

Chapter 2

Atmospheric Alert and Appeasement with Air

I know that our bodies were made to thrive only in pure air,
and the scenes in which pure air is found

– John Muir

The element air, the supplier of oxygen, is the life-sustaining force and the crucial cycle providing life to creatures on earth. It is deemed to be the element with the most valuable living energy and without which all life will cease to exist. Air is invisible to the naked eyes but felt through the senses. The effects of the breeze or wind can be seen in nature as in the gentle swaying of the plants and trees. It remains in a free-flowing gaseous state. It is composed of oxygen, nitrogen and other gases like carbon dioxide, argon and hydrogen in lesser proportions. It serves as an important agent in the breathing process which helps humans, plants and animals to respire and grow. The atmosphere filled with air acts as a protective cushion safeguarding the earth from getting either extreme cold or utmost hot. The atmosphere also acts as a protector from the infrared radiations and the cosmic rays therein reducing the harmful effects from reaching the earth's surface. The moderate and balanced temperature in supporting life systems is facilitated by air. The element air creates major weather changes as in the occurrences of storms, rain, snow and tornadoes. The atmosphere protects the land from the meteoroids, when the meteoroids enter the atmosphere, rub against the air and get burned into smaller pieces before reaching the earth.

Wind energy is the most beneficial resource generated from the high-speed air channelised through the wind turbines. It aids in the transmission and transport of all matter, bodies and objects. Air extends its support to the land structures and water forms besides being

an intermediary between the elements. To illustrate, the land yields turn higher through the cross-pollination process availed by air and water bodies get their monsoon rain in time without a reduction in the water levels through the actions of the currents of wind. Further, the photosynthesis in plants is regulated by air, and the outcome of oxygen is delivered to the humans for inhaling.

Modernisation, industrialisation, materialism and commercialisation in the present times have polluted the atmosphere. The economic activities, industries and transport are the sources contaminating the pure air apart from causing environmental and ecosystem damages. Power plants, heavy industries, chemical processing, coal burning and deforestation contribute to unsafe breathing. Components of soot and smoke released from stationary and movable things harm the atmosphere. The excess amount of carbon dioxide emitted from these sources contributes to global warming. Particulate matter of fine dust particles from roads, vehicles and house also harm the humans. The major pollutants are sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, ammonia, volatile organic compounds and ground-level ozone.

The threats inflicted by air being tainted affect the growth rate of all species, especially humans, on earth. Human beings, breathing the tiny particles of pollutants, get their health system, especially the functioning of the lung affected. Health issues like asthma, chronic bronchitis, cardiovascular, pulmonary and respiratory diseases, eye infection, cancer, skin infection, reproduction problems and even death tolls have increased in recent times. Air pollution affects the other elements of nature like soil, lakes, forests and rivers by acidifying. Acidity in the air resulting in acid rain affects the crops, woods, plants and animal kingdom. Eutrophication process impacts the water ecosystem and land bodies by the distribution of an excessive amount of nutrient nitrogen from transport services and ammonia from the agricultural

fields. Air pollution damages non-living materials through metal corrosion, physical destruction in eroding ancient buildings and heritage monuments.

Air pollution is a rising threat to various countries and cities across the globe. The devastating and worsening effects of air pollution in cities can be evident in the number of bodily ailments recorded. Population, air traffic, industries and many more human activities pollute the outdoor air. The Middle East, African and South Asian countries and cities like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Qatar, Onitsha, Bangladesh, Nepal and India are the most impacted places with the air quality deteriorating. India, known for its highest population also tops the list of major polluted places. Greenpeace, an international body, functioning as a non-governmental environmental organisation has brought out alarming statistics reporting that more than 15 cities in India are among the list of top polluted cities across the world. Gurugram, Ghaziabad, Bhiwadi, Noida, Faridabad and Delhi are the most polluted places in India. The Executive Director of Greenpeace South East Asia, Yeb Sano states of the report, “Air pollution steals our livelihoods and our futures, but we can change that. . . We want this report to make people think about the air we breathe, because when we understand the impacts of air quality on our lives, we will act to protect what’s more important.”

The literary field records numerous contributions of authors addressing the implied environmental health risks in India due to air pollutants. Among the various books, *Clearing the Air: The Beginning and the End of Air Pollution* by the journalist, Tim Smedley outlines the deep-rooted air pollution in Delhi. Smedley travelled to the major cities in the world like Delhi, Beijing, London and Paris to find measures for the air pollution issues and the book narrates the stories of his journeys to the different lands. In his Prologue, Smedley mentions his visit to Delhi in the late 2017 and his experience of inhaling the worst smog and heavy smoke covering the

city. He writes about the Delhi Marathon being continued as the people run with face masks complain of burning eyes. The personal experiences of witnessing people who face such hardships in the city are articulated. Smedley encourages people to take up their responsibilities and roles as there is still hope to change the atmosphere. Each human has a part of attacking the invisible killer. The text gives a clear blueprint for the 'fightback' against air pollution.

Scientists, scholars, researchers, environmentalists and people from different fields contribute their measures to terminate air pollution. Private organisations and government bodies devise policies and framework to control the rising level of air pollution, particularly in urban areas. Clean Air Act of 1963 was one of the first effective environmental law - advocating programmes for the prevention of air pollution. Measures are to be taken by developing countries like India and China, where air pollution increases at an alarming rate. Policies to curb pollution are to be decided between economic growth and emission levels. Improved technologies and innovative science are to be applied to control the pollutants rather than sticking on to older technologies and lower standards. Many countries have already implemented standards for emissions from transports like cars. The industrial sectors and power plants having filtration devices for segregating the air pollutants before disposal into the atmosphere is one of the few remedial measures adopted.

To realise the importance of air and raise awareness of the polluted air, 2013 was declared as Europe's Year of Air. General awareness programmes were conducted for the public about the air pollution effects; air-related events and programmes like workshops and discussions were also held. Vital concerns on the quality of air were addressed, and the major causes of pollution from traffic, power plants and industrial factories were resolved to reduction. In the year of 2013, China faced air pollution at its worse as the cities blackened with smog. The

pollution level caused premature deaths, children to be hospitalised and respiratory ailments. People were made to stay indoors as roads, schools and airports remained closed. Cans of air were sold, and the face mask was an unavoidable accessory. Therefore, it is appropriate that the value of air is realised for which taking steps for the control of air pollutants becomes necessary before the living conditions decline. Elemental ecocriticism caters to the dire need of the element air to be safeguarded for a sound living on this planet.

Air, the intangible element is depicted in literary works of varied authors across the world from the ancient to the medieval period to the contemporary era. It is popularly used as a tool of expression and employed in literary devices like metaphors, imagery, simile, hyperbole and aphorisms like ‘the winds have changed’ are still in usage. The insubstantial element is ascribed as a powerful teacher in Hinduism and also linked with spiritual connotations in their writings. The ancient practice of Yoga originated in India, which underlines breathing, based on the belief that air is associated closely with mind, spirit and soul. The Chinese, Greeks and Romans revered the wind as divinities and believed that they received messages from Gods through them. Aboriginal people associated wind with the supreme power and narrated its importance in their oral traditions, myths and legends. For instance, the Native Americans still believe wind as a deity with holiness and power and some clans use it as their symbol. Air, the element without permanent form, is treated with masculinity in classical literature.

Literary genres picture air to be carrying messages in its vibrations, patterns, movements, directions and forms and literary texts symbolise air as an element of intelligence, creativity, harmony and imagination. The narratives used the wind as a voice to describe the tones of anger and gentleness. It is also used as a symbol of change and adaptability as the gentle breeze changes its form to the roaring wind is applied to life, changing from old to new structures. Air is

never static and listening to its sounds and spirits in the textual context generates positivity to avoid passivity in life. The movements are affiliated to communications and as forwarding motivations. The old saying ‘Run with the wind- see where it takes you’ denotes the mystical realms and dimensions of air in link with humans and also the imparting of encouragement and willingness to explore life.

The contemporary period experiencing the air in its polluted and contaminated state deviates from praising of air and literary devices at present include air in the context of preservation. Literature, arts, science, journalism and other social sciences readdress the current scenario where the crisis of air pollution is escalating causing the climatic catastrophe which affects the living, making it difficult for all species on the planet. Literature plays a pivotal role in narrating the causes, consequences of and corrective measures for the pollution in the atmosphere. Novel, drama, poetry, prose, non-fiction and other types of literary genres in the present times focus on the threats of pollution and also about the need to have pollution free atmosphere.

Writers have the power to recreate nature in literature through the tools of expression and imagination. The naturalist writers in simpler forms try to suppress the winds in their writings. One of the precious gifts to humans is the element of air, which is now in a depleting state. Environmental thinking has deep roots in literature from the ancient period as critics, and literary writers explore the subject through the varied lens. The literary writings from the very start of the industrial period mention the adverse changes in air quality. The essay, “Earth’s Prospects” by Lowell Duckert included in the work *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* gives an account of John Evelyn’s work *Fumifugium* published in 1661. Evelyn’s work reports the worse condition of London’s air quality which is emphatically quoted by Duckert

from the title page as “How easily the strong heavy charcoal fumes penetrate the brain” (244). Coal-burning and the infectious pollutants plaguing the air of London are cautioned in the report.

“Airy Something” by Valerie Allen included in the book *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* adds to the grandness of air narrated with reference to ancient and medieval literature. The Gospel account of the Holy Wound of Christ touched by the doubting Thomas is illustrated in the “discussion of air as holy presence, empty space, and roaring wind” (77). The text conveys air’s different moods ranging from the air that ripples, the perfect stillness, its sacredness, and the natural violent side of it. Air is pictured as a living thing, unseen yet announcing its presence at all times. Life revolves around the stillness and agitation of the element of air. The possessed quality of air with violent side results in cyclones, whirlwinds and tornadoes. The facts related to the air by varied critics, medieval theologies and philosophers are brought to exemplify its airiness; to quote one of the varied critics included in the text “Aristotle says of the element air, namely, that it locomotes in order to be motionless” (96).

John Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost* in the seventeenth century after six years of the report by Evelyn, ascribes to the environmental changes and attitudes in London. The city faced various ecological crises, and air pollution was the worst of them. Industrialisation and coal-burning increased in England simultaneously leading to a pernicious level of air pollution resulting in death and disease. “Milton’s ‘Eco-Eden’: Place and Notions of the ‘Green’ in *Paradise Lost*” written by Nick Pici published in the journal *College Literature* explores the ecocritical aspects, pastoral descriptions and the relationship of man with nature in the epic poem. Pici refers to Milton’s manifestation of his profound appreciation of ecology and nature. Ken Hiltner, author and professor of environmental humanities also explores *Paradise Lost* and dwells upon the

connectedness between Satan and the contemporary air pollution in his text “Belch’d Fire and Rowling Smoke: Air Pollution in *Paradise Lost*” published in *Milton, Rights and Liberties*, edited by Christophe Tourner and Neil Forragh.

The eighteenth-century witnessed the growing emergence of the literary concept of the atmosphere. The usage of air and its quality was affected by the excess burning of coal along with the agents of the industrial and scientific revolution. *Air’s Appearance: Literary Atmosphere in British Fiction, 1660-1794* by Jayne Elizabeth Lewis complies with the notable British fictions which explore the literary sense of air. Lewis’ chapters picture the writers’ diverse conception of the atmosphere of their times. Pollution was a minor issue at that period, yet the texts have emphasised on the levels of pollutants and acrid odour mixing in the air by coal burning. The book explores episodes of atmosphere and perceptions of air in the famous literary works like *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Rape of the Lock* and *Paradise Lost*. Daniel Defoe’s novel *A Journal of the Plague Year* is studied by Lewis to illuminate the speculations of the air quality during the Great Plague of London in the chapter, “Spectral Currencies and the Air of Reality.”

In the modern period, literature through its various genres draws attention to the declining air quality and illustrates the imposed threat of air pollution, particularly in the urban spaces. Renowned literary writers inculcated the adverse effect of air contamination in their texts. T.S Eliot, the modernist poet in his noted work *Waste Land*, predicts the impending environmental disasters. The poem is analysed by critics and scholars in ecocritical perspectives as the verses envision the polluted and desolate post-war environment. The bleak state of nature and the environment exposed to pollutants and smog in the fragile atmosphere find mention in the verse form also, which is analysed by a few. “The Waste Land as an Ecocritique” by

Gabrielle McIntire enlists Eliot's sensitiveness to the dying atmosphere, landscape and cityscape seeking continuous attention to balance and restore the environment.

In the contemporary period, the waves of ecocriticism have spread far and wide to the public, imparting the awareness to protect the environment and thereby the planet. There are numerous works written on the defilement of air and its adverse effects. Awareness is spread to the present generation children by conducting activities and programmes in schools aiming at their environmental thinking. For instance, a particular month is assigned as Clean Air Month in schools and contests for students like poem writing on the importance of air are being conducted. Such activities will not only enrich their knowledge about the environment and the world around them but also help them to understand their role and responsibility.

Philosophers and literary thinkers from the medieval period have contributed to the delight of enjoying pure air placing it in a higher order. The survival of human beings amidst the clean air and befoulment, leading to the destruction of species, brings out the importance of pure air. Friedrich Nietzsche, the profound German philologist and philosopher in his work, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* mentions about pollution as 'Bad air.' He says, "What is it that I especially find utterly unendurable? That I cannot cope with, that makes me choke and faint? Bad air! Bad air! The approach of some ill-constituted thing; that I have to smell the entrails of some ill-constituted soul!"(43).

In the twentieth century, Luce Irigaray, the French philosopher, feminist and interdisciplinary thinker, has written books on human relation to the four elements of nature. Irigaray's book, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* is a work drawing ground from Heidegger where she clears the ground on the importance of the element air. She critiques

Heidegger's emphasis on the element earth and his forgetting of air. "Creeping Things" by Karl Steel in *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* endorses the idea that nothing can exist without air. Luce Irigaray's thoughts are illustrated by Steel to signify the superiority of air when compared to the mysterious earth:

Air enables thought, more vitally than Heidegger's earth, for without more air than earth, there could be no clearing that could make thought possible. 'No other element', writes Irigaray, 'is in this way space prior to all localisation, and a substratum both immobile and mobile, permanent and flowing'. For Irigaray, this element, not earth, is the foundational substance, . . . Air is in us, and we in it, as it, not earth, fire, or water, is the only element in which we can live. With air, Irigaray observes, the 'outside enters [us] limitlessly'. (211)

In contemporary times numerous books are designed with content solely catering to the needs for remedial measures for reducing atmospheric pollution. The awareness spread in literary texts as part of the narration has changed in the current times. At present, literary books, journals and scholarly articles have reduced the use of air as a literary device or as a metaphor but rather focus on the sustainability and balance in the environment which is a documental proof for the critical state of the air quality. The air we breathe is filled with life, playing an active role in our lives. The atmosphere remains the least understood and recognised by humans, thus leading to the complex situation of contamination. In the current century, authors have varied perspectives of the human beings and their relation to the element air specifying the importance to recognise pure air for vital living.

In 2011, Monika Bakke from Poland compiled and edited the book, *The Life of Air: Dwelling, Communicating, Manipulating*, which gives special attention to the eccentric air which serves as an example of awareness filled writing regarding the state of air in the present times. The book holds together multiple views on the natural science of air, the social history and takes into account the nonhuman users of air. The five sections of the book discuss the biological, political, philosophical and artistic prospect of air through the assemblage of texts, videos and audios. The simple pleasure of breathing, a mundane rhythm is elaborated, indicating its inspirational aspects. Air is established as a habitat of its own right, a space where the species meet. The nonhuman species surviving and communicating with air as a medium is also conveyed. The crowded and busy lives of the modernised humans fail to notice the molecular messages exchanged in air. The consciousness to be humane to the atmosphere is enounced as the messed air can never be reformed, nor the pure air remaining can be stored for later purposes.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert in the introductory work, “Eleven Principles of the Elements” handle the present ongoing crises which are increasing in number pertaining to the elements of nature. The cosmos and all matter revolve, function and combine around these elements. Air, water, and earth are the predominant elements in the degraded and degrading state requiring protection. The present chapter concentrates on the element of air and its contamination with special reference to the introductory work of Cohen and Duckert who emphasise on the importance of the element. Air is the partner in the life-giving process of all creatures. The unseen element air is called for to be treated with hospitality and to be considered as a constant companion. Material ecocriticism claims are drawn to illustrate the utility aspect of air by the critics in the book *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*.

The introduction to the elemental power, energy and utility by Cohen and Duckert in the “Eleven Principles of the Elements” recounts the significant guiding principles of the restless elements contributing to world-making as partners. Among the eleven interlocking principles the most pertinent to the element air includes, ‘The Elements Are Never Still,’ ‘You Are Never Out of Your Element,’ and ‘You Are Always Exposed to the Elements.’ The three principles taken for the study have the characteristics of air. The physics of air makes it uncontrollable and free moving at all times enriching one’s senses. The presence of air is unavoidable in the heights and depths of the earth, and if avoided, the chain of living creatures would terminate.

The most sustaining and communicative element of nature, the air is explicitly brought out by William Bryant Logan in *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World*. Logan has contributed to the environment by authoring books about Sprout lands, dirt and Oak. Being a botanist, his love as an environmentalist and nature lover is apparent in the course of his narrative. The book depicts the various roles of air and its aliveness. The liveliness of air is stated to be equal to the other natural forms of land and water. Thoughts, being and life are in existence with the presence of air and forgetting this concept has led to an increase of pollutants level. Logan, through the book, instructs that for the continuation of survival and recognition of air, its protective measures are to be formulated. Many statements of praise and appreciations have been gained from various fields such as arts, humanities and social sciences for the brilliant work of Logan.

William Bryant Logan verbalises the magic in the air, its features, the relation to humans and the elements of nature. The introductory work of *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World* enlists the various characteristics of air and its spirit underlining the effects of remaining in ignorance of air. The present chapter, pertinent to advocating air, is carried out in applying the introductory work of Logan along with the core concept of elemental ecocriticism for better

understanding. The eleven principles in regard to the thinking of the earth, air, water and fire elements delivered by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert recreate companionship and ethical establishment towards the elements. The principles discussed adhere to all the elements of nature, and in the present chapter, three specific characteristic principles stated by Cohen and Duckert are taken into consideration for getting a detailed account of the element air. The most pertinent principles to the element air, ‘The Elements Are Never Still,’ ‘You Are Never Out of Your Element,’ and ‘You Are Always Exposed to the Elements’ are explicated with the application of William Bryant Logan’s introductory work of *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World*.

In the introduction, Logan recounts interesting facts, historical events, personal experiences and encounters with air for enhancing the connectivity with the readers. The element is portrayed in its supremacy by the descriptions as ‘theatre of the world,’ ‘great protagonist’ and as ‘the great antagonist.’ The principles of elemental ecocriticism by Cohen and Duckert are illustrated by the conceptual narrative of Logan, and in the above mentioned three principles, they acquire a special status in the descriptive delineation of air in the introductory pages. To illustrate, the extract below determines the moving air in the words of Logan, which resound Cohen and Duckert’s elemental principle, ‘The Elements Are Never Still’:

The air cannot be owned. It cannot be controlled. It cannot be contained. It has no borders or boundaries. It is hot or cold, thick or thin, heavy or light, wet or dry as it pleases. It appears and disappears at will. It spins, rises, falls, swirls, spurts, mounts up, swoops down, expands, contracts, tumbles, jets, sprays, mixes, flows, sinks, stays, or rests. It is as quick to change as dirt is slow. It penetrates the soil; it mixes in the sea. It can stand

human plans on their heads or sweep them out the door like dried leaves. It changes the world. It changes the fate of creatures and the destiny of peoples. (7)

It is worthwhile to notice Shelley's poem "Ode to the West Wind" which also talks about the uncontrollable nature of the wind:

. . . thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision; . . . (36)

Air brings about changes drastically by its course over time. It 'stirs the pot' and 'thickens the plot' in the words of Logan. Climatic and seasonal changes of air collapse kingdoms and civilisations. At the same time, it proves to be advantageous during adversities. To cite an example, "In 1588, the Spanish Armada destroyed when a powerful Atlantic storm piles up more than half the feet on the rocky beaches of Ireland. Never again are the Spanish a threat to invade England"(8). The introduction fetches the connectivity of air with the non-human beings, plants, animals, objects, all matters and the elemental forces. It explains the science behind the air covering the whole world. Air acts as a roof of protection from the ultraviolet rays, which is one of the useful characteristics given by Logan in the introduction.

The primary concepts of air, fundamentals, pressure regions, rhythms, actual events, order, patterns of airflow and visualisations in a weather map are recapped to the reader to recognise the relevancy of air and its crucial importance at present. The co-existence of living

with other species through breathing and the energy to thrive through the medium of air is emphasised by Logan in the following manner: “All that is alive exchanges gases with the air by means of the phenomenon of breath, and whatever we breathe out is breathed in by some other living thing. The energy to live is derived from these exchanges in the air”(21). Hence from all the above utilities of air, it is crucial to pay reverence and critical care to the atmosphere. As Logan extols, “The air is never empty, although mostly it seems to be. Floating invisible through it are gases, dust, fungi and bacteria, pollen, and liquid and solid particles called aerosols. Unseen though they may be, each plays its part in the concert of the world. Some decay the dead, some make rain fall and bring increase, some promote health or seed disease”(20).

Literature always has its contemporary relevance because it is the mirror of life. Whatever is depicted through literature will have a bearing to the life of the people directly or indirectly. Literature from authors, dramatists, poets and novelists across the Indian continent contribute writings in English and in their respective regional languages to curb the menace of air pollution. The urban cities face heavy hardships, while many parts of India remain to have impacts to a lesser extent. The fewer tribal settlements and rural areas are exceptional spaces away from the blackened smoke, and Northeast India serves rightly as an example. The eight states comprising the North-eastern boundary are surrounded with lush greenery and picturesque hills, experiencing the bliss of breathing the pure air. The air that fills the sky, earth and our own body has its magical property, and its presence is a symbol indicating nourishment and brightness in man’s life, including the other creatures on earth. The value of the element air is delineated in the poetical collections of Northeast India, which is dealt with in the present chapter.

In contemporary times, due to urbanisation, the rich hills filled with natural resources are exploited for various economical needs in the name of development. Rampant infrastructural growth, population growth, power plants, particularly coal mining, have caused a steady decline in air quality. To curb this slowly rising issue, the poets of Northeast India use writing as a tool to create awareness among people. The poets' express their powerful feeling as they admire the scenic beauty of nature, which manifests itself as literary verses bringing joy to the senses of the readers. The organic community of the primitive years without any impurities in the atmosphere, turning a memory of the past necessitated by the poets is to be relived. The poets awake and spread the realisation of people's insensitivity to the elements. As the old order yields place to mechanised living, the younger generation and urban people are retold of the past history of the purity of air whereby they call for combined efforts to monitor the air pollutants.

The four poets Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Desmond Kharmawphlang, selected for the study have penned about the air in the hills and the depleting situation at present. The number of poems dealing with pollution has gained significance as the death toll is rising in the North-eastern states, particularly due to respiratory infections. The North-East poets' concerns for environmental issues are addressed according to their topographical settings. Their oral literature, myths and legends depict air as a holy presence as in other aboriginal cultures across the globe. Air is portrayed as a messenger from the divinity, and at times it is also equated with the deities. The tribe's regional ancient literature praising nature are at present translated by the contemporary poets and often brought into reference to teach the young about the carefree but prudent lifestyle of the past free from pollution and with soul-filling joy and peace.

The element air is venerated among the native settlers, which is reflected in their adoration for nature. For instance, the field is ploughed with great pains, and the grain becomes ready for harvest. However, the farmers lose their crops when high winds sweep the fields at the time of reaping. The loss is great as the wind shakes the grain wholly and carries it away, leaving the field deserted. Even at such hard times, a positive assertion is inherent amidst some tribes that the divinity has taken up the crop. The loss faced due to the wind thereby is equated to an offering to the gods. Though the wind makes vain all their toil and makes them face critical situations, they never react adversely due to the reverence held for the divinity. The element air was upheld in linkage with divine aspects, and this reverence made the atmospheric air retain its purity in the past. Air being recognised in its magnificence by the Northeast communities through the verses of the poets bears a resemblance to the laudatory remarks of William Bryant Logan in his introduction to *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World*:

The air is the theatre of the world, only it is the strangest of theatres. It creates and is created by its actors, and is itself both stage and actor. The air is the great protagonist. All flesh is made from the carbon dioxide in the air. All creatures breathe it to sustain their lives. It makes, delivers, and drops the rain and snow that vivify all life on earth. It carries spores to new homes; pollen to waiting anther; and insects, bats, and birds to one another. Bacteria live and reproduce in it. It is neither mystical nor poetical to assert, as does the I-Ching, 'The clouds pass, and the rain does its work, and all individual beings flow into their forms.' (7-8)

The chapter traces air from its metaphorical usage in the work of past poets describing the pleasant living, to the present day poetry lamenting the contamination of air and also cautioning people to react to pollution. Every North East poet exhibits a unique style in picturing

the concept of air, and the relationship between atmosphere and humans are interlinked in the verses. The Northeast poems centred on the element of air and poets bringing in the air as a reference element in their verses are explored in the chapter. Along with the four poets Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond Kharmawphlang taken for study, cross-references to the poets namely Robin S Ngangom, Anupama Basumatary, Nini Lungalang, Rajendra Bhandari and Shefali Debbarma are examined under the unified concept of air. The maintenance, preservation and management of the blissful air surrounding their hills gave the inspiration and urge to the poets to render the joy and peace they experienced in their poetical lines. The significance of conserving the pleasant air is the driving point of the chapter, analysed using the contemporary poetry of Northeast India.

Edward Thomas in his essay “Studying Nature” propounds nature teaching in schools to revive the romantic spirit and to bear witness for literature, teaching man his position in the infinite universe particularly his relation to the physical environment filled with seas, sky, mountains, winds, rivers, woods and other animals. He pleads for developing the spirit of oneness with all the forms of the natural environment. Thomas asserts the importance of the element air by addressing to the common knowledge of people that outdoor wind and sunlight nourish and beautify the senses and the soul. He shares the acknowledged scientific information, “the working of the brain in pure air and sunlight is good for body and soul, especially if joy is aiding” (67). The following Northeast Indian poems are studied in the light of the concept expounded by Edward Thomas that literary verses advocate holding dear the natural elements, especially the component of air. The poems foster amendments for air pollution so that the world need not be destroyed, becoming airless.

Mamang Dai, the representative poet of Arunachal Pradesh, renders exuberant verses by including air in her poetry. Her poetry is filled with the abundance of nature and associated images describing the vivid joy of residing in the rich hills. “If you see a grassy slope” in the collection *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* incorporates the functioning of the wind. The poet urges the reader to relax from the humdrum mechanised lifestyle. She dwells on the necessity of the people to merge and unite with the natural surroundings. Dai insists not to hesitate to dwell in the realms of nature. The poem specifies the simple act of lying on the grassy slope and evolving into the state of nothingness. To sleep under the shadowy trees forgetting the sorrows of life is the message communicated. The passersby may wonder at the absurdness of such idleness, yet the poet insists that people submerge into the divine nature. Instead of slogging for economical benefits and worrying about the worldly activities, the task assigned to ponder on nature proves peaceful.

Do not be afraid of robbers.
 What will they rob...
 The movement of clouds,
 air trapped in a bubble:
 A short life?

A breeze lifts the branches.
 The day is clear.
 Do not hesitate.
 A deep and restless wind
 is an inheritance. (88)

The poet sarcastically conveys that people can never rob nature’s gift of free sunshine, air and light. The pleasures of relishing the rhythms of nature are recommended for experience in

this short life rather than the temperaments thrown by the world. The poet verbalises the pride in possessing the breezy winds in the nature clad hills. The lines draw upon the lightness and gentle movements of the airbrushing against the branches. To feel the pure air in the senses is a pleasant and direct gift which has to be conserved before it gets contaminated. The need to preserve nature can be comprehended as these natural elements are deemed to be the lasting ones. The natural environment in the present times proves to be a precious inheritance property to be safeguarded and presented to the future generation. For further facilitation, John Ruskin's text "Landscape, Mimesis and Morality" validates the air element as ". . . of precious things in the world: those that God gives us for nothing- sun, air and life" (30).

Humans and all other species function with the support of the natural elements. To depend on the forces of nature for existence is inevitable. However, humans are belittled against the mighty forces of nature in many ways as they try to control them. To control the course of the elements will be an incapable task yet the responsibility for guardianship can never be ignored. The poem "Dot" by Nini Lungalang transparently pronounces the tiny space occupied by the mortal human within the cosmos. The poem is similar to Robert Frost's poem, "Mending Wall." The narrative brings out the dispute between the poet's neighbours regarding the ownership 'over a strip of land.' The land clashed on the bases of ancestral property is according to the poet 'long enough to dig/ a good deep ditch.' The small land sought to be owned, and space claimed to be owned by the humans comes to no amount at all to the wide terrestrial globe. The elements, air, water and earth and their components can never be owned for monetary rewards is the bold statement communicated. Instead of quarrelling over a bit of land, the poem advocates to find solace in the hands of the elements and further to become their preserver. Nature's gifts to

humanity are to be tended and never to be misused by taking advantage to the fullest. The poem “Dot”:

And who owns the rain
 we drink, and who
 the air we breathe?
 Can you or I or
 that millionaire buy
 a ray of light,
 the evening’s cool,
 the moonlight’s mystery? (170)

The Northeast Indian poets’ close concern and proximity with the world of nature is reflected in their verses as the elements of nature are lent with the spirit of vibrancy and positivity. The beauty of the land is studied to the deepest extent in the regions’ lyrical collections. The poem, “No Dreams” by Mamang Dai in her poetry collection *River Poems* appropriate water, land and air as a catalyst for inspiration in the times of hopeless situations. The growth in flora and fauna, veneration for land bodies like mountains, admiration for celestial beings and delight in the water bodies are contrasted to the absentminded state of the poet. Dai hopes that the natural world would gladden her spirits. Her view of air is the specified subject of substantiation in this chapter. Nature bubbling with life and air as an eye-opener to see the beauty adorned hills is presumed. Air is presented as a living thing, and its feathery touch is a marvellous experience. Along with the elements of water and earth, which cater as aspiration, Dai merges wind in her verse, thereby revealing the equal importance of oxygenated air. To adduce:

The wind blows into my eyes
 Sometimes, it stirs my heart
 To see the land so plain and beautiful,
 But I have no dreams. (18)

Mamang Dai's poem, "White" from the metrical composition *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* likewise exemplifies wind as a metaphor for positivity and strength. The poem is a jigsaw puzzle constructed of natural beauty images expounding on the very many white grounded objects like the clouds, white flowers, hills draped in white and in the end narrowing to white birds. In the course of detailing the courage gained from the associated things, Dai as well pitches in the winds through the lines, "if I hear nothing but the wind/ gathering strength out of emptiness. . ." (84). The words of Muhammad Yusuf in "Gulf Today" is mentioned in the book cover of *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* as, "Dai reveals herself as a poet - anthropologist, an alchemist who changes nature into emotion."

Midsummer Survival Lyrics by Dai brings out the above statement of eulogising as the poetical collection embodies nature more proficiently. "Language" is the prose poem narrated regarding the myriad languages and dialects disputes. Dai recounts the meeting she attended in the first few lines, held in discussion for mother-tongue conflicts in the tribal areas. The crucial flow of recital deviates to the gushing of winds on the tin sheds assigned for serving lunch. Dai ventures into a detailed description of the wind encircling her hometown. The unique force of nature coming through the hilly air remaining common to all divergent dialects and languages is approximated from the vivacity of verses. The unparallel winds breathe united and unified belongingness among the people of the plains. The poem validates the principle 'The Elements Are Never Still' as Dai exhibits the verses with the knowledge that the element of air is

constantly on the move. Cohen and Duckert expose the difficulty of predicting the mobility of elements as they remain wavery. The poem contemplates Dai's minuscule understanding of the winds, which is expounded by Cohen and Duckert in the principle "Find your element. Get to know it"(9). The poem reads:

This wind of my hometown tears at my heart. It blows over the town hurling our words into the air, against trees and buildings; shaking everything as if on a calculated mission to change the landscape, mow it down, and create something else. The voice of the wind rasps through the barn – like building filling my ears with song; songs of the rooster, songs of the fish, songs of ginger, rice, war, sacrifice and lullabies.

Above this turmoil, a wild bird is calling to show us the pathways of the sky.

Wherever we go – the wind follows. Howling wind. Dissident wind. Sharp, angry wailing wind! (73)

Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih has two volumes of poetry in English and three poetry volumes in Khasi language offering a variety of fabric interwoven with the contemporary concerns of North East India. He mixes myths with ecological concerns to highlight their glorious past to impart to the contemporary people of his land the required lessons and responsibility to react to the conditions of pollution and degeneration. The grace present in nature and the sympathetic regard the poet has for the natural world can never be overlooked while reading the poems. The poem "The Season of the Wind" narrates the realistic incidents that would occur during the windy days. The harsh realities faced during the windy season like the drying up of the spring is also articulated. The mischievous spirit of the wind is revealed in the lines, "When it throws dust into our eyes/ and goes into young girls' skirts" (72). Human

traits and emotions are attributed to the pine trees as they sway relentlessly in the wind, “When it lashes out at the pines/ and they wail in vain” (72).

William Bryant Logan talks about the paradoxical roles played by air as a protagonist and antagonist. The poem embarking on the whimsical winds is true of its powerfulness as a drastic change maker. The elemental principle ‘You Are Never out of Your Element’ by Cohen and Duckert holds resonance with the antagonistic terminology of Logan as the element air takes on hostile and adversary contours. Survival and endurance with the elements are adventurous and overwhelming as they are submerged and drown as part of the habitation. The elements’ holding on to the organisms is the notion of Cohen and Duckert as they say, “Close your doors against gale and flood, safeguard your kin, mind the roof as lightening flickers, but know that weathering will someday leave you nothing but stones where a hearth once warmed”(11). The extract from Logan’s *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World* is given for a better understanding:

The air is the great antagonist. It brings the pathogens and decomposers that decay the dead or destroy the living. It carries the pests that devour a corn of crop or kill thirty billion trees. It makes the storms that drown the main street of Schoharie, New York, in twelve feet of water; erode thousands of tons of topsoil; topple buildings; and drive a wheat stalk through a telephone pole in Tell, Texas.

The air stirs the pot. It changes its course over the face of the earth, and where once rain fell dependable at a certain season, it suddenly does not fall at all. (8)

The notable saying ‘Bend with the wind’ is used as an expression by Nongkynrih to demonstrate the hatred towards the relenting attitude of the leaders who turn out to be vile, swerving from their principles. The popular saying also talks about the ability to adapt to the

harsh realities and adversities of life by developing balance and flexibility like the green reed bending to protect itself against the strong winds. The inspiration to imbibe moral qualities, to remain positive, to be strong and to stick to one's good principles rather than giving away is conveyed through the lines, "I hate this season when my thoughts/ bend to leaders like the wind" (72), whereby Nongkynrih imparts lessons of life, concurrently describing the wind with its playfulness and vivaciousness.

Air is entwined in the poetical works of Northeast India right from the primitive period of oral literature to the translated works of the medieval times which portray the wind element in all its aliveness. Even the ordinary things of the mysterious nature are enumerated with a personal touch. Psithurism, the sound of the fretful breeze against the tree branches and buffeting winds against the leaves producing music are composed in the lyrical verses by the nature poets of Northeast. It is worthwhile to make a note of another poem in this regard, "Wind Among the New Leaves," a translated poem of Shefali Debbarma from Kokborok language, that surfaces the merriness in the air circulating in the meadows, vegetation, paddy fields and other cultivation areas in the hillocks. The poet visualises the wide-ranging forms of nature jingling in the air. The paddy plants being charmed by the whistling wind are humanised in the verses for their gesture of embracing the wintry breeze. The newly sprung leaves, meadows and gardens mirthfully and cheerily moving in the course of the wind are rendered through rich images. The enchanting smell of the fresh crops fills the air with richness, and this smell indicates the pastoral pride the natives inherit. Debbarma's verse lines read like this:

The wind whistles a note and sings,
Rushes over the meadow in abandon;
The paddy plants swing and hold the hand

Of that wintry breeze. The smell of *Mamita*
From the *Jum* spreads all over and swirls. (152)

Temsula Ao's five books of poetry compiled together in *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* has poems vividly describing nature bound environment in its minute details. Her collection gives an account of all species, matter and elements abounding in the hills. Her poems on Everest, firefly, frog, stars and other trivial objects are magnified in her poetical verses. The poetry collection validates the principle, 'You Are Never Out of Your Element' as the elements, and their interstices are evaluated, analysed and learnt of their scale to be familiarised and humanised. The poems establish an intimacy with the elements rather than material affinity and dominance. To perceive the elemental functioning requires no scientific academy, agency and forces as, "They therefore constitute the most promising of inhumans with which to ally, especially because they offer conveyance beyond familiar frames. The elements are the threshold beyond which the post human awaits. They are the outside that is already within, the very stuff of cosmos, home, body, and story" (Cohen and Duckert 13).

The poem "Fire-Fly" featuring under the poetical book *Songs of Many Moods*, elaborates on the minuscule creature flitting happily in the darkness of night. The poet steps outside her home when the electricity is off and observes the solitary firefly's movements in the air.

The electricity is off again.
And the heat is oppressive.

I venture outside
Into the garden
Seeking relief
In the small breeze

Sent in

By my neighbour's trees. (153)

Although the poem centres on the behaviour of the fly and its activities, the words depicting 'small breeze' and 'neighbour's tree' cannot be neglected in ecocritical perspectives. The words serve as reminders for the rising heat by human-made global warming and unbearable temperature. It also conveys the lack of freshness in air quality in the environment as a result of the lack of concern for the atmosphere. Technologies and inventions have stunted the growth of the plant kingdom, which provides gentle and cool breeze. Human civilisation has lost the power to listen to the voice of nature. These words can be taken as a cautious signal to conserve the natural surrounding with the regeneration of air and to deploy more measures for the preservation of nature for the temperature to be stabilised.

The poet, awestruck by the presence and flight of the fly along the course and direction of the wind makes. *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World* bears a similar description when Logan encounters the flies. The fluttering and flitting make the poet curious about the fly's actions, yet she shares her happiness in watching. The effect of the wind catering to the felicitous zig zag movements of the fly is observable even in the darkness. The solitary firefly glad in its flight led by the breeze becomes a moralistic and joyful sight for the poet. In the darkness, the wonderment of the flight is versified by the poet by incorporating the external elemental force of air which aids the fly in its magical bright self. The verse lines read:

I watch this magic play

As he goes his solitary way

Content

To be his own bright self. (154)

“In the Light” present in her poetry collection, *River Poems* by Mamang Dai describes the seasonal changes that occur in the elements of nature along with the incorporation of air and its changes at each seasonal period. The movements of the little creatures and plants’ in air, though insignificant, are portrayed as if they are of the dancers. The poet says, “In the light of air the leaves/ are the dancers of morning” (71), establishing the poet’s intense connection with nature. The poet’s description of the dragonfly is similar to the representation of Temsula Ao’s poem “Fire-Fly.” Due to the presence of pristine air in the hills, the airy creatures such as birds, insects like dragonflies and fireflies abound in the hills. North East Indian poets write verses filled with wonder as they witness the flight of these tiny species joyfully dancing in the air. The dragonfly is described in the following manner:

Bright wing flash,
 in the dizzy air
 the dragonfly turns
 trapped
 by the sun’s long arm. (71)

Like the Northeast Indian poets, William Bryant Logan reports of his seeing the dragonflies as an adventurous event, in the introduction to his book *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World* which is taken for reference. The little coincidental meeting and sharing of the same place in taking the air have a great effect on Logan also as it had on the poets as, “The world is open, the stage and its actors are free” (18). The movement of the twenty or thirty more dragonflies flying elegantly along with the air in the lawn, brushing the grass, flowers, leaves and trees startled the author and kindled in him merry feelings. The dragonflies never make the

author as the target of their attack, “Sometimes they seemed to be chasing one another. Often, they seemed to be chasing the air itself” (17).

Logan, filled with wonderment narrates the swift flight of the insects in zigzag and indescribable patterns. The invisible element air giving life to all beings in the cosmos and the dragonflies, in this context, is the idea explicated by the author as he says, “I realised that the air did not lead into me, but around me, and they were paying attention to the air. It was like watching blue fireworks in broad daylight. I tried to puzzle out a pattern, but there was none that I could grasp” (17). The filling of air all around indicates the principle ‘You Are Never Out of Your Element’ to acknowledge, “Our knowing the world is matter-mediated (enabled, impressed), an intimacy of substance, force, flesh, trope, plot, and weather” (Cohen and Duckert 11).

The metropolitan cities breathing polluted air lack the opportunity to watch birds and other insects and small creatures moving to and fro. An appropriate example would be the bird sparrow which is on the verge of extinction across major cities in India. The machine dominated society has left the man with no time to feel the rush of air into his senses or to watch these airy beings fluttering. The higher contamination level of air is presumed to increase the extinction rate of birds and other species using air as a medium of flight. The North-East Indian poetry conveys the pleasure experienced by the poets in the midst of nature and in particular, breathing the air delighting the senses. The important tendency to feel the air and take good care of the atmosphere is presumed from the poems. The elemental principle ‘You Are Never Out of Your Element’ is to be inscribed strongly as the human bodies are composed of elements which act as companions. The allying abstract elements are to be comprehended to actualise the species scale

of oneness as unmistakably, “Ecologies become intimate, even as they retain a wildness dangerous and alluring” (Cohen and Duckert 12).

Apart from picturing the insects and creatures playing in the air, the metrical collections from Northeast India also visualise the movements of plants swaying in the wind. To supply with illustration, the poem “The Chrysanthamum danced out the windy night” by Rajendra Bhandari is taken here for reference. The poem revolves around the newly blooming chrysanthemum near the poet’s window. The stormy night and its after-effects are described vividly, but the poet is awestricken at the sight of the chrysanthemum standing unaffected in the hailstone. The flower had stayed unworried, swaying to the rhythm of the wind. The element of nature and creatures responding to the stormy night is contrasted with the carefree chrysanthemum mesmerised along with the wind. The joy received by both the firefly and the dragonfly in the above poems corresponds to the blooming chrysanthemum fancied by Bhandari.

The harmonious chord experienced by the species through the intermediation of air is assessed beautifully by William Bryant Logan when he says, “All creatures tell each other stories and call to one another through the medium of the air” (21). The poem further envisions the elemental principle ‘You Are Never Out of Your Element’ as the mundane and inhumane elements become part and parcel of the humans and creatures. The elements expand from the tiniest particles to cover the cosmos in their shifting perspectives and flourishing, which are essential to know to master and inhabit along with the elemental world. The element air is imagined, comprehended and featured in all its aliveness and celebration by the prolific poets of Northeast India. The poet articulates:

Listening to nobody,
 Carefree of all,
 The chrysanthamum near my window
 Swayed and swayed throughout the night

All through the night danced the chrysanthamum with wind. (20)

Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih's poems feature the tribal life of Northeast India and the celebrated association with nature. He is considered a worshipper of 'Mother Nature' as his poems abound in the recurrent images of the thick green forests, mountains, hillocks, seasons, rainfall, and natural resources which are treated gloriously in his verses. The poem "A Day in Cherrapunjee: I" praises the rainy days of Cherra, its unpredictable rains and violent downpours which the poet is bound to miss out in the forthcoming days due to his shifting to Shillong. The breezy air literally opening every pore when it rains down is envisioned by the poet. The verse recites the air turning heavenly when it is rain-washed and free from dust. In the course of describing the wet climatic condition of Cherra, Nongkynrih gloriously brings in the element of air in a majority of his poetical works. For example, in the collection of poems *Moments*, the poet testifies to a peaceful and blessed living in Cherra, as the atmosphere is fresh by the pure air. The lines bring such a pleasant life:

There is peace in Cherra
 where a man may walk
 the time-honoured paths unperturbed
 and breathe invigorating air
 without affliction to his nose. (47)

"A Day in Cherrapunjee: I" gives details of the course of the wind during seasonal changes, particularly when it combines with rain. The rapid deforestation in Cherra is indicated

during the narration as the winds turn maniac without the trees to pacify their course at present. The onlooker, due to the absence of trees, fails to feel the gentle brushing of the winds against leaves and branches. The trees cut for various economical needs, industrialisation and the establishment of factories like cement, lead to disastrous changes in the present days. Cherra, the land receiving the highest amount of rainfall now faces drought in many of its parts, as there are no trees present to retain the ground level water. Deforestation is the major cause of the elements earth, water and air getting affected; this also indicates the chain of connectivity in the cosmos. The gentle romance turns into wild laughter of a maniac as there are no trees to temper. The poet laments such change in the following lines:

But I can feel gentle autumn in the sun
and there's no dust in the wind.
The wind rules the land,
howling like a maniac,
for where are the trees
to temper its wild laughter
into romantic wooing? (22)

Forest is a dire necessity for the existence of human beings. Among all its utilities, the significant contribution it makes is the maintenance of atmospheric purity. The immense value of trees and forests are found when the air quality turns impure, making it unhealthy for breathing. The impure particles and chemicals inhaled lead to health hazards. Absence of forestry and woodlands is harmful resulting in soil erosions and floods; besides, they bring in more disorders affecting the atmospheric air and by retaining and increasing its impure state. It is evident that Nongkynrih creates a subtle reference to the condition of Cherra being stripped of its dense forest areas leading to many risks.

The wind ruling the land versified by Nongkynrih explicates the principle ‘The Elements Are Never Still’ averred by Cohen and Duckert. The zone of the elements is ever revolving as the Counter- Copernican revolutionary motto reads, “And yet the elements have never been still”(9). The Northeast Indian poets attest this as they write of the air element in its free-flowing and invisible state as a source of great power, influence and force. The incorporation of the maniac winds by Nongkynrih is a model poetic verse built to highlight the wild orders of the elements. The poetic lines of Northeast Indian poets resound the principles of Cohen and Duckert for the “Elements-as-fundamentals trigger beginnings, catalyse arrangements that resist totality, open never-ending archives, labyrinthine libraries of the not quite-read” (9).

“To Delhi: I” is yet another poem by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih where he talks about his discontented journey to Delhi by North East Express train while enumerating the monotony in the metropolis. The sidelined Northeast considers the centre Delhi as something of great significance and travelling to the city is considered an expectant and great opportunity, but Nongkynrih believes differently which is evident from his lack of interest to reach Delhi. His profound wonder and admiration for the hills subsiding the awe for the modernised urban centre are reflected through his words “But my love, my heart was behind” (75). Nongkynrih establishes his strong connection to his abode of living. He transmits nostalgia in his versification and yearns for the natural settings of the hills. Nongkynrih is reminiscent of his joy found in the ‘cool sensuous breeze’ blanketing the hillocks. The element air though unseen, it is embracing, and the all-encompassing trait is conveyed by the poet when he compares it with other elements. The poets’ innermost revelling in the cool burst of wind and the purified air in his bucolic surroundings is fetched through the verses. For he writes:

Where were the hills
 and the cool sensuous breeze?
 This land, I thought,
 has no use for the hills
 and those in the hills. . . . (75)

The poet's yearning for the air in his hills is apparent. The acknowledged truth that tribal settlements prefer to live to their hearts' content in their own perceived boundaries rather than being mesmerised and dislocated in the name of development. The Northeast Indian tribal system is embedded with cycles of festivals, dancing and singing in the pursuit of pleasure. Their zest for life and the merriment they find in their physical and natural environment makes them differ from the non-tribal manner of living. The air they are surrounded literally and metaphysically bind them to a comfort zone. The element air, its freshness and solace enjoyed by the hill people make it unimaginable for them to survive in other states. The purity they have witnessed makes them adhere to the hills as their sanctified home town.

The environment encompassing the hills eases up a suitable and desirable living for the natives than the crushed spirit in the city is conveyed through the poem. The winds encircling their ecological home grounds are their wealthy and prized possession, and they conceive it to be their breath of freedom. Monetary resources in the cities can never compensate for the ventilation and purity of the hilly breeze. Rather than paying a short visit to the pastoral villages for experiencing the fresh air outdoors during vacation, the urban settings are proposed for greener restoration. The vulnerability of the elements is undeniable as per the principle, 'You Are Always Exposed to the Elements.' The purity level in the environment directly gets affected by the pollution with its resultant harms to nature and human forums. The exposure to the wild

winds free of toxins is highly recognised and versified by the poets. The alertness to ensure worthiness and yearning for one's place of living by appeasing with the elements is pronounced.

According to Cohen and Duckert:

Exposure is mediation: 60 percent of the human body is water, 96 percent of it is made up of four chemical elements – oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen- and all mix into an elemental cocktail that fluctuates, secretes, absorbs. Galenic humoralism got it right: earth (black bile), fire (yellow bile), water (phlegm), and air (blood) are not outside of us, not “out there”, but are the shared ecomateriality that is both us and world. Erect walls against the elements, but they are always - already inside - and they did not even require a sinonical betrayal! Your body is a wilderness, an in/organic tempest that the elements are and convey. (13)

The yearning for the hilly air is manifested in the poetical works of North East region copiously. The nature poets' pen verses about the noise of the wind brushing against leaves and tree branches. The smell of the air is fancied in its altering states such as the smell of the earth, noonday wind, river winds, mountainous air, meadowy wind, lush forest aroma, outdoors breeze, the air from green weeds to bamboo leaves and the air filled with the scent of rain. The poem, “Mud” by Anupama Basumatary is typical of Northeast Indian poem appraising the sky's pristine air in its divergent presence. William Bryant Logan evinces the ambit of the air as “The air is the great stage. Odors rise, waft, and diffuse through it. Chemical signals so transmitted are the most widespread form of communication on the earth” (8). This fragrant essence of the fresh air talked about by Logan finds something similar in the poem of Basumatary delineating the winds from the agricultural fields in the following lines:

As soon as you till the field
 Soil smell scored the sky
 And fills the wind that blows
 Down the village road. (88)

Like the air, the farmer is also pure-hearted, and the verses praise the pure-hearted farmer, of his toiling in the fields; Basumatary conveys how the wind is filled with the fragrances of the field. The imbibed and treasured scents of the air in the hills are at present languished as the industrial era has deprived the places of the ventilation, which becomes a great concern of the contemporary poets. The older generation people in the Northeast region find it something new when dust and dirt deposit in their houses unlike the earlier days when the atmosphere was filled with pure cool breeze accompanied by sweet whistling and rustling sounds coming from the surroundings. They bewail the present industrialisation process which directs the wind picking and circulating harmful substances from the dam construction sites, mining areas, quarries and factories. The wind filled with the scent of mud, agricultural mud is lost to the bricks of the plains. The air filled with the smell of the pastoral land ploughed and sowed has not been experienced by the younger generation due to the technological cover. The poets advocate the youth to live through freshening the air, whereby they can be encouraged to conserve the precious elements of nature. The proponent applies to all the agricultural settlements across India where machinery has taken over the muddy fields.

Desmond Kharmawphlang, from Meghalaya, never gets tired of showcasing the Northeast Indian landscape, rivers, seasons, cultures and traditions in his poetry. Element air is channelled along the course of his poetical verses and few notable lines are: “And the wind laughs herself shrill in certain months/ shaking her belly among flowers” and “Last night, the

winds threatened / to tear the moon to tatters.” Kharmawphlang’s poetical lines standardise with William Bryant Logan in connection with the superiority of the element air. The verses of Kharmawphlang integrate air in the recital holding acknowledgement to the ideology of Logan.

The air in the words of Logan:

But the air in every moment is a special gift. There is no other planet within twenty parsecs that has the like of it, and perhaps there is no other place anywhere at all that has such air. The air is the archetype of restless immanence. It is full of invisible movements and invisible contents. Through what it does and what it brings, it makes and unmakes the world it envelops. There is no actor more powerful on this earth, yet for the most part we studiously ignore it. (19)

Desmond Kharmawphlang along with the other poets of North East India, opposes the aftermath changes imbibed from British colonisation in the form of modernisation and westernisation. The colonial experiences which started from the tea trade, which later extended to coal mines, oil refineries, mineral excavations, factories like plywood and cement being initiated, contributed to the exploitation of the magical hills. The ecological impact is recited by Kharmawphlang through his metrical compositions. “Poems during November” by Kharmawphlang present in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays* edited by Tilottoma Misra restates the cognised impression that “Although we could not refuse / The visit of religion, . . .” (61). However, Kharmawphlang instils promissory notes for the plains through the projection of nature, “The rains still weep on these hills, / Filling the thin air with softness, . . .” (61).

The poets deploy the element air by incorporating it during the verse course as literary devices and in particular as metaphors. Air is elevated as part of their identity and belonging to the land. The open-air ventilation and pristinely plentiful air is a proud inheritance possessed by the dwellers of the eight states. In the current scenario, the intrusion of modernity wave and insurgency has led to the victimisation of nature and natural resources in the land. The process of progress has produced pollutants affecting all the elements of nature. Air is the lesser affected component in comparison to the atrocities faced by the other elements of nature vested in Northeast India. The pollution level in the atmosphere has increased in these hills recently where death tolls are mounting. The contemporary Northeast Indian poets to reduce the growing hazards in the environment deal with controversies in regard to primitivity and modernity in their lyricism. The distance generated between man and nature is expounded by Temsula Ao intellectually in her poem “Distance.”

The poem “Distance” from the *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*, existing under the metrical composition *Songs that Tell* by Temsula Ao verbalises the broken link of humanity within human relationships between fathers and sons and mothers and daughters; she extends the estrangement of the bond of humans with the physical environment. The earth and the sky are at present excessively treated unfairly which makes residence in the planet unmanageable. Ao pictures the true state of the current times where the components of nature collapse in their struggle to maintain and provide a standard living for masses. The atmospheric air being polluted requires urgent monitoring to restore the ecology and for the skies to extend their arms for harmonious living. The ethics of people are called to be cross-checked in their human relationship towards one another and distinguishingly towards the macrocosm. The poem is used as an instrument by Ao to foster changes and curb the nature-oriented destruction level

for a healthy habitation among the elements of nature. An extract from the poem points out this in a beautiful manner:

An earth
Stretching out
To a sky
No longer abode of the celestials.
..
A sky
Looking down
On an earth
No longer housing mortals.

That is distance. (12)

The verse above indicates the distancing of the elements of nature from the living habitat, which is brought forth by the activism of modernism. Pollution from the coal mines of Northeast Indian states is the perfect example to state the consequences of atmospheric pollution due to the drive in the modern age for monetary benefits gained from withdrawing the natural resources. Mining coal through the primitive methods, namely open cast and rat hole methods create a huge impact in the hilly belts. The rivers and streams are greatly polluted due to the draining of toxins wherein aquatic life are heavily impacted. Air pollution results at a greater level due to faulty mining and burning of coal. Interfered destruction of one element leading to massive longstanding repercussion on other elements are evidenced as the mineral dust from the mining areas pollute the air, and the waste dumps of the mines affect the water and land bodies adversely. Further, the coal mine pollutants impact the immune system of the people working in the mines and the rest who are residing nearby.

In recent times vehicular pollutants have increased in the hills due to the increase in the number of vehicles and transport lorries passing through the highways. The smoke emitted from the factories also engenders air pollutants to a large extent in the atmosphere. Measures are taken to control the water pollution by engineering and biological processes, but in the case of air pollution, the hills remain helpless. The changes and damages caused by human activities would stand irreversible unless some serious amendments are taken to curb the future emission of pollutants. This pecuniary progress like extensive coal mining is the ground where the fissure and distance between the elemental worlds of nature widen.

William Bryant Logan has described the distance sprawling between man and atmosphere in an incident encountered which is mentioned below. The free product of air altering to sparse prepositions in the present times and the suffocation at stake is reckoned. The poem "Distance" bears the reflection of the plight dreaded by Logan of the bleak future of humans. An extract of the narrative by Logan taking into account the distance generated and its outcome is given here:

One hot August day in New York, many years ago, I got off a subway car in upper Manhattan. The air-conditioning was broken. I was sweating, almost stifled, very cranky. As the door opened, it revealed an advertising poster for a movie called Zardoz. (I never saw the film.) The tag line atop the poster read, "I have seen the future. And it doesn't work."

At the time I was wiping my brow and gasping for breath.

"Precisely!" I thought. (Logan, 15)

The lack of insight regarding man's survival with a united bond with fellow humans, creatures, celestial objects, all matters and elements is projected in the poem, "Distance." Despite man's progress in the fields of science and knowledge, he has failed to impart human empathy and tolerance. Prosperity and development have turned nature a commodity. The self-centred notion in the present times to run the rat race will be the reason for severing the bond between humans and nature. Adhering to nature and ascertaining with wonderment the movements of the sky and clouds transmit humane qualities to forbid pollutants from entering into the open air.

The political turmoil, identical crises, insurgency, chaos and other resentments have caused extreme hostility among the natives. The picturesque environment they are wrapped up becomes secondary amongst the turbulent situations they confront. To maintain, uphold and preserve the natural resources, flora and fauna in the Northeast states remain to be passive due to the political intrusion and Occidentalism amidst the younger generation. "Lament for Earth" is yet another poem by Temsula Ao from the poetical collection *Songs that Tell*, compiled in the *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*, which explains the mournful state of the element earth. The opening lines of the verse unfolding as "Once upon an earth/ There was a forest,/ Verdant, virgin, vibrant. . ." (42), retell the past glory which at the present times is lost to the mechanised world. The thick groves and forest covers are vanishing in the name of development and technology. Ao sympathises with the perplexed birds and many other little creatures for having lost their habitat in the trees.

Deforestation causes a steady decline in rainfall which eventually will lead to drought-hit lands. Soil erosion, heat waves, floods, siltation in major rivers and many more negative repercussions are apparent in the act while the foremost of them is the wiping out of pure air.

Fresh breeze from the trees which fills the senses with bliss will be the prime loss in denuding the dense tree areas. To breathe in fresh air is not easy in the hills, as air is becoming a scarce resource. Primitive people lived in harmony with nature, and the conflict between man and nature never arose. When nature is modified as a commodity to meet the ever-increasing demands of man, the conservation concern becomes a question.

The felling of trees forms a repercussive cycle of harm to the other elements of nature, namely, water and air, which are adversely affected. The poet envisions the delayed rainfall and drying rivers whereby the thirsty deer at the bank never gets its thirst quenched. Ao recounts how the water element is perishing simultaneously with the forest resources. The decreasing absorption of air pollutants chiefly after the felling of trees and plants brings forth the increase of unwanted substance in the atmosphere. The elements head to a gravelled cycle of disorientation, and the conflicting situations is an alarm which is conveyed through the poem. Temsula Ao, in the poem rightly anchors her words as a medium to transmit the awareness to foreclose pollution levels, in her words “Grieve for the rape of an earth/ That was once verdant, vibrant/ Virgin” (44).

Robin S Ngangom represents the plight of Northeast natives in his poetical works. His poems stage emotional surge, diverse moods, and in addition, his anger is witnessed in the verses; all these make him a figurative poet with versatility. “The Strange Affair of Robin S Ngangom” is a poem with four parts confessing the trauma faced by his land such as violence, ethnic clashes, military intrusion, centre dominance, insurgency burden, corruption rooting, modernism and disorderly behaviour of the native youths. His love for the people and land merges in the lines with the temperament to bring about changes in contemporary situations. The

Northeast past is pictured pristine while at present the land is raped in the name of modernisation and clashes of insurgency. The hills demolished for natural resources and vegetative areas intruded under advancement policies diminish the traditionalism of the tribes. Human emotions and feelings like love are suppressed under these conflicting occurrences. Ngangom describes the atmosphere as:

But the hills lie draped in mist.
 Instead of the musk of your being
 I inhale the acrid smoke
 of gelignite and pyres. (11)

The drastic changes in the hills obtruding the natural forms and livelihood of people would not deter the poet from moving away from his motherland which testifies the spirit of patriotism. The increasing number of challenges to survive and the uncertainty for sustenance are highlighted. The elements of nature are fragmented into commodities, unlike the primitive morals practised upholding the elements. The make-believe policies of industrialisation and affably convincing monetary advancement deprive the plains of their natural condition. The peace-loving and carefree life depart, and the impending danger of objectification of nature is lamented by Ngangom. His verse on elemental deprivation: “Even/ fire water and air/ are slowly becoming commodities” (12).

The poet beckons the youth to inculcate patriotism which is the lone medicine to cure the plagues of the plains. The breezy, chilly air they cherished and the rustling rhythm of the wind they listened, of which the land is deprived of at present signal to the nightmarish life lying ahead. The poet’s earnest request, “patriotism is declaring we should/ preserve native customs and traditions, our literature and performing arts” (12). The reinventing of the old belief system

and lore would rejuvenate the elements of air, water and land, in the process of restoring its vitality to maintain the equilibrium with the elements, as over and less exposure results in hypothermia and dehydration, respectively. The principle by Cohen and Ducker, ‘You Are Always Exposed to the Elements’ illustrates the indivisibility of body and environment encounters with the elements. To safeguard the elements primarily Cohen and Duckert ask humans, “Are you afraid of the elements? You should be”(13).

Midsummer Survival Lyrics by Mamang Dai incorporates the prose poem “Bandhs,” where she anticipates and quests for yesteryear peaceable inhabiting. Amid the upheaval and hullabaloo, Dai views nature and its forces as their comfort zone as the other Northeast poets have done. The shutdown of the normal functioning of transport, schools and offices due to insurgency and militant activities was a regular unannounced causality in Northeast states. Dai in the poem “Bandhs” gives an account of the realistic picture of a shutdown in her place of residing. The element air partakes as a catalyst in the verse. In the poem, the connotation is made to the wind to rekindle positivity as the poet claims the cells awakening by the gentle brushing of air on her face. The wind is acknowledged with familiar spirits, and besides, the taste of the wind is relished by the poet. Return to the pastoral and idyllic setting is the presumed call of the wind. The poem is a vociferation to restore the happy and alive pace the clans have witnessed rather than the concurrent times of disorder. The element air is thereby a medium of the squall to venture back to the race of primitive peace holders. The wind is epitomised as a companion and comrade by the poet as:

. . . Everything is shutting down. The wind
blows into my face. I remember the breath and
taste of this wind. It is a call from the wilderness
those wild places where love kept us happy, alive. (61)

The search for prosperity, expression of power, consumption levels and heady individualism by the citizens percolate the clean air to devastating conditions. India experiences the harmful effect of air pollution at an accelerating rate to the maximum extent in major cities that people travel with face masks as a compulsory accessory to safeguard themselves from the pollutants. The discussion of brands for face masks is prioritised among the city crowd, which is becoming a new metropolitan accessory. The humans waking slowly to amend the air quality would result in the free element turning to business value. Fresh air would predictably be sold in cylinders and cans for livelihood. Due to the mounting rate of atmospheric pollutants, the measures to ameliorate the quality of air have been sidelined.

The abundance of natural resources in the eight states of Northeast India is the vital reason for the intrusion of monetary activities harming the hill environment. Air pollution prevails in the hills in varied forms and levels ranging from domestic consumption to industrial emissions. In comparison with other metropolitan centres, the air pollution level is minimal in the districts and towns of Northeast India. The numerous factories present in the region emit toxic pollutants causing the highest rate of atmospheric contamination. The cement factory at Cherrapunji is a representative case for industries creating alarming hazards for the lives of the people. The amount of smoke emitted from the Cherra-Muwalah Cement factory produces huge ecological destruction to nature and the people living near the factory. In several studies conducted near the cement factory to test the danger level of pollutants, an interesting fact has been found that the honeybees circulating the location had disorders due to the heavy metal pollutants.

Heavy metals are important toxic contaminants of the environment which pollute the air, earth and water elements. Mercury, lead and cadmium are a few of the nonessential contaminants

which pose severe threats to the environment. Abhik Gupta in his environmental degradation analysis, “Heavy Metal Pollution of the Environment: Problems and Perspectives in Northeastern India” mentions about Gupta. A, Nath.H and Gupta.S study of “Heavy metals in honey and the honeybee” which found that the dust particles in honeybees contain several impurities like copper, chromium, manganese, cadmium, lead and zinc. When tested, these metals were found in the body tissues of honeybees as well in the honey gained from their hives. The particles will transmit to humans eventually when the honey is consumed, producing health hazards. The element air posing a grave threat from post-war resettlement to the present industrial development across the globe stands applicable even in the reclusive eight states of Northeast India. William Bryant Logan, regarding the constant threat of air pollution, says:

Our success as a species has filled the air with the leavings of our lives, changing its behavior in ways that are dangerous to us and to many other species. It is an irony of the postwar period that we regarded pollution as our chief “problem” in the air. Indeed it was and still is a serious threat, and it has had consequences other than increasing the frequency of respiratory diseases. (19)

Apart from coal mining, the stone sand quarries where granite and other rocks are dug blows fine dust of harmful contaminants into the air. These dust emissions are known to be layers rich in manganese and copper. The metal pollution is to be checked to prevent the impending dangers to human health and deterioration of nature. A cycle of contamination occurs as these particles present in the air come down along with the rains and thus further tainting water bodies. The polluted harmful air causes damage to land and water elements as the elements form a reversible connecting chain. Humans are the most affected species under the atmosphere, as air pollutants induce pulmonary diseases and cancer.

Domestic pollution of air quality is evident in the hills as dumping of urban wastes, garbage including industrial effluents in open space and gutters spread unbearable pungent smell. The mountain air carries this stench to a large stretch during breezy days and inhaling the air diffused with these pungent pollutants results in hygiene issues. The rural areas and towns are to be authorised with proper sanitation services and facilities for the disposal of wastes through proper regulating systems. The sewage dumps at many open junctions and waste littered around reduce the aesthetic beauty of the hills in addition to the purity of air being spoiled. Health and hygiene of people should be given priority and maintained without hazards to their lives.

The unburned hydrocarbons produced by automobiles are polluting the region. The trucks carrying timber, coal and other natural resources downhill have increased in number resulting in the increment of smog levels. Vehicular emission has turned out to be the main culprit contributing to the impairing of air quality. Further increased traffic in the hills calls for controlling and monitoring. The industry plants and factories located in North East India emit dust particles along with smoke from their units blowing up through the tall chimneys. Wind circulates these tiny particles around the habitation regions where people inhale the substances on a regular basis which leads to many diseases like tuberculosis, lung cancer, asthma and eye infections. The factories and industrial plants are to be monitored to filter these particles according to the set norms before their emission into the atmosphere.

Air pollution preventive measures initially gained importance after the climate change convention held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Earth Summit had the member countries sign in for recognition of environmental protection. The harmful effect of greenhouse gasses leading to global warming and global climate change were discussed to be curtailed. The issues are not crisis building, but rather, they are crises reached in the modern-day society. According to

William Bryant Logan, the human race held responsible for the atmospheric crisis has embarked on measures after the drastic changes in the air quality. To cite:

To an alert child, the air and sky are actors. . . . We know so little about the air. It so constantly bathes us that we think of it only when it does something unpleasant: oh, the air is so polluted! Or when the weather is bad: it's raining cats and dogs! Or when it becomes a danger: global warming is killing the planet! Or when it brings us something really special: I have never seen such a sunset! (19)

Awareness programmes at present are widespread among the people regarding the consequences of health hazards whereby they oppose factories located near the residential avenues despite the number of beneficiaries they serve for development. The regulatory boards responsible for prevention and control of air pollution should amend possible measures to prevent further deterioration in respect to the quality of the air in the Northeast States. The welfare of the natives and maintenance of the pure air quality is a prime factor to be ensured as the elemental principle registers, 'Your Are Always Exposed to the Elements.'

The measures to master and moderate the air pollution level in the region involves lesser difficulties as the restraining steps are simple to be adhered. For example, the increasing number of vehicles are to be kept in line in addition to the governing of silencer pipes, specified horns and green certificates as to abide by the vigilance of the air pollution board. Coordination should prevail among the various government sectors and private institutions to maintain the worthiness of the hill environment. The main emission particles causing the impairment of air are oxides of nitrogen, carbon monoxide, aldehyde and sulphur dioxide are to be checked. The notion derived

from the study of the poems dealing with air is that to unmask the problem and to reduce pollution, the element air is to be reckoned as a wonder rather than as a figured problem.

Forest covers and dense tree spaces not only help in the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere but aid as shield protector of impure pollutants. It is estimated that the forest plays a huge role in controlling air, water and noise pollution levels. For instance, many bacteria present in the air die when they come into contact with the pure forest air and to state a case the researchers say that the bacteria responsible for dysentery die in contact with the maple tree. The atmosphere with its choking effect has green no more as it is ashen in the process of deforestation. That the manhandling of deforestation to be arrested and plantation acres to be increased in greater degrees are major initiatives in curbing the air pollutants, which is effectively conveyed by the poets discussed in the chapter.

For a better living of the forthcoming posterity, evaluation techniques and criteria are voiced by various forums and boards in increasing numbers in contemporary times. The governmental institutions, welfare schemes, individual interests, non-governmental organisations, environmentalists, journalists, science and humanities fields and many more contribute to up-gradation of the atmospheric calibre. The Northeast Indian poets also persist in sensitising the people across the green plains where air pollutants are in the rise. They prominently and generously discharge their role as appropriate environmentalists to the anticipated alarming contaminated atmosphere.

Northeast India, even after experiencing many ecological disturbances, still possesses the pristine, fresh and fragrant air in many parts of the state. The unpolluted, unaltered and enchanting serene environment is still present without the hindrance of man and his intrusive

activities. Dense forests, orchids, chirping birds, waterfalls and crystal clear lakes in the hills and valleys are accompanied by the serene air which leaves a person enchanted. That this vibrant and positive relationship with the forces of nature is to be retained and extended is the clarion call of the poets to the contemporary generation. The illustrated poems in the chapter depict air in its glorious state as was prevalent in the primitive societies; which is aimed to inspire the masses to rectify their present polluting environment imputed to political activities like insurgency and modernism. The poems elaborating on minuscule details of the wind cherished in its various kinds and its astounding features incite the people to admire the element of air strongly.

The poets articulate their dread of the hilly paradise being exploited for futile purposes and ply to channelise a cordial relationship with nature. As a remedial measure, the poems seek to search back the primitive roots, culture and tradition which preached nature sacred. The traditional value systems are the right answers to the questions raised due to the present ecological degeneration. The numerous researches and observations examined at the rituals and festivals of the hill tribes bear witness to the general welfare inherent in the customs. The concepts cater to purification, protection against wild animals, epidemics, the wrath of deities and evil spirits, miscarriage and diseases. The natives believe that their gathering for the rituals increases the integration within the kin, clansmen and members of the community. Further, it is believed to provide the natives with longevity and good health. These rituals, festivity and unification are at stake in the present modernised society where the evolution of lifestyle is erasing the purification and welfare of the hill people.

The effect of air pollution and the deterioration of nature and healthy life of people can never be presented in definite statements, yet the presence of these gaseous matters is decisively harmful. To check on the air quality depletion, the Northeast poets invariably contribute by their

moralising verses to foster change and to revert the magic in the air. Environment and social concerns regarding the atmosphere are to be synthesised for prime quality is advocated by the poems analysed in centrality with elemental ecocriticism principles of Cohen and Duckert and further with the conceptual application of William Bryant Logan's introduction to *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World*. The poems packed with powerful environmental, social messages act as a constant source of inspiration to the present generation for greener resolutions towards the air, an element of great significance. The words of Logan are worth pondering in this context:

The air is spinning. All the phenomena of weather and climate come from the restless motions of the air, the gyres, and all their permutations that bring rain, snow, fog, hail, sleet, black ice, tornadoes, hurricanes, the layers and the heaps of the clouds, the rising smoke of the chimneys. We can't control the weather, but nevertheless the weather changes as we change the contents of the air. (20)