

Chapter 3

Wavering Waters in the Wobbly World

Water is the mother of the vine, the nurse and fountain of fecundity,
the adorning and refresher of the world

– Charles Mackay

Water, called the elixir of life is one of the most necessary elements like air, required for the survival of the human race. Water is the prime element for the sustenance of life systems. It holds the central position in aiding the functioning of the ecosystem. The fundamental role played by the water element as life generator makes it the most significant of all the elements. The World Water Day is observed on the twenty-third of March of every year to celebrate the waters present on the planet. The day functions with events, musical fests and campaigns fostering the importance of the water element. The essence of a rich societal and communal living is made possible when they are prominently connected with the fresh water availability and accessibility. The earth is made a habitable location with the water world engulfing seventy-one per cent of the earth's surface. It also serves as the abode of many aquatic life forms. The ecological balance is maintained by the water cycles in constant performance. Water is recognised as a universal solvent, and it has the chemical composition of one oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms.

Water establishes its connectivity cycle with the other elements of nature. Water is vital for human existence as two-third of the inner body is composed of water lubricant. Safe drinking water is collected from various sources like surface water, rain, rivers and lakes. It is a human right to access the basic need of consuming potable water. Water facilitates the humans to meet

their innumerable requirements starting from domestic to irrigation levels. This transparent substance is considered as a natural heritage.

Water is colourless, odourless and tasteless, yet it occupies a significant place in the web of life. With the increase in technological growth, population rate and urbanisation in the contemporary period, the properties of waters are contaminated. Human activities pollute the water bodies with toxic substances, particularly by the effluents from industrial wastes. The quality of waters is degraded by chemical contaminants, radioactive wastes, oil spills, plastic wastes and many more of such hazardous pollutants. Marine ecosystems are adversely affected, and heavy metal pollution is a dangerous stress on the water environment. The pollution of water element alters the climate. The global demand for fresh water has increased drastically, and there is water scarcity in many countries. Impure water has caused water-borne illnesses like cholera, typhoid, skin diseases, respiratory infections, reproductive problems and even deaths. Water pollution creates long term damage to the ecosystem, and at present nations struggle to monitor the challenges to improve the renewable water resources as they are the prime drinking sources.

“Thousands have lived without love, not one without water” is a statement attributed to W. H. Auden which contributes to the importance of the water resource. With the increasing demand for drinking water, education to conserve water bodies is on the rise. Government officials and policymakers are doing programmes to facilitate the availability of clean water. Awareness is created regarding water resource management. Strategies are implemented to stop contamination of water and to make adequate clean water accessible to all communities. Nations have started to administer and implement environmental laws, especially to monitor industrial and agriculture sectors to abide by the conservation rules for water bodies.

The brilliant blue element of water is to be safeguarded for the betterment of living and the need to have clean waters and to protect the wetlands, ponds and streams has gained significance. Many rules have been implemented like the Clean Water Act by the United Nations with the objective to make the nations recognise the responsibility of keeping waters from pollution. Researches are carried out to measure methods to prevent water pollution, and simple steps are formulated for everyday eco-friendly lifestyles which assist in protecting the waters and the world. A healthy society is directly responsible for maintaining a healthy relationship with the water bodies; the literary texts from ancient days have been mentioning the necessity of maintaining purity of waters as an essential factor.

Water is represented in literature from ancient writings primarily as a symbol of purity. This essential element of life in its fluid and flowing state is represented gloriously, in various traditions, and through this element of water life lessons and teachings are imparted. The sublime, as well as destructive features of the waters, are connected to aspects of birth and death by authors. The classical element having varied forms is also represented in divergent metaphorical connotations in poems, stories and novels; for instance, the rivers are prominently referred to while talking about fertility and freedom, and the oceans are represented for depths of mysteries. The term 'Hydrous Psyches' used in the book, *The Penguin Book of the Beach* denotes writers in close relationship with the sea and for people who have water symbolism in their works. Water is related to spirituality and is used as a cleansing spirit in rituals. The faiths across the globe have reverence for the element of water as in the Christian context where baptism with water represents the purification of the soul and acceptance of the faith.

Water has remained a fascination for writers for generations as they capture both the violent and gentle aspects of water. The regenerative and destructive features of waters are

consciously or unconsciously used as symbols in the literary writings from Homer to contemporary literature writing. *Water in Medieval Literature: An Ecocritical Reading* by Albrecht Classen traces the substantial reflection of waters in human life from the medieval period. The tremendous significance the water element holds from the Middle Ages is brought out magnificently by the poets. As a sustaining force, the connectivity with waters is portrayed in the writings of the Old Norse to Irish, Latin, German and French. As an interdisciplinary approach, the book integrates the experiences, spiritual connection, mysteries, myths and symbolism. Water, as a mark of identity along with its transformative powers, is woven in the descriptions of the book.

Starting from the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer mentioning the sweet showers of April to the present, the water world is used by authors in their artistic creations. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Stephen Crane's *The Open Boat*, and John Barth's *The Tidewater Tales* are a few such renowned works. Water element inspiring and shaping the artist's beauty is evident in the famous poetical creations. In Yeats's poetry, water is used at several different levels symbolising various traditions and myths in relation to creation and generation. His reading of the Indian philosophy and 'The Upanishads' is brought out through many imageries where water is presented in its innocence to destructive nature in Yeats poems.

The universal symbols used for water in oral and written literature from ancient civilisations and cultures had remained the same throughout the ages until recent times when the water pollution saga began. The aesthetic and metaphorical representations have reduced, and the waters are now critically represented even in apocalyptic forms to preserve this significant element. All genres, including poetry, graphic novels, fictions, short stories are at present,

focusing on the challenges faced due to climate change and global warming. The authors interlink the past, rejoicing its association with the waters with the current mourning of polluted waters. The subject of waters is found in reputed works like *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, *Don't Cry Lake Tai* by Qiu Xiaolong, *Empires of the Indus: The Story of a River* by Alice Albinia, *The Drowned World* by J.G Ballard, *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood and *Tears in Rain* by Montero Rosa. The Indian literary works representing water are numerous – from the writings of the ancient period where the natives bestowed due reverence on the water bodies to the contemporary writings where water pollution has generated literary voices seeking revival of the aesthetics of waters. To mention a few; the poetical collection, *City of Water* by Anindita Sengupta, the graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* by Sarnath Banerjee and artistic folk art collection of *Waterlife* by Rambharos Jha.

At present many new approaches are arrived at to transform the polluted water bodies; for instance, the term 'Blue Ecology' used by Michael Blackstock. Blue ecology seeks to incorporate and adapt the practices followed in the ancient period for the present changing climatic conditions. The indigenous knowledge applied along with western science is the foundation for the term, and it is a call for the next generation to solve the complex ecological problems. The rhythms of waters are to be understood from the context of the old generation, and the relationship with waters is to be strengthened. Blending the knowledge of western science with the traditional teaching and local knowledge is the prerequisite whereby the ethics for water in various cultural diversities are practised. It caters to build water sustainability environment and to balance the water system in ecology. The term Blue Ecology is given credibility by UNESCO, and The Association of Hydrological Sciences has included the concept in their

mainstream. The conservation of the core element is administered by blue ecology as water is a living entity.

The blue water resources were neglected in the urbanisation and modernisation processes, which resulted in the impurity of the element. The critical state of water is at present experienced by nations, and many more places are on the verge of water scarcity. Literary writings inculcating the critical situation of the water element are creating ripples to alter the polluted water bodies. That the development of conflict within the web of life can be avoided when the water pollutants are managed alongside without disturbing the economic progress of the modern period is advocated by the writings. Natural resources are to be treated with ethics is articulated by the books, and a few are mentioned here for reference.

The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water by Charles Fishman draws upon alarming facts on water scarcity. Water element can be altered back to its original freshness easily compared to the other elemental restoration. The granted negligence occurs as the water resources are in plenty and that it can never be completely used up, but the critical state is for the fresh water which is depleting rapidly. In the golden age of water, centuries back, people lived merrily with the available fresh water, which at present have become a valuable commodity. Water catastrophe occurring in major countries and cities are cited. Innovative measures are advocated along with smart and creative use of water in the turbulent times to encourage people to imbibe water consciousness. The book is a warning with examples from civilisations crippled by lack of water management.

The Hidden Messages in Water by Masaru Emoto transmits the theory proposing water being connected to a person's self and which is held in his collective consciousness. The stimuli

of a positive response by water crystals in the study are narrated with pictures and other visuals. The transmitting ability of water to reflect human emotions and feelings are proved. Polluted waters reflecting negative vibes in the water crystals are also given to emphasise the need to uphold goodwill with the waters.

Thinking with Water edited by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis bring consciousness for considering the water element to necessitate balance in the climatic conditions. The anthropocentric culture has been dominating water resources in the name of utility purpose resulting in commodification and contamination of water. The forgotten waters are brought forward to the centre stage in recognition of the fact that without water system livelihood will be impossible. World water crisis needs a watery relation scholarship to manage and organise the resource for communal living. The book talks about authors and artists who captivate water expressions, resist the political concerns, oppose water privatisation and demonstrate the presence of water required in all aspects for living. To quote a few lines from the Introduction of the book by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis titled “Introduction: Toward a Hydrological Turn?”:

First, we love water. Water attracts us: rivers, ponds, rainstorms, coastlines- even puddles- have an undeniable sensual charisma. Waters hold great spiritual meaning across cultures; they gather stories, identities, and memories. For many of us, water possesses spirit. And of course, water is a material substance essential to our life. As so many of us (plant and animal) are largely made up of water, we cannot help but be moved by this shared relation. Furthermore, among the many elements that come together to materialise life, water offers a visceral experience of the transformations that all biota sense, both internally and in their surrounding environments. Unlike other kinds of

elemental matter, water moves from solid to liquid to vapour with acute environment responsiveness. (5)

Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, the practical narrative calling for the fightback against the worsening global water crisis and the corporate giants profiting multifold. Water wars are predicted in the contemporary period due to severe water shortages. The consumption of water turning costly exposes the ecological impacts faced. The book mentions the big bottled water companies like Nestle', Coca-Cola and PepsiCo at present yearning millions. It highlights the growth of water industries and the human population slowly becoming dependant on bottled waters than on tap water availability. The fresh water is a heritage for the society, and its depleting state is to be restored by transforming individuals to water warriors.

To oppose private control of the element water, a treaty was initiated and written by Maude Barlow, and Jeremy Rifkin titled 'The Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons' is attached in the book for reference. It was signed at the Summit Water for People and Nature at Vancouver on July 8, 2001, by 800 delegates from 35 countries acknowledging the need to nurture the water bodies protectively and to stop polluting the fresh water. Every species on earth has the fundamental right to access the water resources belonging to all and thereby privatisation of the commodity is to be stopped is the keynote of the treaty. The elemental availability is to be collectively safeguarded by the social institutions and communities having it as their prime responsibility. The book narrates the very many success stories in places across the globe and the justice movements for water to induce water consciousness to the readers.

The book *Blue Gold*, divided into three units namely, ‘The Crisis,’ ‘The Politics’ and ‘The Way Forward’ narrates effectively the features of water, its degrading levels, measures to conserve and to treasure the elemental world of water. The hydrological cycle, decreasing groundwater, unstable aquifers, exploding populations, water disputes, migration to cities, surplus industrial consumption of water, drying lands, pollution particles and over-exploitation of river systems are detailed in the chapters. Humans are warned for their activities that pollute and “Red Alert” chapter illustrates the state of waters in America, Mexico, China, Mid-East and African countries to picture the current crisis rate of waters.

“Red Alert” the first chapter under the division ‘The Crisis’ narrates in detail the water catastrophe occurring in the contemporary world. The present chapter is explored with reference to the narratives of “Red Alert” to facilitate better comprehension of the water element. “Red alert” brings out the alarming rate of fresh water reduction in the world with a detailed description of the root causes. Red alert for the blue zone indicates the critical state of waters. The chapter opens with the lines: “Water has been an important symbol in the legends and histories of many ancient cultures. Unlike people living in the urban, industrialised nations of the 21st century, most humans throughout history knew that their water resources could run out, and they developed a healthy respect for conserving whatever water they found” (3).

The elemental violence and diminution are gradual processes happening, and the consequences confronted will be dire and damaging. The elemental significance featuring in the “Eleven Principles of the Elements” by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert bring to the limelight the element of water and its characteristics. The three principles of utmost relevance to water to be discussed in the chapter are, ‘The Elements Are Never Easy,’ ‘Elements Are Steps, Not Stairs’ and ‘The Elements Oblige.’ Critical embrace of the element foster radical

environment enhancements, and in the contemporary period, the increasing pollution levels of water requires water stewardship initiations. The principles studied bring out the knowledge of elemental powers, their magnificence and presence, as good companions and betrayers.

In the great chain of being, the element of water is substantial for interweaving functional activities. The elements unite, compose and combine to operate the great chain of being and nature's chain narrated by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in "The Sea Above" is included in the book, *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Air, Water and Fire*. Cohen states, "Humans flourish at the boundary where earth, water, and air meet" (106). The chapter explores the medieval stories and narratives of the sky as the sea above and describing the stories of ships in the sky, and the sky travelled by sailors. The elemental intersections are demonstrated, "When earth and air are so dynamically entwined, they invite into their elemental midst a sibling materiality, water" (115).

With regard to dynamic elemental existence, restless functioning, love adherence, ecological worthiness, Cohen brings in the view of Gervase of Tilbury; "Even if their enduring stability is questionable, each element offers a distinct ecology: earth for creatures that walk and crawl, water for swimmers, air for that which flies, and fire for 'everything that shines'" (118). Further elemental activism is advocated by Cohen in the lines, "To acknowledge how the elements work, matter, and thrive, to realise our utter embroilment within a world of plants, animals, winds, seas, sky, stone, is to realise that environmental activism mandates ecological agentism" (123). For the betterment of the future, humans should establish interpersonal relations with the water world, taking into consideration the three principles selected in the present chapter.

The Indian nation has a rich heritage of water systems which are adored and revered as deities and entities possessing divine characteristics. The traditional and cultural roots of India have water bodies at the forefront as powerful symbols. Major rivers are bestowed with female names like Yamuna, Kaveri, Godavari and Narmada in India which indicates the interlinking of feminine characteristics with the features of waters such as life-giving, supporting, mysterious and at times ferocious. Rivers are worshipped for their utility purposes, especially for irrigation uses. The water bodies at present are facing contamination by untreated effluents and sewage, distortion of water flow by the construction of dams, encroachments and many more problems. Various measures are carried forth like rainwater harvesting, water conservation campaigns, afforestation policies and community engagement with the local wetlands and catchment areas.

North East India has the massive Brahmaputra-Barak river system with its tributaries covering the region with abundant fresh water resources. The wetlands, floodplains, groundwater, lakes, waterfalls, ponds and rivers are the very many flourishing water resources in the region and the entire abounding waters cover about 34 per cent of the country's total water systems. The Brahmaputra is one of the world's longest rivers flowing through China, India and Bangladesh and it enters Northeast India through Arunachal Pradesh where it is named Siang. The Brahmaputra is also known as 'Lohitya' in Sanskrit, which means 'red river.' The river takes on red colour when it passes through the red soils on the adjoining embankments during the rainy seasons. The river has a mythological connotation with Parasurama and his sins. It is said that it was in this river that the great saint washed off his bloody stains of matricide and regained his sainthood. Hence people say that the water in the river is red. The river is compared to the Egyptian Nile for its grand spectacle, width and intensity. The surrounding valley is fertile and rich in the harvest and is rightly mentioned as the lifeline of the Northeast People. The presence

of Brahmaputra gives rise to stretches of rice, thick woods, wild ferns and mustard cultivations around the valleys.

The roaring water flowing out of the mountain gorges offer a picture of scenic beauty. The intricate river system beautifies and graces the hills with rich alluvial plains, minerals, resources, and in particular distinguished flora and fauna. The coastal areas and the green valley along the Brahmaputra flourish with nature and cultivation. Trees like betel nut, bamboo and coconut groves are found in abundance. The flow of the river is rapid, and it has strong undercurrents. The river rushes in torrents feeding a good number of tributaries and streams. To mention a few of the Brahmaputra tributaries in North East India are: Beki River, Dibang River, Teesta River, Kameng River, Lohit River, Manas River and Subansiri River. The picture of the river, Brahmaputra, with its tributaries flowing through the Northeast region is given below.

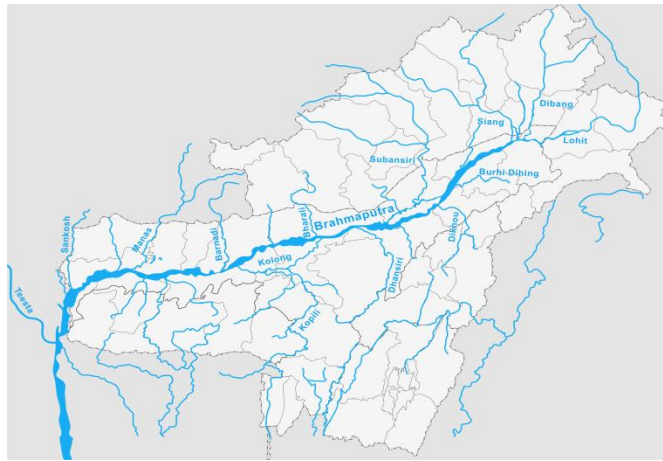


Fig. 3. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries in North East India

The water amuses the people in its varied structural wonderment like the famous waterfalls of Akashiganga in Assam, Nohkalikai in Meghalaya, Nuranang Falls in Arunachal Pradesh, Kanchenjunga Falls in Sikkim and Triple falls in Nagaland. Irrigation activities and the

livelihood of the people are vested upon the river basin. Even during the floods, natives are benefited as the waters bring moistures and sediments necessary for agriculture and marine farming. Fishing is a major occupation among the native people catering to their economic needs, and the fishes caught during the flood seasons are rich in protein. The natives are aware of the knowhow of water management, utilisation, quality maintenance which are inherent in them as part of their traditional lifestyle.

The Northeast region has oral literature, scriptures, traditional songs, ancient stories and regional writings on the significance of the water element. Apart from literature, other forms of aesthetic creations like fine arts, paintings and music also focus on water visualisation. The sacred spirit for the waters is imbibed in the cultures and traditional practices of the natives. The traditional narratives of the tribes depict the closeness they have with the waters, and the affinity the women had was stronger than men. The rivers and lakes are connected to female images and bestowed with feminine names. Mythology and folk arts feature the water element as central in many aspects. In devotional perspectives, the rivers are vehemently held higher, and ritual bathing during festivals like Ashok Astami is practised. The river centric themes present from the ancient writings are never sidelined even in the present modern literature. The radiant beauty, valour, honour and glory of the water bodies are expressed in the literature from the region. The water bodies are claimed to be the identity generators for the natives as the waters are deemed to be their prized possessions. Many types of research, academic journals, magazines and books are published about the Brahmaputra-Barak Waters. To quote a few lines from the poem “Me” by Aruni Kashyap:

Where rivers and rains are born
To flow down as legends, life-blood.

My history is different, defined
 by grandmas, rivers, hills,
 singing spring birds behind green trees
 and seventeen victories. (32)

Nawariagits or waterman's songs in Assam are another illustration of the attachment the natives have with the element of water. These waterman songs are similar to the Bihu songs which praise the land and the seasons. These songs existed during the times when the boat was the means of travel; it is believed that the songs originated as the boatman paddled drifting along the currents of water. The waterman singing songs as they paddled made the boat trips enjoyable, and it envisioned the simple delight of their lives in the company of nature. These songs were later translated from their oral version to numerous songs and ballads. The hills with their ample water resources are benefitted endlessly, and water is one of the significant components in the lives of the natives which always found a place in their literary form as it is sketched and celebrated in poetry from the ancient times.

Northeast Indian poetry in English abounds in beautiful descriptions of the numerous water bodies they are surrounded like the rivers, streams and ponds. The present chapter focuses on the description of the element of water from the four Northeast Indian contemporary poets Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Desmond Kharmawphlang. The aesthetic descriptions and livelihood revolving around the waters, the transforming of waterways by urbanisation which deprives it of purity leading to scarcity and reduction of rainfall and pollutants rising in the current times are narrated in the verses. The region has many poets like Nilmani Phookan, Hiren Bhattacharya, Monalisa Changkija, Nilim Kumar and Ajit Barua who admirably poetise the water element in their regional and English languages. Fifteen poems are

analysed from the selected four major poet's writings which are interpreted with the three elemental principles, 'The Elements Are Never Easy,' 'Elements Are Steps, Not Stairs' and 'The Elements Oblige' of Cohen and Duckert along with the prose piece "Red Alert" in *Blue Gold* by Barlow and Clarke.

Mamang Dai is recognised as a river poet for her poetical collections *River Poems* and *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* which are addressed exclusively to the water element. Her poems depict the varied feelings, experiences and emotions in association with the water structures. The waters are depicted as deities as well as destroying forces threatening lives by natural calamities like floods, earthquakes and droughts. The collection *River Poems* contains fifty-two poems and the poems establish the connectedness and completeness cherished by Dai with the waters of the region. *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* abounds in intricate observations of the hills, generating attentive care to other creatures and rendering respect to the elemental world. The realistic pictures of the element of water in her poems reveal the immortal association with the element.

The poem, "A Stone Breaks the Sleeping Water" from the poetical volume *River Poems* by Mamang Dai ponders on the sublime and serene characteristics of the waters. The poet describes the asset of owning the rich inheritance of nature in similarity with the traditional roots in the opening verse lines. The fast-moving and cherished childhood days are compared to the ripples breaking in still waters when a stone awakens the sleeping body of water. The poet glorifies the visual beauty of dawn along the river line as a feast giving delight to the senses, and Dai wishes in impersonation to obtain the sereneness and pureness of the river waters. The final stanza captivates the ravishing spirit of the poet's transformed heart from the sights of 'white magnolia' in the rain, 'spring clouds' and 'stroke of sunlight.' The rains and river enthrall the poet's soul and nature as the best transformer and healer is evident in the verse lines. To cite:

Where eyes meet the dawn
 claiming the course of a river, a stream,
 I wish I could fulfil impersonation of a life
 and inherit each simple hour
 protected by innocence

Now, when it rains
 I equate the white magnolia with perfect joy.
 Spring clouds, stroke of sunlight,
 the brushstrokes of my transformed heart. (21)

The revelling of the spirits at the sight of rains and rivers has become rare in the contemporary period. Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke in “Red Alert” regret the decreasing revere for water and enumerate the mounting problems that occur due to the negligence of water element. Water, the fundamental element for life sustenance and catering to the well being of humans is to be upheld in its unaltered and pure conditions. The need to protect and preserve waters and to maintain a cordial relationship with them is the need of the hour as Barlow and Clarke state:

All living ecosystems are sustained by water and the hydrological cycle. Ancient peoples, and those living closer to the forces of Nature in today’s world, knew that to destroy water was to destroy self. Only modern ‘advanced’ cultures, driven by acquisition and convinced of their supremacy over Nature, have failed to revere water. The consequences are evident in every corner of the globe: parched deserts and cities, destroyed wetlands, contaminated waterways, and dying children and animals. (4)

Mamang Dai explicitly describes rains, and the poem titled “Rain” in the collection of *River Poems* directly acknowledges the overwhelming presence of rains in the hills. The dense forest covers rejoicing in the rains, the aliveness of creatures and the transformative growth is witnessed. The camellias blooming and the pine spreading its fragrance dwell in the senses imparting joyfulness to the natives. The aura fills the hills when the raindrops embrace the land and creatures exude boundless joy. The creating and rearing characteristics of the rain make the destroyer scale balanced; the burdened heart also is made light according to Dai- “Again, the scales are balanced/ between joy and pain” (25). To quote a few lines from the poem:

In the sound of the rain
is contained
all the spirit of the jungle.
Living, breathing,
crushed, regenerative
dark, always watchful. (25)

The native people have a strong association with the rains and also predict the coming of rain through signs observed in the physical environment. The plants, animals and land evict signals for rain through which the natives are able to plan their cultivation cycle. The observation of an ant carrying food to store has been an indicator of heavy rainfall in the near future. For instance, the Khasi’s believed a circle around the sun indicates rainfall, and a thick degree of a circle is said to be representative of heavy rainfall whereby the farmers abandon sowing in fear of heavy rush of water into the fields. This connectivity of the people with the rains is versified proudly by the Northeast Indian bards.

Water and mist are considered twin gods for the Arunachal tribes, the birthplace of Mamang Dai which reflects in her verses. The poem “Small Towns and the River” in the volume *River Poems* is an evidence of the compact peaceful life of the people of the hill which is clad by greenery and waters. Dai verses the simplicity, calmness, monotonous functioning of the people with life and death recurring amidst the permanent cultures and rituals of the small towns. The towns believe in myths even for burial rites; as it is believed that the dead buried facing the west will resurrect with the soul rising to walk in the east to the ‘house of the sun’ is narrated in the poem. The placid environment among the green hills giving the substance for a living is considered sufficient by Dai and the state of man’s oneness with nature and god is found in the line, “In small towns by the river/ we all want to walk with the gods” (30).

The destructive quality of the waters are also accounted in the verse lines, “The river has a soul./ In the summer it cuts through the land/ like a torrent of grief...” (29). Water is perceived as both a hospitable and a hostile force. Floods and heavy downpour are part of the living cycle for the native people and even during such adversities and sorrowful times Dai mentions the river with reverence as if possessing ‘a soul’ which reminisces the beliefs and adoration of the Northeast people for the waters. The mundane living in small towns is paralleled to the water system owing a soulful personification signifying the importance of the river’s presence in the small towns. The immortal waters quenching the thirsty dry soil and gushing into the towns with jubilant spirit evoking merriment is found in the stanza:

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

The poem “The River” from the poetic collection of *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* by Mamang Dai examines the varied images of the fresh water body with astounding figures imbibed from their living myths, rituals and cultures. The river corresponded to a female entity through the verse lines, “I thought, the river is a woman, / a country, a name, / a note of music trapped in the white current” (16) exploring the gentleness of the feminine features and beautiful attributes. The floating waters in surrounding mountain mists with the movements of the captive cloud bring the serene appearance of the river. Dai magnifies the depths and heights of the waters, “The skyline is where it begins/ between the darkness and the summit, / in the birthplace of thirst” (16).

“The River” extols the features of the waters as characteristics of animals, creatures, gods and spirits. The female entity of the river has the smooth and amusing nature of the Peacock, swiftness of the horse, greatness and ferocious nature of the lion and mightiness of the elephant. The river, raised to the level of a deity of armed and wayward god along with its ‘drowning spirit’ is versified. The largeness of the river provides happiness and identity to the people as stated by Dai, “river sea, river ocean,/ river of all our summers/ collecting the salt of our lives” (16). To quote a few lines for reference:

Do not stay too long by the river.
The river is a wayward god.
It is an elephant, a lion;
sometimes they call it horse.
One summer we thought it was a peacock
turning in the yellow dust
that filled our eyes with gold. (16)

The poems “Small Towns and the River” and “The River” explicate the water bodies in their divergent presence. From its subtle characteristics to fierce personalities, the waters are versified, as soulful entities, depicting cultural relevancy, glorifying the immortality, expressing the feminine qualities and having the characteristics of creatures and gods. The poems evidence the elemental principle, ‘The Elements Are Never Easy’ compiled by Cohen and Duckert. The water body might appear simple, yet the composite concepts behind the element are to be comprehended for the establishment of cordial relations with the water world. The water’s mystery of creations, myths, prosperity aspects, compositions, stories, and agents of the water cycle is to be deduced to divulge the implication of the element which the poems are catering in the present chapter. The poems studied impart the creative connect and new beginnings in comprehending the elemental water.

“Tsunami” by Mamang Dai in *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* brings to light the dangerous natural disaster consuming lives in mass numbers at one single stretch. Dai versifies survival in nature as a tedious process, “The ocean is a magnet of war and death; / diving deep, there is no love in nature; / only survival” (70). The young, daring men with small boats oaring into the sea without paying heed to the roaring sea currents place their hopes on the waves for safety is narrated by Dai. The patterns of the sea change constantly, yet the bond the natives hold with the waters remain fixed as men never give up in fear of riding the catamarans. The disaster of a tsunami affecting the living conditions of the people is illustrated by the estranged baby floating in the waters searching for its mother’s voice. The waters take the role to hush the baby to sleep in its lullaby tides where the baby dreams and endures. The compassionate role of the mother is bestowed to the waters though they are dangerously disastrous. From Dai’s verse:

Dim. Dark. Blue.

A baby floats on a mattress and wonders
where the voice of a woman has gone.

All night the ocean murmurs
foaming with the debris of salt and stars;
and the baby dreams,
dreams of fragrance and light;
and lives. (70)

The poem envisions the wild energy and fragile compassion of the water element. The forceful, as well as serene descriptions, correspond to the elemental principle, 'The Elements Are Never Easy' by Cohen and Duckert. The basic principle states of the unity in the elements of nature and the elemental features described by authors are in close association with the waters: "The elements gather the slow and swift, the durable and ephemeral, the flowing and the deceptively still. Even stone undulates within its native duration. They promise that few things easily divide. Impurity insists. Chaos and binding spur emergent, spiraled orders. 'It's elementary' speaks a separation, a reduction into clarity, but underneath elements enmesh"(8).

"Rivers" by Mamang Dai from *Midsummer Survival Lyrics* talks of the essence of rivers aiding for the normal functioning of the people in the hills. The river banks carrying the huts, boats, temples, trees, idle onlookers and women at work are equated to the galloping horse, "with the mane of sky/ lifted on ancient wings" (71). The river is pictured as a companion to the natives, serving and assisting them in their everyday endeavour. The silent and still river holding its composure is questioned of its two sides, "Is it beautiful? / Is it fearsome?" (71). The river is appreciated and admired by Dai:

Daybreak.
 The river shows itself
 impressive with its silence.
 We look at it,
 not knowing what to say. (71)

The poem narrates the river's contrary side, capable of creating calamities and havocs in an abrupt manner. However, in the past, even floods were considered as a boon for the people settled around the basin as it helped in replenishing the soil annually. Farmers welcome the flood as it aids erosion, providing new soil base which will yield surplus agricultural products. The floods are believed as reminders to the people to revere and treat the mighty and masculine river the Brahmaputra with respect. They learn that the bonding with the rivers needs to be strengthened and negligence for the mighty waters is to be avoided. Barlow and Clarke warn in "Red Alert," "If we do not soon change our relationship to water and the ecosystem that sustain it, all our wealth and knowledge will be meaningless" (4). The present polluting period has to acknowledge that the fresh river waters can vanish if it is not managed earnestly. In Dai's words:

Rivers can do anything,
 Capsize boats,
 Plunge into the earth,
 Turn into gravel and rock.
 Rivers can disappear. (71)

The impressive rivers encountered by the natives have a profound influence, and they are expressed in every medium of their thoughts. The rivers, for instance, are present in moral tales taught to the children through stories like the river Umngot and river Umiew originating from Shillong peak which also finds mention in the Khasi folk tale recital of H.O Mawrie's work, *The*

Khasi Milieu. The story has both the sister rivers flow from Shillong peak in a race to the Ri Dkhar, Surmah Valley. River Umngot, the youngest sister, decides to flow through the easy and soft terrains even if it takes a longer route. However, river Umiew dashes her way through the cliffs, hard terrains and rocks and reaches Ri Dkhar satisfied that her sister has not arrived. She leisurely turns her way round the river Rupytylli, but her sister makes it first though in her slow pace. Her remorse and unhappiness in losing to her younger sister made her burst into pieces which eventually became five rivers, namely, Dwara, Umtang, Kumarjani, Prasbiria and Umtarasa. The lesson that moral pride precedes a fall and arrogance and boastfulness leads to destruction is thereby examined through the natural topography of the river.

“The Rain Waited with its Holy Waters” is a poem by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih from the poetical work, *Moments*. The experience of the poet cherishing the welcoming rains on his travel to Cherra for attending a wedding of his childhood friend is the background of the poem. The rains pouring with mists and currents of air are associated with the spiritual baptism in Christian faith where the individual’s soul is connected to the Lord forever. The holy rain waters drenching the poet and baptising him whereby he is connected with the blue waters is expressed in the lines, “I found it waiting with its holy waters/ to baptise me from head to foot, / linking my soul forever” (39).

The blissfulness experienced from the natural showers of the element indicates the intricate relationship held with the waters. Transformations occurring with the presence of subtle elements are relevant to the elemental principle of Cohen and Duckert, ‘The Elements Are Never Easy.’ It states, “Linking agents and multiplicity machines, the elements are straightforward but not simple. Irreducible and initiatory, they are lively as language, a storied tumble of relation, sudden rupture, and material burgeoning” (8).

The wildness and fierce downpour of the rains driving people into their home for safety are narrated. The heavy rains are being exuberantly received by the water bodies as new lives are joining their entity, “Only the silvery falls in musical chasms/ rejoiced in their new-found life” (39). The poet addresses the rains as his muse and elevates them to the level of gods. The characteristics of a forceful downpour, thunderous power and outpouring waters are sought by Nongkynrih who wishes that his poems would also reach the world in a similar manner like the rains. The force of the rains requested to make his poems heard everywhere are found in the verse lines:

Dear rain that comes from the hills
like the gods,
share with my songs a little of your force
and let them be heard and be talked
as your thunderous storm.
Carry them into the four winds
and let them overflow the world
as your waters in the plains-
for all I ask from life is a little of your name. (39)

“Dikrong River” by Desmond L. Kharmawphlang retraces his good old childhood memories spent in Assam’s district of Lakhimpur. The Dikrong River, one of the tributaries of the mighty Brahmaputra originates from the hills of Arunachal Pradesh passing through Itanagar reaches finally to Lakhimpur district of Assam to join the Brahmaputra. The admiration and respect for the river have never ceased as the poetic verses are filled with praises for the waters. The myth, legend, folk tale and art created around the Dikrong River are acknowledged and complimented. The intensity of the river, “Unloosed, / You surge forward” (52), is described

with wonderment as it rushes passing through the mountains and marvellously reaching the sand banks.

The traditional adoration of rivers from ancient times and the devotional perspective of immersing oneself in prayer indicate the rivers being held in significant magnitude, “Plunging in your antique soul/ I worship you in my/ nakedness...” (52). The physical plunge into the water represents the immersion into the components oneself is composed and establishes the contact zone strengthening with the liquid element. The elements being a component part designed with a series of steps corresponds to the elemental principle, ‘Elements Are Steps, Not Stairs’ illustrated by Cohen and Duckert. The elements’ correlation within the elemental world and the unison with the human world in perceived small steps establish the equilibrium in the cosmos and supply to the continued sustainability. Kharmawphlang ends the poem with modest verse lines, “I, a seed of your dreamwords, / I, a foetus in the womb of poetry” (52).

The poem, “Rivers” by Mamang Dai reflects the sacred ancient ties man has with the river structures. The verse begins with contemplating the utilitarian and divine aspects of the river and its substantial association with the inhabitants; “The river of dreams/ penance and pilgrimage, / linking life’s designs” (65). Dai recounts the numerous legends and stories circling around the river. The poem connects the river to celestial beings such as the sun and the moon for its eternity, growth, happiness and changing features. The poet reminisces the purity of the rivers during the ancient times, “Once you sprang clean/ washing boulders, / clearing streams” (65).

The changing appearance of the river in the present period and the lack of ties of the younger generation with the waters are presumed from the lines, “A quiver of arrows/ braced

your motion, / now the light changes” (65). These lines bring out the contamination of water. Barlow and Clarke in “Red Alert” narrate, “We are as dependent on fresh water for life as our ancient ancestors were. But many do not seem to be aware that this precious resource is disappearing. The clock is ticking, but they do not know it” (5). The poet inquires the rivers if they could recollect their joyful association with the inhabitants, “will you remember/ the golden chain/ that linked us” (65).

“December Rain” by Temsula Ao recounts the disastrous events caused by the heavy rains in the month of December. The awful experience the general public have during the rains is contrasted to the delighted receiving of the downpour by farmers. The coldness and bleakness of the rains are resented by common people who never comprehend the importance of rains for harvest. The farmers consider the rains as sent from the heavens to cleanse the field to prepare for the next harvest season. The modern urbanised crowd never comprehends the agricultural activities and their regard of the rains as disturbances for carrying their normal routine are versified beautifully. The younger generation is not aware of the farmer’s arduous work in irrigation and the seasonal changes occurring in nature to aid the fields to produce yields. The modern technology and advanced developments bar them from finding joy in nature’s simple bounties. Ao talks about the farmers’ views:

Farmers say
 Heaven sends this rain
 So the straws in fields
 Will rot to increase
 The next year’s yields. (163)

When the elements of nature are powerful in their calibre to establish warm comradeship with humans, they also exhibit their other side of destruction. The element of water with its serene quality has immortal characteristics which were revered by the ancient civilisations, whereas the modernised undertaking is negligent of its mounting powers which cause tremendous changes in the earth's surface. The humans with enhanced scientific and economic growth are of little value at the hands of the elements of nature, which possess the strength to take away the lives of many at a single stretch. In the words of Dai:

But be it winter
 Spring or summer
 Or even golden autumn
 A sudden cold,
 Like the December rain
 Descends unannounced
 Upon us all
 Standing proud
 In the mortal field
 And levels us
 In one fell sweep
 To follow the fate
 Of straws (164)

The poem illustrates the potency of the element of water. People around the world praise the region for its diversity and strengths from the water resources, but in reality, the native people are affected by many calamities and natural disasters from water resources. The fascinating river the Brahmaputra, which has the unique privilege of holding the name of masculine gender, has a total length of about 3000 km, benefiting the people around the catchment area. However, the male name signifies its turbulent behaviour, might and fury. River

dependent people are affected extremely during floods, and overnight people are left stranded on the streets losing their homes, farms, life savings and livestock to the waters. The elemental principle, ‘Elements Are Steps, Not Stairs’ by Cohen and Duckert explicate the unpredictable harmonious as well as disastrous characteristics of the element of water:

Despite the elements’ arrangement in most premodern cosmologies into vertical forms, the elements have no destination in particular, regardless of our attempts to order them into goal-driven ascent. Instead, the elements are steps that lead to more steps, even to missteps, to errancy. Nature’s ladder proves slippery; it does not convey but trips you up from one rung to the next. The chain of beings goes from vertical to vertical. Yet we must acknowledge that some elemental actants inescapably take us where we fear to tread, or wish not to. (15)

“Tezpur- II” a poem by Temsula Ao describes the historical ruins in Bamuni hills located in the banks of the majestically flowing Brahmaputra River. Tezpur, located on the north bank of Brahmaputra, is known as the historical and cultural city of Assam. The Bamuni hills in the district of Sonitpur are particularly known for the archaeological association from ancient times. The intricately designed carvings and statue ruins of the bygone era attract the onlookers to admire the stones and sculptures. The poem narrates the experience of the poet admiring and contemplating the beauty of the boulders along the silent river. The sun sinking along the horizon of the Brahmaputra is an awe-stricken picture, which no artist could recreate with such marvellous scene as accounted by Ao. To recite her verse:

Standing on the huge shape- chiseled boulders
 We watched transfixed
 As Brahmaputra calmly devoured

The glorious setting sun
 In his daily ritual-feast. (209)

The grand boulders having a rich past history of the prosperous kingdom is at present, lying in their abundance as ‘children’s toys.’ The ruined mighty civilisation is judged from the greatness of the artistic creations and sculptures. The poet dwells on the evening shadows of the kingdom, causes for the downfall of civilisation and on the ‘shape- chiselled glorified boulders.’ The poem ends with the verse referring to the serene rivers as the ‘next-door neighbour’ to the boulders. It becomes the concern of the poets that the mighty boulders crafted, chiselled and protected with awe in past kingdoms, lay in ruins at present and the neighbour, the massive rivers flowing are to be fortified to prevent them from vanishing due to pollution and other human activities. To cite:

So we left the mute boulders
 For their daily discourse
 With the next-door neighbour
 Flowing majestic in his silence. (210)

The Brahmaputra River, the greatest water resource is duly praised in the oral traditions, music, ballads and other writings are not kept clean at present as people treat it as a garbage dump. The natives have reverence and preserve the rivers offering prayers at the banks, yet the modern generation leads a carefree lifestyle littering the water beds. The filth from human settlement and slush from the industrial wastes drain into the Brahmaputra. The graceful water appears polluted for a few metres, yet after the polluted stretch, pure crystal water appears. If the human activities are monitored, that will help preserve the majestic flowing waters of

Brahmaputra as the fresh waters are finite and in desperate need for recognition. Barlow and Clarke in “Red Alert” mention the dire demand for finite fresh water:

Available fresh water amounts to less than one-half of one percent of all the water on earth. The rest is sea water, frozen in the polar ice, or water stored in the ground that is inaccessible to us. The hard news is this: humanity is depleting, diverting, and polluting the planet’s fresh water resources so quickly and relentlessly that every species on earth – including our own- is in mortal danger. The earth’s water supply is finite. (5)

“Summer Rains” by Temsula Ao brings out the eager desire for raindrops to quench the dry, parching summer grounds. The scanty drizzling rain on and off is considered as a teasing play by the poet. The summer heat radiated makes them offer a prayer for rains; “While I burned with renewed heat/ And longed for some early reprieve/ Praying for the summer rains” (223). Ao versifies the ample delight for the answered prayers when the sky opens up with showers pouring from heaven. The raindrops are personified as, “They danced on rooftops, glided on panes/ Swelled gutters, muddied clothes on lines/ And flattened flowers in their beds” (223). The inviting raindrops dancing rhythmically make the poet join the dancing steps of the waters immersing the soul with enchantment to the tunes of the dancing drops. The memorable dance day in the summer rains during her maiden year lingers strongly in the mind of the poet; she cherishes it as it is equable to none of the following summer rains witnessed. The celebrated youthful experience of the poet is versified as:

I watched their frenzied dance-steps
As each drop tried to out-dance the others
In that summer-dance of watery wildness.

In a lightning flash of summer- madness
 I dashed out and joined the dancing drops
 To dance the muddy giddy rain-dance.

The sun smiled on us that day adding
 Tiny diamonds to the dancing drops
 As they cooled my burning body. (223-224)

The tender experience of dancing to the rhythms of raindrops and admiring the sun-kissed rain crystals showering is invaluable in comparison to anything brought about by the present technology and science. The present generation cannot comprehend the joys. The younger generation living in storied buildings stay indoors and appreciate the rains. Today the summer days are accompanied by drought, scarcity, heat waves and parched lands as the increased pollution and deforestation affect the rain cycle, and resultantly they cannot quench the thirst of soil with waters. The poem is a clarion call to the young people to feel the rhythms of raindrops, to participate in their dancing and feel the sense of companionship with the element water.

The elemental principle, 'The Elements Oblige' by Cohen and Duckert formulates the mixed paths of elemental activities in the physical environment. They limit and at times impart peril to the circling atmosphere; at times the climatic perils are caused due to the human exploiting interventions. The disorientation caused by them can never distance them from being comrades to human societies when they are treated with elemental reverence. The unstable shift in the water element affecting the domestic living frame of people, the elemental companionship and obligation is narrated as: "The apprehensibility for which we have praised earth, air, fire, and

water is also an allurements toward betrayal. Once invited to think ecologically in their good company, the elements reveal that their narratives are not undemanding, that their material poesis requires unremitting labour”(19).

“A Drink Unmatched” by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih expresses his profound admiration for the greatness of the hills: “Who says we lack a beach?/ Come, mount these pine-clad hills,/ our land’s proud head” (55). He expounds on the cool winds circulating, calm spirits and peace of mind gained amidst the green hills. The poet ponders on the Umiew river, “Here graceful in its twists,/ the Umiew glides through Umtynngar’s flesh” (55). Umtynngar village is located in East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya and the Umiew river, originating from Shillong is known for its fresh water. The poet with pride verses the grandness of the river as, “But no, no, my scholar friend, no Honey Bee for me,/ this is a drink unmatched”(56).

The freshness and sweetness of the river water and the need to have pure water and conserve water bodies become the concern of the poet. The river at present is polluted with domestic and solid wastes and liquid contaminants. The large river stretches are to be protected; the catchment to be maintained; aquatic species are to be preserved; sand mining is to be regulated, and water is to be saved from contamination by pollutants; these are the lessons to be taught to the younger generation. The continued heavy pollution will lead to the disappearance of the river and its sweetness. Hence awareness is to be created on the vital need of the rivers and their waters. Realising the need to conserve and actions to preserve the river is spread among the traditional chiefs, village councils, women and youth by various environmental organisations.

The human activities affecting the water sources do not stop with polluting as the process of urbanisation and industrialisation have created infrastructure and buildings destroying the

natural surroundings. The cities are packed with many-storied buildings, metros, pavements, malls and bridges whereby the surface land with plantations have become dwindled. The hydrological cycle requires waters from the ground, rivers, seas and ponds to evaporate forming precipitation to come back as rain. The water absorbed by the natural greenery, forest, fields, rivers and vegetation aids in the functioning of the hydrological cycle rather than the water falling onto the buildings of urban settlements which reasons out the less amount of rainfall in cities. The raindrops in urban areas are not absorbed, and further the fresh waters go waste.

Barlow and Clarke in “Red Alert” give details of the study of Michal Kravcik, a hydrological engineer, on his alarming finding of ‘landlocked country’ and the negative atmosphere for the water element in urban spaces. The natural habitat of water is destroyed at present in the name of developments and buildings are constructed on dried river basins. The hydrological cycle affected by the ‘overbuilt landscapes’ is explained thus, “When rain hits pavements and buildings instead of forest and soil, it cannot be absorbed and sent underground. Instead, it swells both rivers and oceans. As a result precious fresh water is converted to salt water” (10). The water retention ability reduces with deforestation, destruction of the natural water system and the construction of concrete buildings. The urbanising ill effect for the hydrological cycle is proved through the study of Kravcik’s own country, Slovakia. To quote the warning bells from the study of “Red Alert”:

Kravcik’s scientists have also issued a dire warning about the growing number of what they call ‘hot stains’ on the earth – places where previously existing water has already disappeared. In the near future, the ‘drying out’ of the earth will cause drought; massive global warming, with its attendant extremes in weather; less protection from the atmosphere; increased solar radiation; decreased biodiversity; the melting of polar ice

caps; submersion of vast territories; massive continental desertification; and eventually in Michal Kravcik's words, 'global collapse'. (12)

“An Evening by the Source of the Umkhrah River” is a poem by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih narrating his leisure stroll along the banks of Umkhrah River. Umkhrah and Umshyrpi rivers flow through Shillong down streams to the Umiam Lake, which forms the important source of water for people in the city. The thousands of inhabitants along the Umkhrah River pollute the waters with domestic filths, sewages and solid pollutants which pose a threat to the residents of the city. Nongkynrih admiringly versifies the purity in the originating Umkhrah river bed reflecting the blue sky. The bank holding the sights of fishermen, maidens near washing stones, tuneful pines and children playing are narrated through the lines:

Nobody care that this limpid water
The bashful maidens, the tuneful pines
Are rolling down to the city
Where life itself wallows in the filth.. (52)

Many initiatives are taken to educate the residents near the banks of Umkhrah River to abstain from contaminating the waters of the river with household wastes. The city dwellers are also advised regarding the importance of conserving the fresh water source. The poem insists in the process of purification by mentioning the essence of having clean waters. The elemental principle, ‘The Elements Oblige’ by Cohen and Duckert narrates the elemental alliance and ethics to be catered for sound living on the planet. The ecological awareness and aesthetics as emitted from the poem are vital in contemporary times to secure the realms of water lines. The water bodies facilitate the living creatures to their fullest with an obliging spirit, and it is the turn of the humans to exhibit ethics by binding to the obligation. The principle states:

The binding of the elements is love. Without strife, though, they and their makings could never be free. We are, irremediably, within a swirled mess of obligation. The earth, air, fire, water, love, strife, interstices, and impossible hybridities with which we are coextensive are strange strangers, intimate aliens. Even more difficult, they are at once compulsions to lyric and story, unremitting tropes, material and language that turns. The combinatory world they compose is *universe*, a cosmos that is quite literally a spinning thing. (20)

“Kynshi” by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih captures the ever-flowing powerful waters of Kynshi, the largest and important river of Meghalaya flowing towards the west Khasi hills. The picturesque beauty of the Khasi hills is decorated with the flow of the sovereign river originating from the hills of Raishan. The river adds to the prosperity of irrigational activities and improves the living condition of the Khasi people. Tales and legends about the river glorify the hard white waters gushing impressively. The poem details the simple life led by the natives exerting a good relationship with the natural surroundings. The green hills and gracious waters being exploited under modernisation and development notions are regretted strongly through the words of Nongkynrih:

Pines like dressed chickens
 leave woodlands in truckloads.
 Hills lose their summer green
 explode into boulders
 boulders into pebbles and sand
 the sand is not spared. (46)

The environmental degradation has not deterred the gushing waters as Nongkynrih describes, “But Kynshi goes on/ however changed the land/ however changed the people” (46). The rivers are at a critical state at present in similarity with the green denuded hills, which requires an urgent measure to avert the pollutants to keep the crystal clear water gushing. The sense of belongingness and the unchanging magic the waters emit is encapsulated in the lines, “Sovereign river/ why do we lose ourselves here/ not going anywhere?” (46). In contemporary times water pollution has increased rapidly, and the poet’s intimacy with waters emphasises the need for affinity with water to be inculcated by the younger generations. The intricate and aesthetic attachments with the waters are to be instilled in the minds of the individuals who are technology-driven as the alarming report of the United Nations narrated by Barlow and Clarke requires urgent reconciliation with the element of water:

According to the United Nations, 31 countries in the world are currently facing water stress and scarcity. Over one billion people have no access to clean drinking water and almost three billion have no access to sanitation services. By the year 2025, the world will contain 2.6 million more people than it holds today, but as many as two-thirds of those people will be living in conditions of serious water shortage, and one-third will be living with absolute water scarcity. Demand for water will exceed availability by 56 percent. (24)

The prominent Assamese poet, Navakanta Barua, possessing a unique aesthetic expression has penned the poem, “Once a River...” which captures the water crises. The poem narrates the past memories of water flooding the cities and the pleasing appearances of the waves. The verse laments the loss of greenery from the hills today which “Slowly erase all the colours of life” from the simple rustic living natives as pollutions have turned, “The green, the

golden.../ Paint a copper sky instead/ And an earth the colour of ash!” (144). The green and blue colours give the universe essential characteristics for human survival, and when the colours fade with human interventions, the planet loses its ability to accommodate the human species. The poem visualises the realistic disastrous future the human advancements and industrialisation growth is heading towards. The barren agricultural fields with cactus flowering imagery indicate the parched lands lacking rains; Barua narrates, “The shadow of the camel’s neck, of long necks,/ will lie as bones in wait for a sea” (144). Small steps of negligence, leading to a big water catastrophe, are emphasised. The blue waters depleting are versified as:

Turning rivers into rivulets
 And brooks into beds of stone,
 Build with sand but a tomb
 For trees, creepers, flowers.....
 A hazy dragon fly, --- looking for water
 In endless flight over boundless sands
 Somewhere loses its way;
 Deserts come this way,
 Slowly, in months, in years..... (144)

Desertification is an act performed by the individuals in the modernised and urbanised spaces ignoring the significance of fresh water. The massive industrialisation process has been one of the major causes for the depletion of the elements of nature. The balance between the human and natural world is destroyed as the increasing population demands of consumer wants drain the natural resources and elements of nature. Water is the prime element used in the operations to meet the unending consumer claims leading to reduction of fresh water. To cite an example of the consumerism impact on fresh water from the text “Red Alert” of Barlow and Clarke: “Many of the world’s growing industries are water intensive. It takes 400,000 liters of

water to make one car. Computer manufacturers use massive quantities of de-ionised fresh water to produce their goods and are constantly searching for new sources” (8).

“A Day in Cherrapunjee- III” is a poem by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih delineating the beautiful Likai waterfalls, considered the queen of waterfalls; it is also one of the highest ranges in India. The waterfalls and the surrounding lush green jungles are considered the prized possession of the hill people. The recital of the past memories of birds chirping sounds in the dense green lands reminds of the current ecological degradation in the hills. The poet describes with profound joy his past visit to the interior green lands and rivers along with his uncle. The verse laments the saddening truth of pollution affecting the aquatic lives. To cite:

And there is a river overthere,
Where fishes used to play in the pools
Like little children
In the fields.

Now it's a ghost town
And the music is gone. (27)

Cherrapunjee, the place addressed in the poem is reputedly known as the wettest spot in the world due to the heavy amount of rainfall and only two seasons, the cold and the rainy in the region exist. As a result of human intervention in recent times, Mawsynram has become the heaviest rainfall receiving region instead of Cherrapunjee. In recent times the region of Cherrapunjee faces the problem of drinking water despite the heavy rainfall. According to environmentalists, the significant out take of coal and limestone is the major reason for water scarcity. In addition, the Khasi hills from the colonial period have been involved in the production and export of iron and trees were used for charcoal purposes in large quantities for

iron smelting; but in the later years, the exports reduced due to the lack of trees. The bare forest covers due to the various exploitation activities have created an acute water problem in Cherra.

Cherrapunjee, receiving the natural rainfall in abundance faces a shortage of water due to deforestation which further leads to failure in retaining the fresh waters and underground levels; it is an example indicating the drastic factors responsible for the water crisis. The contemporary society, immersed in its detachment from the natural surroundings, abandons the elemental world. The numerous agents credited for deterioration of the water element are enumerated in “Red Alert” by Barlow and Clarke:

In addition to population growth and increasing per capita water consumption, massive pollution of the world’s surface systems has placed a great strain on remaining supplies of clean fresh water. Global deforestation, destruction of wetlands, the dumping of pesticides and fertilisers into waterways, and global warming are all taking a terrible toll on the earth’s fragile water systems. (9)

“Lament for Earth” by Temsula Ao talks about the elemental depletion in the current century. The water element is given utmost importance in narration as the fresh water resources are depredating into contaminated sources. The clear composition of the rivers and the crystal waters are compared to honey in the olden days. The prosperity and growth with the element of water are versified, “With little fishes/ Growing big/ With the seasons” (43). The gurgling sound of the river, the little fishes in its bosom and the deer quenching its thirst with the crystal waters are beautifully described. The poet is saddened with the river transformation due to the pollution which is turning the water muddy and impure.

The valleys and rivers had beautiful sounds and sights with creatures drinking the clear waters are not found today. The loss of clear and crystal rivers, the gleeful play of aquatic beings and the sight of animals drinking the crystal water are lamented. According to environmental science, humans' extreme knowledge leading to experiments turns dangerous to nature's organisms and disturbs the environmental conditions. Many water creatures have gone extinct due to the chemical polluting of rivers emitted from technologically sound factories. To quote the lines of regret for the polluted water element:

Alas for the river
 It is muddy now
 With the leavings
 Of the two-legged animal
 Who bleached her banks
 And bombed her depths
 Foraging for the little fishes
 Grown big with the seasons.
 Cry for the river
 Muddy, mis-shapen
 Grotesque
 Choking with the remains
 Of her sister
 The forest. (43)

Aquatic creatures as the poem remarks are troubled by the pollutions thrown in the water surface. Dolphins, the captivating warm-blooded mammals are a good example for fresh water creatures in danger of extinction. The movement of dolphins indicates the water body turning clean containing many fishes, species and signal balanced ecosystem. The Brahmaputra and Ganges Rivers have dolphins generally called as the Ganges river dolphins which emit powerful

sonic sense compared to all other species in the world. The disturbances in their habitat have reduced the number of dolphins, and the main reasons for the species loss are due to the noisy ferries with its boat engines, overfishing led to lack of food for the mammals, contamination, oil spilling and other human interventions in the water surface. Besides, the dolphins face threats from the poachers of Assam who capture these creatures for their blubber as it is used for the purpose of fish bait. The fat oil attracts many fishes which make the natives hunt for more dolphins. Environmental conservatives and researchers found an alternative for the fish oil of dolphin to stop major poaching activities.

At present efforts are ensured to save the dolphins of Assam, and the government of Assam has adopted the dolphin as the state aquatic animal, which would inspire people to conserve their state's pride. Initiatives are taken to curb the fishing done in the areas where the presences of dolphins are found. Human interventions through various activities are stopped in areas where it is claimed as Dolphin Protected Zones. The graceful dolphins are said to bring enriching spiritual experience, and the conservation is a must to retain the joyful site of dolphins to be experienced by the future generation and not in pictures.

“The Missing Link” by Mamang Dai examines the Siang river of Arunachal Pradesh which connects the Tsangpo river of Tibet with the Brahmaputra River of Assam. The river is a principal constituent of the Brahmaputra originating from the Mount Kailash, and the term Missing link was coined before the Survey of India which proved its connecting channel. The affinity of the natives with the river is verified, “The river was the green and white vein of our lives/ linking new terrain” (11). The narrations of stories to the younger generations are crafted with the squalling of the waters. The strong cry of the river applies to the global lament of polluted fresh water:

Remember the river's voice:
 Where else could we be born
 where else could we belong
 if not of memory
 divining life and form out of silence. (11)

The tribal belief system revered water and mist as their twin gods are highlighted by Dai in the poem. The slow process of change in the water quality is emphasised, and future hope to rectify the pollutants are derived, "Remember, because nothing is ended/ but it is changed" (12). The memories of the pure river beds are to linger in the minds of the younger generation to bring back the golden days of blue waters. The possessions of the waters are the pride inheritance of the natives, which are venerated, and the polluting problems are to be distilled. The environmental regeneration, cultural enhancement and many more unanswered petitions are yet hoped, "And in the villages the silent hill men still await/ the long promised letters, and the meaning of words" (12).

The poetical lines of the river questioning their existence are of critical importance as the impact of economic progress poses a threat to the water bodies. The dam construction is considered impaired as it alters the orientation of the natural waters. Barlow and Clarke in "Red Alert" express, "Another source of pollution is the damming and diversion of water systems, which have been linked to unsafe concentrations of mercury and water-borne diseases" (9). Marina Varghese in "Endangered World and the Eco-Warriors" voices opposition against the constructions of huge dams resulting in earthquakes, displacement of locals and death of rivers. Varghese mentions about the effects of dams in her article:

Dams are disastrous for rivers since they change the fluid ecology of a landscape and its biological elements. They are the only reason why one-fifth of the world's fresh water fish are now endangered or extinct. The still water of a dam seizes one of the oldest gifts that a river keeps bestowing - the regular replenishing of the floodplain's fertility. Patrick McCully's *Silenced Rivers* states 'nothing alters a river as totally as a dam'. Rivers are so easily abused: pollution chokes them, while embankments divorce them from the land. When we tend to ignore the complex play between water, land and living beings, we tend to ignore life. (150)

The principle, 'The Elements Oblige' by Cohen and Duckert explain the domestication and subjugation of the water systems into dams. However, the principle opens with the lines, "Elemental obligation arrives in a doubled sense. The elements companion and assist; they also materially and ethically bind" (19). The principle indicates the moral and ethical prospects to be adhered in the altering of the natural functioning of the elements. The waterways, deprived of their natural course and converted into constructed dams, never are ethically justified.

"Should Light be put Out or Mind Kept in Dark" by Rajkumar Bhubonsana voices for the government subjugation of people's rights especially for education. The government's inefficiency and ignorance towards the state keep the minds in darkness without lights for developments. Chaos created by the mainstream government and its officials and inequality in job fronts, monetary requirements unheard is vocalised. When the young mind is educated, the wrongs occurring in their native is questioned for which they are silenced. The poet regrets the happenings in his native land, Manipur known as the land of jewels where at present the front teeth are bashed out and when raised voice, youths are arrested and beaten up. The longest fresh water lake in Northeast India is the Loktak Lake, and it is the biggest natural reservoir in the

valley. The water element exploited for dam constructions and the negative impacts of hydroelectric Loktak Project are versified in the following lines:

Before Loktak Project came into existence
 It's said there was no light in Manipur
 Even after the commissioning of Loktak Project
 There is still no light
 On the other hand
 Loktak Project wastes paddy fields and fishes
 Causes submergence under water
 Spoils men
 Takes away homesteads
 Makes unavailable space for working
 Causes resentment. (38)

Water element found in abundance is used effectively for the development of the region as Northeast accounts for forty per cent of India's hydropower potential. The hydro projects boost the economic growth and uplift the welfare of the states; however, on the other side, the excess hydroelectric sites harm the unique ecosystem. Among the numerous projects, the Umtru Hydro Project was established in Meghalaya along the Umiam River, and the word Umiam in Khasi means a 'weeping river.' However, the presence of this huge profitable project increases the smiles of the people and facilitates industrial developments. The hydro-electrical projects are also disadvantageous as they submerge hectares of plantations lands and intrude into the tribal settlements.

The hydroelectric project areas are to be treated with environmental conservation measures. Environmentalists support minor hydroelectric dams on small rivers rather for mega-dam projects. Experts argue that minor dams are cost-effective and in particular environment

friendly; though they generate sufficient electricity, it is only less than the megawatts generated from the mega projects. They oppose mega projects due to the environmental damages they would cause as the valleys face the threat of geo-seismic vulnerability.

Acid mine discharge during coal mining process into the water bodies is another major pollutant in the Northeast region. The coal mine runoff water and other human activities emit impurities like iron, manganese, chromium, cadmium, copper and zinc. According to researches, major contaminants are present as suspended sediments in the rivers, in particular, the Brahmaputra area. The local factories and industries emitting harmful radioactive particles affect the water environment. The presence of iron contents and other impurities in natural water collected from springs and streams are losing their standard quality for human consumption. Water borne diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery and typhoid are becoming common among children and adults. Health-conscious activities are carried forth by organisations and steps are to be taken to stop the disposal of acid mine or other pollutants from the mine discharge areas from entering the potable water resources.

The environmental safety of Northeast India is degenerating due to monetary exploitations of natural resources. Rapid deforestation resulting in soil erosion, siltation and decline in soil quality affect the water bodies such as rivers, lakes, natural ponds and marshlands immensely. The aquatic species are disturbed by the continuous land changes, and few species have become extinct. Boulders from the river banks being removed for various monetary purposes affect the aquatic organism, in particular, the fishes as their breeding sites are removed. The various projects and schemes in the river line areas further give out harmful substances. The modernised development affecting the fresh waters globally become the concern of Barlow and Clarke in "Red Alert" as: "At a time when we are on a rising curve in water use because of

increasing industrialisation, intensified farming, and population growth, water resources are being depleted at an accelerated rate. Aquifer overdrafts, massive urbanisation, and unchecked pollution are withdrawing supplies from the world's water account, just when we need to be saving more" (25).

The Brahmaputra River running through Tibet, India and Bangladesh covering a distance of 3000 kilometres approximately has negative impacts as any turbulence caused in the neighbouring state river flow will create ripples in other regions. In the year 2000, Tibet faced landslide, causing a collapse of the dam which brought damages in the Northeastern states like Assam and further water devastated regions in Bangladesh. The sharing of information regarding the built-up water pressure in Tibet by the Chinese government would have prevented the extensive damages. Information sharing between the three governments sending signals and alerts should be worked smoothly rather than having a strain.

Few remedial measures to utilise the abundant water resources and to safeguard the plentiful fresh water are enumerated. Technological advancements are to be implemented for advantageous use of the water bodies resourcefully. Proper use of water, management of channels and maintenance of embankments by the government sectors and natives will bring about positive changes in the water bodies. The numerous rivulets and streams provide a good scope for agriculture, yet the absence of technology to channelise the water resources add to the heavy workload of the farmers, who follow the traditional tools and techniques of cultivation. With the application of machinery and other modern techniques, agriculture can be raised to a huge scale due to the availability of abundant water.

At present many conservation organisations along with the government departments have started awareness programmes to conserve the water element. Environmentalists and forest departments develop green tourism and eco-tourist sites along the river lines, which will be beneficial even for the villagers. The tourists enjoy the local food, warm hospitality by the tribes and explore the handicrafts and handloom activities by them. The natives turn enthusiastic when their identity and environment of survival is praised by the visitors, which further enhance them to conserve the environment, in particular, the water bodies. The cultural beliefs, values, festivals and ethics in relationship with water should be practised by the forthcoming generations to ensure the growing consciousness concerning the threatened water world.

Humanity losing touch with the natural world is notified by Barlow and Clarke in their writing of *Blue Gold*. The disturbances for the element of water threaten the peaceful existence of humans on the planet. The modern society with industrial growth has tamed the water systems to facilitate the undying needs. The humans are to collectively enhance the health of the waters through obliged sense towards the water element. Ethical behaviour to overcome the catastrophe is detailed in the chapter “The Standpoint”:

At the heart of any new water ethic must be a renewal of ties with the natural world and a reverence for water’s sacred place in it. Humans must see ourselves as one species among many, whose existence, like that of all species, depends on our living within the rules of the natural world. Instead, humans have polluted their own common property – a *modus operandi* that is anathema to the more reverent and logical way of using resources that must define our future. If we are to survive as species, our lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater supplies must be preserved and reclaimed, and all economic and human activity must conform to this goal. (211)

The metaphors for rivers are constantly recurring in the poems of Northeast Indian poets as rivers are the roots to trace their identity and ecology of the land. The rivers are an integral part and are the comrade living entity for the natives, which radiate the philia the people possess for the water element. The non-human nature elements being exploited by the non-human emotionless consumerism is warned. The images of sunlight reflecting on the waters making the fishes dance with golden glow are never witnessed by the contemporary generation. The poems bringing back these images and symbols of water cater to create and instigate a better future.

The playful rain and dancing drop personified as a friend, playing around with innocence as a child and caring nature of mothers determine the heightened relationship of adoration the natives have for the elements. The admiration of the silent river flow by sitting on the banks and watching the dawn along the river line generating immense composure and peace is verified from the poetical compositions. The spiritual calmness of the mind and soul attained with the serene spirit of the river changing its colours from yellow to red are versified by the Northeast poets beautifully. The poems beautifully bring forth the images of nature's constant movement.

The rivers and rains pictured in the poems bring out the fondness of the natives with the element water. That the water bodies are to be protected with changes in the attitudes of humans, who should comprehend the blue water crisis, is emphasised through the poetical writings of Northeast. The poems cater to enriching the relationship with the degraded ecology and elements. The external waters protected will safeguard the inner self of the human existence. The poets, with their powerful voices, urge people to go back to the roots for peaceful living with the element water. The very many poems penned on the past pleasant days with the water bodies emit the light for the younger generation to look back at the glorious past for further sustenance in the planet with amiable associations with the blue waters.

Further, the elemental principle, ‘Elements Are Steps, Not Stairs’ by Cohen and Duckert explicate the mounting importance to conserve the natural elemental forms which is significantly related and perceived to the preservation of the water system. To cite:

Thus the elements are situated encounters that allow us to reimagine, and critique the steps that shape our bodies, texts, and desires in the urgency of now, our current environmental crises and injustices- not just to ask what steps we should take to avoid or prevent disasters but to ask where we, as collectives, are going; what assemblages are being made; what futures are yet to be made in the twenty-first century- for whatever happens, we know the elements will be there, lava-like, every step of some way. (15)

In the ancient times, the rain was a legitimate expectation at a specific time of the year; but at present, the unpredictable and long waiting for the rains determines the affected water cycle. The knowledge of rains the Northeast natives possess expresses the love for the element. The water element of nature is explored in the poems with a dynamic force which expresses the love for the land and waters. The ethics for the ecological disaster is advocated in the poems, and further, the poems play a pivotal role in bringing about ecological consciousness. The discourse for elemental nature relationship has to be enhanced for ecological continuance is highlighted by the three elemental principles denoted.

To redeem the water and human world relationships, Barlow and Clarke have outlined ten principles in the chapter “The Standpoint.” The principles invite societies to rebuild their water resources, advocate activism and guide in the mission to renew the water world. To narrate the principles:

1. Water belongs to the earth and to all species.
2. Water should be left where it is whenever possible.

3. Water must be conserved for all time.
4. Polluted water must be reclaimed.
5. Water is best protected in natural watersheds.
6. Water is a public trust, to be guarded by all levels of government.
7. Access to an adequate supply of clean water is a basic human right.
8. The best advocates for water are local communities and citizens.
9. The public must participate as an equal partner with government to protect water.
10. Economic globalisation policies are not water-sustainable. (221)

The pragmatic environmental perspectives are to be inculcated in the minds of the younger generations as the soulful chant of the waters in blue colours undoubtedly pacify the minds. The rivers are gifts bestowed by nature, providing people with surplus benefits. The watery way with its magnificence is to be safeguarded. When pollution and preservation are at the battle fields, it is the human race to umpire the victory between them. Each city is to be turned into river preserving city, facilitating healthy living. The red alert state of the element has to be removed for the futuristic golden days of blue waters. To end in the words of Barlow and Clarke from “Red Alert”: “There is simply no way to overstate the fresh water crisis on the planet today. The alarm is sounding. Will we hear it in time?” (25).