong.

_A Naga Village Remembered_ by Easterine Iralu is the first novel in English from Nagaland by a Naga writer. The novel is an account of the great battle of Khonoma (1879-1880) and of the advent of the Christian Missionaries to Nagaland. References to tribal faiths, festivals, myths and legends, hills, rivers and forests of Nagaland, the entire ecology of the region are in abundance in this novel. There is also a sense of degeneration of ecology and the writer is very much concerned of it. The writer seems to be concerned of history, ecology, ecological theosophy and the turmoil of time against animistic faiths. The novel reflects the degradation of pristine ecology (Das 2011:288).

Although a fictional account of the Naga village of Khonoma in particular, the novel _A Naga Village Remembered_ is also a document of the socio-cultural life of any Naga village in general. The age-old value-system of the tribal people, their traditional beliefs, their rites and rituals, and the overall ecology of the land — all are depicted here in a form of a novel. There are geographical descriptions of the village of Khonoma and also of its natural landscape. Such descriptions play an important role in providing an idea of the ecology of the region in general:
From this vantage-point the village of Khonoma spread out before him rather majestically, the fields to his left and the village in front of him and at his back, its houses clinging to the cliffs they were built into. The fields ran right through the cleft of land between the two hills and ploughed down the land next to the river ending on the borderlands with Mezoma. Fed by the rivers, these fields yielded good harvests each year. The village had never known a year of famine and want. (Iralu 2003: 40-41.

But such self-sufficiency in the rural economy was disturbed as the ecology was degenerated by battles and wars, predominantly a human affair. The novel has references to various such wars those have had adverse effect also on the ecology. A depiction of one such war is indicative of its role in the degeneration of the ecology:

The tough little village of Khonoma was encircled on all fronts… the valley came alive with sounds, the calls of soldiers to one another and the rumbling of an army on the offensive. At 10 in the morning it came, shells dropping out of the middle of the sky, so it seemed, and falling into Keyaba, east of the village. (ibidem: 82).

This passage also voices the postcolonial resentment against colonial invasion on the land and its people, and also on their tradition and culture. The novel seems to have a voice of protest against neo-colonialism also. In its “Introduction” it is said:

It the village of Khonoma] delineates the ingrained sense of honour and deep love of independence bred by it which drove its men to repulse any invasion on its lands and any attempt to suppress its freedom loving people, first by Britain and in later years by India. (ibidem: xv).
This voice of resistance as well as of identity is typical of postcolonial writing in English from Northeast India.

The traditional tribal way of living in harmony with nature has been referred to in more than one occasion in the novel. Their sense of respect for the natural world reiterates their age-old way of practicing the philosophy of what in recent times known as Deep Ecology and Creation Spirituality. The following words from a mother to her son reflect the traditional attitude of interdependence between the human world and the world of nature:

The sun and rain are the Creator’s blessings. They rain and shine in turn for us to make our fields and get our harvests. (ibidem: 10).

There are also references to some traditional beliefs which can be interpreted in terms of ecofeminism. There is a reference to two beautiful young women who are also expert weavers. Even then they have not get married as they are considered by the society as Kirhupfumia, which means ominous women having evil powers. This belief of the society that has women as particular targets of contempt and torture reiterates the authority of patriarchy. It also re-affirms the critical position that sees womanhood as a social construct. The elder of these two young women says to her younger mate, “My sister, we are not as the other women. I cannot explain how we are different.” (ibidem: 41). The younger one too tries to accept this reality since acceptance is the only way for them to survive amidst a social hegemony. Accepting her destiny she says: We are Kirhupfumia and what is born of us will never find life. Our destiny tends towards death and destruction, not life.” Thus lamenting on their fate “she wept a bit but resigned herself to her sad fate”. (ibidem: 41). But it can be felt that she ‘resigned’ not to their fate but to the social framework, which is
essentially male-dominated. The sorrow of these women that remains unexpressed, their voice that remains unarticulated seem to be typical of women in general whose voice is also silenced and hence remains unheard, and who is suppressed and considered as ‘the second sex’ by the patriarchal social set up. The story of these two young women is also suggestive of the violation of the natural order. Women that create and sustain life, are being associated with ‘death and destruction’ in the story. This can also be seen from an ecocritical viewpoint where it may be suggestive of the anthropocentric or, in a more specific sense, the androcentric attitude towards nature which has been seemed to be hugely responsible for environmental degradation and the present ecological crisis.

In her another novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* Easterine talks about gender inequality. She raises this issue with a new perspective showing how women exploit women in a set up of matriarchal hegemony. The story revolves around a five year old girl Dielieno, who is the youngest and the only girl child of the family. She happens to live with her grandmother, who has a firm belief that “education is wasted on girls”. (Iralu 2007:158). The grandmother holds the supreme authority in the family and she takes Dielieno for granted in every occasion. In most of the times Dielieno is unwanted and is made to sacrifice her ambitions and aspirations for her brothers. The grandmother here represents the traditional attitude towards the girl child:

In my father’s day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them.
That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should. (Iralu 2007: 37)

But when Dielieno meets her grandmother at her deathbed she forgives her grandmother: “Grandmother, it’s me, Lieno, I want to say that it is okay, I forgive you for being harsh with me”. (ibidem 280). Dielieno here seems to be as calm and benevolent as nature. The novel has a sharp note of ecofeminism throughout.

Dielieno is all the time ill-treated by her grandmother. The following lines depicting the little girl’s expression of the treatment she met during her stay in her grandmother’s house show how a girl is oppressed and tortured even by her grandmother and who herself is a woman:

…Mother, you don’t know how I was treated at Grandmother’s house. I never told you that I was not allowed to bathe with warm water in winter. That Bano bathed me in icy cold water following Grandmother’s instructions. And I was only five and a half. … That is not all, Mother, I would have to stand in the dark counting her chickens and if I counted them wrong she would make me go out in the dark again. I was so terrified. You said that Grandmother loved me but I know that she held it against me that I was a girl and not a boy. I used to feel I was being punished for being born a girl. For many years, I hated it so much, I wished that I was not a girl. (ibidem: 272).

The grandmother embodies the traditional attitude towards a girl child even within the family. She justifies her attitude towards Dielieno, the little girl:
In my father’s day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should. (ibidem: 37).

In her justification we may mark the reflection of the patriarchal legacy of which, significantly enough, the women are faithful bearers. This seems to be quite interesting and this issue has been critically dealt with by the novelist. The patriarchal set up is so strong that women have to live with it, accept it, and be a part of it. The grandmother here, although apparently seems to be an oppressor, in reality, a victim herself of that strong patriarchal social set up. She has been living these experiences all through her life and these have become a part of her consciousness may be even unknowingly. Dielieno’s mother’s words to her speak of the experiences that have been lived by the grandmother all through her life in a social set up where women constitute the voiceless, marginalized group that does not have a ‘space’ in the politics of representation in any social or even familial discourse. These words seem to reflect a complex, critical stance the novel tries to provide:

… When she [the grandmother] was young she lived through a very hard time. In the village, widows without sons lost all their husband’s property to other male relatives. So she understood that it was very important for a married woman to produce as many male offspring as she could. … But people were unkind and mocked those who could not produce male children. The understanding was that a woman without a male heir would be sheltered
by her in-laws but her daughters could not inherit the father’s property. Their best bet would be to marry a man rich enough to have property of his own. Then they would devote the rest of their lives to trying to produce a male heir. … I think your grandmother looks at her sons and grandsons as a kind of insurance … You know that our people say we should love our sons because they are the ones who look after us in our old age. (ibidem: 272-273).

In a social set up where patriarchy dictates terms, this is the very situation women usually find themselves in. The Grandmother here, behind the robes of an oppressor, is a victim herself. She is the suppressed, silenced voice who has been compelled to accept and live with such experiences. This social set up is so powerful that it works not only on the physical level but also invades her mind, memory and consciousness. But against this oppression and male-dominance the novelist makes Dielieno’s mother say:

I can see that women are not weak. They just have a strength different from men. (ibidem: 274).

This is also another position from which the novel can be looked at. Although it is apparently a ‘terrible matriarchy’, the novel, with shifting critical foci and changing perspectives of power structures, provides niches to study the women locus. This is where lies the significance of studying A Terrible Matriarchy using the tenets of ecofeminism.

There has been quite a good number of non-fictional writing as well on ecology from Northeast India. These writings also discuss some of the core issues of
the region such as the problem of insurgency, the issue of identity, racial autonomy and so on and so forth. Sanjoy Hazarika, the journalist, who has been associated with quite a good number of leading international newspapers, delves deeper into the history of insurgency in Northeast India in his book *Strangers of the Mist*. The book helps in developing a consciousness that apart from having a geographical dimension, the Northeast is also a psychological entity that exists in the mindset of the people both outside and inside the region. Right from the time of Independence of India, the people of this part of the country has been feeling a sense of being the ‘other’. This has been largely responsible in creating a general feeling of insecurity as well as a sense of alienation from the ‘mainstream.’ Going back to the history of the insurgent movements is the region, Hazarika writes:

> India’s Northeast is a misshapen strip of land, linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor just twenty kilometers wide at its slimmest which is referred to as the Chicken’s Neck. The region has been the battleground for generations of sub national identities confronting insensitive nation-states and their bureaucracies as well as of internecine strife. It is a battle that continues, of ideas and arms, new concepts and old traditions, of power, bitterness and compassions. (Hazarika 1994: xvii)

Hazarika also talks about the people, their tradition and history:

> The Northeast has best been described as Asia is miniature, a place where the brown and yellow races meet and mingle. The oral history of the tribes of Mizo, Nagaland, Manipur and other areas tell of ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors. (ibidem xviii)
The ecology of the region comes to life in such passages in the books:

The people of the Northeast are the guardians of its most precious asset: its uniqueness which other area has such beauty among its people and its environment? Which sees such a range of religions, creeds, communities, lifestyles and traditions? Which other area can match it in the sheer raw power of nature: whether it is the Brahmaputra that resembles a great sea during its rain-swollen, flood-hungry days, or the force of its gales and the grace of its waterfalls, the lushness of its forests and bamboo thickets and the solitude of its spirit, found in the mist of the mountains. (ibidem xx)

Such passages are expressive of a spiritual ecology prevalent in the region.

The ecology of the region centered on the mighty river Brahmaputra has been explored to the deepest extent by Sanjoy Hazarika is his essay entitled,” The Brahmaputra: muse metaphor, source of life.” The ‘Brahmaputra Ecology’ has also been dealt with in detail by Arup Kumar Dutta, another powerful writer in English from Northeast India. His book *The Brahmaputra* is a detailed account of the oral traditions, myths and legends, rites and rituals, tradition and culture, especially of the people of Assam, centering the Brahmaputra River, which is said to be the lifeline of Assam, in particular.

Sanjoy Hazarika speaks of the Brahmaputra discussing its salient features. He describes in detail the role of the river as a life force as well as the politics, economics and culture centering this mighty river. His description is suggestive of the role of the river in the ecology of the entire region:
The Brahmaputra is one of the greatest rivers of the world, traversing three nations and many cultures, as it flows from Tibet through North-east India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal, on an extraordinary journey spanning nearly 3,000 kilometers….. The river is revered in legend, ballads and contemporary literature as the most visible face of Assam and the North-east, dominating the geography, history and cultures of both Arunachal Pradesh and Assam….The Brahmaputra’s extraordinary power can be seen in a simple fact: this single river carries as much water as almost all the rivers of India put together. (Hazarika 2006:245)

Arup Kumar Dutta makes a historical as well as an anatomical survey of the Brahmaputra in his book entitled The Brahmaputra. He also discusses the myths and legends associated with the river. He goes back to the pages of remote history and finds out scriptural references to this mighty river. Dutta presents different shapes of landscape while exploring the Brahmaputra Ecology: The following passage is one such example:

The unbroken green of the landscape as seen from the Brahmaputra is soothing, and the rustic environment, unsullied by ugly scars of industrialization, imparts to the ambience an extraordinary quiescence. Copses of the plantain, bamboo, coconut, betel nut and other palm half-conceal clustered helmets, with thatched roofs and bamboo walled cottages. The hills rise in gentle slopes from the fringes of the valley, taking on a steeper gradient as one proceeds north to south. (Dutta 2005:67)
Dutta’s book also talks about the ethics and values of the indigenous people regarding the Brahmaputra. All these are suggestive of the traditional ecomystical ideals of the people of this region.

Contemporary politics in India’s Northeast is a complex one. Voices of dissent search for identity, ethnicity, aspirations for new homelands, and crisis of displacement are some of the dominant issues of contemporary politics in the region. These issues are addressed and looked into from different angles with different perspectives in *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, a book by Sanjib Baruah. The book talks about the geopolitics of the region and also focuses on the politics of representation in regard to this politically volatile part of the country. While taking on ethnicity, Baruah discusses the tradition and culture of the tribal communities of the region. These have ecological significance. He also talks about the crisis and politics associated with the problem of displacement, an issue that hugely has an ecological aspect in it. Baruah observes:

> Questions of social justice in Northeast India are significantly more complex today than what the regime of protection was originally designed to accomplish. The informality of the arrangements exposes a large number of poor people to a more vulnerable legal position than that already implied in the marginal nature of the economic riches they occupy. (Baruah 2008:197)

These poor, displaced people and the problem of their settlement is a serious issue that also has an ecological concern.

The prose writing in English include both fictional and non-fictional prose and as characteristic of the region, the writers have mostly dealt with the eco-cultural
tenets of the region. Even writing about the crises of the region, writers like Sanjib Baruah, Sanjoy Hazarika, Hem Barua and Arup Kumar Dutta have mostly highlighted the ecological glory of the region. The political life of the region, and the cultural aspects along with the ecological greatness constitute the ecopolitics which magnificently signify the region.

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