

Chapter 1

Introduction

Smaller than Nature, larger than quarks and leptons, the elements are the perceivable foundations of which worlds are composed, the animated materialities with and through which life thrives.

(Cohen and Duckert 13)

Literature is an exclusive subject dealing with all matters of human life in integration with other life sciences to cater to the needs of society, and it brings about social changes and developments. Literature is a reflection of life, and human beings can lead a happy and purposeful life as long as they live in harmony with nature. With the increasing talks on conserving the environment, political ecology and environmental history have emerged. Literature too has been reflecting nature and human relationship from ancient times to the present and literary texts have been expressing the concerns regarding the degeneration of 'Mother Earth'. Literature aspires to represent the human condition realistically, and environmental aspects involved in human existence are pondered, critiquing the here and now of the climatic catastrophe. Literature as a discipline aids a better understanding of the environment and guides humanity to find ways of reforming the ethical systems to impart healthy living with nature. Nature writing depicting the environment in various dimensions contributes to the upholding of tradition and values to rediscover the rich past and reconsider the attitude of humanity towards the natural world for a promising future.

The evolution of technology and loss of aesthetics in art and literature proclaim a serious call for preservation. Laments and loss of diverse nature recorded in literary works depict the environmental issues at stake. The survival of humans becomes a question in the present contaminated environment, and it can be rectified with literature as a tool, as it influences human

behaviour with nature bound teachings. The art of writing has an enormous impact on its readers, and the light shed on environmental issues by writers, enables the reader to be convinced to take measures for environmental conservation. Literature is the medium of communication as it bridges the gap between nature and humans. A range of writers and writings trace the traditional relationship humanity maintained with nature to the modern technological revolution. Earth-centred approach is advocated in writings depicting the battle between the physical world and material world, which have ecology at stake. Literature tries to maintain the environmental standards for the welfare of the earth, to build a healthy relationship as friends of the earth.

Greening of literature aids the reader in finding his self in nature and the soul to be in a trance with the vivid natural world. Ecological centrism is urged over anthropocentrism so that man considers his responsibility of being part of the creation chain of the cosmos. Urbanisation and industrialisation generated lack of attachment, reverence and love for nature which are to be preserved for the mutual benefit of humans and the natural world. The tribal people's spiritual bond with nature through their rites and rituals are directed towards the revival of nature, which finds a place in the ecological literature. The ecological concerns are depicted in literature globally with the widespread interdisciplinary study of literature and environment classified as 'Ecocriticism.' The term was formulated by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Ecocriticism features the environmental green world crisis of the contemporary century and caters to the subversion of anthropocentrism. Global warming, pollution, deforestation, climate change and many more ecological disasters resulting from the ill-effects of industrialisation and modernisation are addressed by poets, novelist, dramatists, essayists and literary critics. Numerous literary writings have contributed to the

development of ecological consciousness and have generated environmental activism among modern civilisation.

Ecocriticism is an essential component of literary studies as it caters to the harmonious coexistence of the planet with a balanced relationship between man, nature and the animal kingdom. The protection of the green world is dealt with in various literary texts; the man and animal consciousness are gaining awareness after the alarming extinction rate of native birds and animal creatures. Literary texts advocate the responsibility of the citizen on planet earth to safeguard the natural resources for his continual sustenance. Urban developments have caused ecological disasters in many places, which the literary texts exemplify through ecological literacy. Varied conceptual terms are studied under ecocriticism such as ecosophy, deep ecology, ecofeminism, green cultural studies, eco spiritualism, environmental ethics and environmental justice to enhance the ecosphere.

The interaction between literary studies and environmental discourse would yield to a better physical world. The interdisciplinary study originated due to the much-needed interaction between humanity and the landscape. The reforming and remedial texts brought out by eminent literary scholars, historians, anthropologists, philosophers and other disciplinarians are acknowledged in ecocritical studies. Moral ethics of humans towards the natural world are questioned in ecocritical perspectives, to pledge for a more bio-centric world. Preservation and procuring nature was foremost in bygone days for its aesthetic value, but in the present situation, it is obligatory to conserve nature for ecological balance, and ecocriticism strikes the right chord for macrocosm conservation.

Literature from the period of Homer, Virgil, Dante and Chaucer incorporated nature in their writings with different texts inspiring man-nature relationship awareness to the present modern-day eco-literature dealing with interconnectedness between man-nature, promoting values and harmony. Eco-literary consciousness throughout the ages advocates rootedness and affection to one's home, the earth. In particular, the writers of the romantic period found nature as their driving force to create their work whereby initiating the readers to move towards nature through topographical poems, aesthetic and picturesque works, journals, paintings and engravings. Nature notes of observations for the landscape and emotions and intimate feelings towards the wilderness are revealed in the works. William Wordsworth is credited to have started the green language in literary studies; following him were John Ruskin, William Morris and Edward Thomas. John Clare's poetry is filled with natural elements; William Blake categorised as a visionary; Samuel Taylor Coleridge formulating his theory of imagination accommodated both the human mind and the natural world and Dorothy Wordsworth's writings anticipated the ecocritical age.

The romantics created a new world of writing with structured feelings towards the natural world and strengthened the green language tradition. In the United Kingdom, John Ruskin established improvement in the relationship between art and the environment through his famous work, *Modern Painters*. Even the work of minor writers like Dorothy Wordsworth is appreciated by Virginia Woolf in *Dorothy Wordsworth: The Spirit of Appearances*, for Dorothy Wordsworth's imaginative affection towards the natural scenes and the minute observation of nature notes in her writings. The poet Edward Thomas advocated nature study in schools for understanding and appreciating nature in the growing ages of scientific knowledge. Wordsworth's religious respect for nature can be seen in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," and in

later times he was studied by many critics for his nature relationship like John F Danby's work *The Simple Wordsworth*.

Even during the post romanticism period, the concern to develop the environment was present in modernist writings, yet most of the modernists never revolved around ecological wisdom. T.S Eliot condemned the industrial exploitation of the earth for commercial benefits leading to desertification. Many writers like D.H. Lawrence and Martin Heidegger catered to levelling down the rapid modernisation trend as to develop the bond with the earth. Thoughtful essays on the relation between language, literature and nature originated. F.R. Leavis' work *Culture and Environment* found attention within the green studies, gave rise to the traditional rural communities bonding with nature in contrast to the modern mechanised civilisation. Many genres related to environmentalism grew in the period, for instance, 'socialist ecology' advocated by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Modernists give signals in their writings that nature is in a state of loss, being neglected and thereby stands polluted compared to their memory of pure nature.

In the United States, Kenneth Burke's "Hyper-Technologism, pollution and Satire," Leo Marx's "The Machine in the Garden" and Theodore Roszak's "Where the Wastelands Ends" are famous for critiquing environmental issues. Many writers remained as spokespersons to look up to the wisdom of the romantic traditions and pave a greener future, keeping the old times in memory. Ralph Waldo Emerson during the transcendentalism period incorporated nature in his writings and Henry David Thoreau's Wilderness concept promotes literature as vital to keep culture and nature intact. The fundamental issues regarding the relationship of man- nature began to rise and led to the ecocritical age. Nature was addressed with many philosophical themes like dualism, stating the mastery over nature. Kate Soper, in her work *What is Nature?* reminds

human beings of their responsibility towards earth and nature and the writing proposed harmony through the association of nature and humanity.

Women subordination equated to nature destruction, and their proximity with nature are discussed under ecofeminism, particularly in the popular texts like *The Language of Flowers* by Helene Cixous. A few eminent writers of the genre are Verena Andermatt Conley, Donna Haraway, Val Plumwood and Kate Soper. Through ecofeminism, the exclusion and passivity related to women and nature are subverted as the writings propose unlearning of ordered hierarchy; the celebration of women and the discovery of ecological awareness are carefully intertwined in the writings. In due course, myth was included in nature discourse in works like *The Environment of Myth* by Claude Levi-Strauss. Movements like structuralism inspired living beings to love and respect nature though the writers are accused of abstractions. In the process of literature turning a green study, environmental terminologies like ‘Deep Ecology’ coined by Arne Naess reflected in Gary Snyder's poetical works, and terms similar to ‘Romantic Ecology,’ a phrase popularised by Jonathan Bate came into existence.

The environmental criticisms were distinguished into a first wave and a second wave indicating the significant changes yet united in their ethical values to protect the non-human world. Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established for the spreading of the ecocriticism theory and practice, and the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (ISLE) edited by Scott Slovic created ripples in the readers and opened up important issues in ecocriticism. Many theorists have propagated different perspectives from science, language theory, history, culture and feminist scholarship to be combined along with the green theory for conservative purposes. Literary writers with noble cause awaken humanity and pioneering critics like Lawrence Buell, Michael P. Cohen, Cheryl

Glotfelty and Glen Love aid in transformative ecocritical practices. Ecocritics believe that there is no single dominant principle or strategy to be followed in practising ecocriticism and the actual practice of the theory modifies the ecocritical apparatus as there is no central doctrine.

Ecocritical works are analysed by moving freely in and out of the chosen material and not associating to or emphasising a particular method. The green language of nature poetry imparts spontaneous aesthetic and reformative addressing in comparison to other literary genres like prose, drama and novel. The poet functions as an antenna of the society, imparting utilitarian values to sustain society through poetry. Environmental poetical works incorporate both ethics and aesthetics as it implies sociological dimensions along with artistic quality. The term 'Ecopoetics' contributed by Jonathan Bate is one of the few crucial movements in environmental literary criticism, and the term 'Green Poetry' by Terry Gifford to poems engaging directly to environmental issues elevate the poetical genre. The renowned ecopoets include Robinson Jeffers, William Carlos Williams, Snyder, A.R Ammons, Patricia Berry, W.S.Merwin, Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, Jane Kenyon, Adrienne Rich, Simon Ortiz, Joy Harjo and Theodore Roethke.

From ancient times it is believed that everything in the universe is composed of the elements of nature and the classical five elements are: earth, water, air, fire and space. The five elements are claimed to constitute the human body and are further related to five senses of the human body. All nature forms are generated out of these five elements which aid in the understanding of the laws of nature. Clear understanding and knowledge about the elements are essential regarding the ecological calamities occurring in contemporary times. The thesis concentrates on the three vital elements; air, water and earth, which are in a highly contaminated

state. The importance of elements is addressed by literary scholars and other humanity fields to control human activities leading to ecological catastrophes.

Elemental significance is widely represented in literature, and famous writers like W.B Yeats have incorporated the elements in their writings. Yeats in his essay *Anima Mundi* depicts his fascination for the elements, and in his poem, “The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers” invokes the elements to grant peace and uses the elements as a source for consolation to the poet’s beloved. The four elements are blended in Yeats' imagery and symbolic writing. Yeats presented his elemental imagery in the letters to Olivia Shakespeare, where he aptly compares the four elements to four faculties of mind and body.

Elements of nature influence the character and thinking of a person, which is evident in various works of famous literary authors incorporating the elements. William Blake, from the romantic age, used the four elements for poetical symbolism and connected the elements in a significant way with the four Zoas: Loz, Urizen, Tharmas and Luvah. T.S Eliot, the renowned modernist in his work *The Waste Land* brings in the four elements and the required ecological concerns in striking images. The work predicts the effects of globalisation, modernisation and highlights the dehumanised, absence of tradition and lack of responsibility among the humans. Australian writer, Patrick White, in the novel *The Tree of Man* points out the four elements of nature to signify the natural world where Stan Parker and his wife Amy live; the four elemental forces are woven as rhythms of life, birth, growth and decay.

Various cultures represent the elements of nature with slight variation as the western tradition holds four elements while Hindu tradition speaks of five elements in their classical traditions; yet the vital elements earth, water and air remain constant in all the cultural roots

across the globe. The ancient Indian literature has Vedas, oral literature and religious texts recorded on ecology and environment, which showed how people lived in harmony with nature. For instance, Upanishads hold the elemental description of the five elements as the Pancha Bhutas, sacred and holistic in existence, considered as the completion of cosmos and as well narrated that the elements can be used, misused and celebrated. In the course of time, the traditional mindset to uphold the elements was lost to globalisation; thereby, the resources have been exploited and polluted to a greater extent. The present thesis concentrates on the elemental significance regarding the elemental principles of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert in their work *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*.

The elements of nature constitute everything, and all matter is composed of the elements in varied shifting combination. Air, water and earth are the fundamental elements comprising of emergence, dwelling, development and component of the environment, where all creatures thrive. The elements are venerated and revered as they are the essential agents of the environment sustaining the life of all forms. The classical elements in the past were held high by various civilisations, cultures and in particular among the aboriginal people. They believed that purity in the elements meant vivid living and thereby prevented contamination. *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert bring in earlier works of critics, and concepts of philosophers who address the elemental importance, while talking about the present-day environmental crisis.

Environmentalism faces crisis as living turns harder in the atmosphere of polluted air, deflowered water bodies and contaminated earth. The elements reduced to materialism and commodities are the main root cause for the depletion of these elemental resources and energy. Ecocritical aspects are drawn on the elements, and their significance is emphasised by Jeffrey

Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert in the introduction-“Eleven Principles of the Elements” to the book *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*. The introduction acknowledging the elements as essence and substance of all living things proves to be a powerful tool for environmental activism in the present contemporary society as the natural surrounding stands degraded. The eleven principles by Cohen and Duckert offer an interlocking and inviting aspect to ponder on the elemental world.

The four elements earth, air, fire and water, consisting of all matter in shifting combination are advocated right from the ancient poet Empedocles to the present day where literary scholars cater to protect the elements relentlessly. The elements connect or wander in shifting dimensions, and the elemental matter is inherently motile and creative. The entire cosmos functions through the push and pull of the elements. Earth and water have a downward sink, while air and fire have an upward rise. The elements considered as outmoded epistemologies are sought to be revoked as they are the environmental agents. The intensifying ecological crisis is readdressed by the acknowledgement of elemental philosophies and primitive learning of the elements of nature. Cohen and Duckert in the Introduction claim, “Elemental Ecocriticism is not a project of nostalgia, not a wistful retreat from present-day concerns into supposedly simpler cosmogonies. The contributors to this volume find in the literature of the past a storehouse of provocations for present environmentality” (4).

Ethics and human care towards the all-powerful elements are to be monitored to prevent further deterioration in living. Cohen and Duckert state: “We seek an elemental ecocriticism that discovers in imaginative and critical texts a lush archive for thinking ecology anew” and further narrate “We believe that attending to matter and writing against the reduction of world to commodity (resource, energy) is a powerful aid to activism” (4). Human activities are to be

directed towards elemental world care and justice. The elements are not to be treated as mere commodities as they are entitled with the power to create and destroy the natural order of things. Being more humane to the elements of earth, water and air to sustain as a human being with the beneficiaries of resources and energy is the underlying idea of the thesis. The literary text of Terry Gifford, “The Social Construction of Nature” diligently epitomises the natural world:

But from this material world in which we live we have become strangely alienated. There is much evidence to show that those of us living in large industrial cities still need to have unmediated contact with nature. A study of the therapeutic value of trees for hospital patients found that, compared with patients whose windows looked out onto brick walls, those whose windows gave them a view of trees required fewer painkillers and were discharged earlier. The frame here is a healing one. We not only need this sort of contact, we need to communicate it, examine it, and share its meaning through our symbolic sign systems. (173)

The element of nature reduced in value is traced by traditional environmental history where anthropogenic notions change and create cataclysm. The two ideologies – to ponder that the world is humanity’s to ruin or to act with precaution to save the world are highlighted. Environmental historians have documented the human activities upon ecologies where raw materials of nature are commercialised, fire as extractable coal, air transferred into carbon offset and rivers transferred into potable water into the market. The economical labels on the elements are pathetic and even worse when humans are exploited, as miners who are affected with black lungs are discarded after the extraction of maximum labour. The materialistic outlook in contemporary society destroys the elements of nature to a large scale in the name of progress. Cohen and Duckert seek to relearn the ethical traits of humans towards the natural world and to

renew the elemental ties for a better future. To reactivate and restore the elements as dynamic sources and active forces is the call of the present thesis.

Any individual element is not a single entity but rather intermingles with each other to compose the cosmos. Elements are revered in primitive civilisations, cultures and religious beliefs, and Mother Earth has been worshipped in various cultures. India has a rich history of elemental significance as the natives are conscious of the ecological environment from primitive times. Ancient people from various civilisations worshipped the five elements of nature: earth, water, air, fire and ether as deities. The belief that man is formed from the elements and returns to them after death is believed by many religions. The devotion to elements is present in India from time immemorial as the literature recorded depicts their convictions towards the elements. The elements are venerated and considered as kinship, family, friends, brotherhood and comrades by the tribal Indian societies. They acknowledged the elements as life-supporting materials present in the society for human happiness and wellbeing, and ancient Indian writings advocate harmonious coexistence with the elements for richness in civilisation.

Indian Ecocriticism having three phases adopted strategies canonical to avert the impending environmental dangers and the influence from western writers stands inevitable. The regional approaches for the ecocritical scholarship have been implemented in context to the Indian theories and texts from the ancient days depicting ethnicity, sustainability and greener living. Indian ecocriticism originated with 'tinai' oriented ecocritical engagements which widely spread, leading to various influential growth stages to the present implication usage of media to focus on tinai and other regional and cultural aspects. Environmental documentaries and other medium tools are analysed in the present phase to facilitate ecocritical pedagogy and in particular, environmental activism. Tamilnadu, present in the southern part of India, has a rich

heritage of cultures, customs and traditions which are actively brought out in their literary writings. The Sangam literature of the Tamils depicts the various elements of nature brilliantly into five folds as 'Aintinai' namely: kurinchi, mullai, marutam, neidal and palai. Poets grouped the regions according to their geographical characteristics, and each region's glory was brought out in the verses with accurate details of creatures, nature and its inhabitation. The five terms mean: Kurinchi - mountainous space, Mullai - jungle space, Marutam- agricultural region, Neithal -seaside and coastal areas and Palai - dry desserts. The writing is evidence for the breathtaking awe and reverence the Tamils had for the elements of nature, and this aspect can be found in other vernacular works of literature in India and particularly, Northeast India.

North East India comprises of eight states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura. North East India is bestowed with the unique presence of nature, and the serene scenery of the simple hills fills the spirit and soul of the inhabitants. The traditional beliefs, customs and cultural practices are formulated with nature as an integral part of their living. Nature is the source of sustenance, celebrating elements as part of its roots. The literature published from the regions picturises the active role of nature indulgent in their artistic writings. The proximity and affinity the people share with the landscape are reflected particularly in their poetical compositions. The abundance of nature imageries depicted in their literature forms the source of claiming their identities. The awareness and emotional bonding the Northeast people possess for their ecological surroundings is reflected in their vivid green poetry. The intricate relationship between man and his physical natural surrounding is explored in the contemporary English Poetry of Northeast India. The poets lament the indifference for nature and the ecological disturbance in the name of development prevailing in the hills.

The Northeast Indian literature from ancient days has been depicting the mundane reflections of beauty surrounding the hills. The environmental experience, intimate to the hill people of Northeast is expressed in their genre of poetry – filled with hills, paddy fields, rivers, streams, bird songs and other echoes of nature. The genre of poetry brings the natural elements more alive in comparison to other literary genres of Northeast. Northeast poets from oral narratives to the present contemporary period have a profound devotion and sentimentality in describing the natural forms which are addressed in the thesis. The contemporary poetical works from Northeast India exhibiting their affinity with the elements of nature are studied in depth in the chapters to ascertain the significance of the elements.

The genre of poetry through its verses, aids societal reformation, imparts humanistic values and brings out consciousness for the society. The poems question the social norms apart from its aesthetic aspect, and it is an effective medium to convey ecological awareness. For Northeast people, nature is part of their living, and it is an inherent asset for the hill people. They are surrounded by hills, greenery, vegetation, trees, flowers, winged creatures and animals which impact their lives tremendously. Northeast people have a deep-seated belief on the natural phenomena, and the poems depict how nature is a social institution to them. Northeast poets feel that one can never stand away from the elements of nature. Northeast poets are sensitive and sensible to the natural images of the hills and depict with splendid picturing the beauty of their land.

Green Ecophilia is a term used widely in environmental communities, as the ability to resonate with the surrounding environment. The term originated from the book *Biophilia* written by Edward O. Wilson in 1984 drawing the attention of ecological writers. According to Wilson, Biophilia is the ability to affiliate with other living forms of life in the web of beings. The inner

tendency rooted in our beings to connect subconsciously is defined. Further, the book *The Biophilia Hypothesis* edited by Stephen R. Kellert, Edward O. Wilson and Lynn Margulis have the hypothesis formulated based on the theories of evolutionary psychology. In the eco-gothic novel of Hilary Scharper titled *Perdita*, the concept of biophilia by Edward O. Wilson was illustrated as the protagonist brings the innate tendency of biophilia to humanity. Thus the understanding of the features of biophilia led to the establishment of ecophilia in the literary circle and ecophilia includes inanimate things for positive closeness and coexistence of humans and nature.

The inner tendency and commitment to the natural world is a reflection of ecophilia. The unified notion held regarding the web of life and connecting with creatures is exemplified. Ecocentric dwelling and emotional bonding with nature deeply rooted in the inner self of a human being is the basic tenet of ecophilia. The magic present in nature and the spark towards the green world are felt by the human senses. Happiness and inner peace for humans increase when surrounded by the green world. Studies prove that nature reduces stress, aids for overall wellbeing and even patients while looking at the green atmosphere have a speedy recovery. Exposure to the elements of nature and interaction with outdoor nature has direct benefits for the inner psychology of humans. Thereby ecophilia has to be practised to enhance interaction with the environment and to reshape one's thinking of the environment with humaneness.

Ecophilia is used in the education system as an approach to evoke people to redefine their bonding with nature and to stop the ideology of anthropocene. Ecophilia paintings with natural world theme convey that, connectivity with the land is an integral part of living. The focus of the paintings is to understand pressing environmental situation in the current times and the richness of the ecosystem.

Ecophilia is used in academic writing to foster the responsibility to save the planet and extend love towards nature which the Northeast poets bring out in their endearing poetical works. The affinity that the poets hold for their landscape serves as an example for the younger generation to connect with nature. The poetical collections from the Northeast region, help people to have a better understanding of the environment, its importance and worthiness in the current century. The satisfaction and affection the poets express for the landscape are noteworthy. The local wisdom of the poets in understanding their hills is pictured in their poems. The pleasure derived by the poets in artistic visualisation of their natural atmosphere is beautifully and clearly expressed. The profound joy found in natural cycles, rural landscape, connectivity with the habitat and love for the way in which their hills are clad with greenery, flora and fauna exhibit their spirit of ecophilia.

The eight states spreading under the foothills of the Himalayas referred to as the Northeast, covering 7.8 per cent of India's total area are often called an anthropological museum with a rich storehouse of tribes and traditions. The Northeast region earlier comprised of five states and two union territories. At present, with the addition of the eighth state Sikkim, it is called as seven sisters with the only brother. In the Northeast, nature is prodigal, the forests are luxuriant, rivers are numberless, and the green hills have water in abundance from the mighty Brahmaputra, flowing from the eastern corner to the western corner. Northeast in its varied landforms possesses rich soil contents and the fertile alluvial soil aids the growth of vegetation like rice, tea, jute and many other crops. Northeast India is a melting pot with varied cultural, linguist, ethnic and religious differences within each state and even within smaller regions of the states.

Northeast has been the focus of several studies covering almost all the aspects of life and culture of the hill people. The first national seminar, “Hill People of North Eastern India” was held in Calcutta from 3rd to 6th December 1966. As years passed, the growing awareness of the sidelined Northeast Indian cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial and economic diversity has been discussed by many scholars in various seminars and symposiums. The peculiarity in these tribal communities has attracted the foreign administrators, anthropologists, travellers and social workers. Among the various aspects of Northeast India, nature is dealt with by many researchers for its unique geographical features.

Nature element is the common string bringing the people together, as Northeast abounds in natural resources, minerals, water bodies, flora, fauna, sacred groves and forests. Northeast region is the abode of 225 out of 450 tribes recorded in India, and all the eight states have unique environmental features, for instance, Tripura has a bird population of 300 species. After Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Northeast in India has the major portion of tropical forests; the pristine forest houses many endangered species like the great cat tigers, snow leopards, antelopes and out of the 1500 endangered floral species in India, 800 are reported from Northeast which shows the need to protect the region. The communities bestow faith in all the elements of nature; for instance, they consider the mountain sacred and holy due to its extraordinary shape and colour. For want of a better world, they communicate, worship and pay due respect to the nature deities or spirits. For Northeast, nature is the main protagonist – identity giver, identity shaper and identity promoter.

Northeast is recognised as one of the twenty-five global biodiversity hotspots and the dense virgin forest in which many renowned animals including the world-famous one-horned Indian rhinos and the tall hollock tree in India find their habitat. One horn rhino, yak, dancing

deer, elephants, gaur, tiger, panther, leopard, bear, gibbon, langur, hornbill, fishes, butterflies and reptiles are found in existence in the northeast valleys, mountains and hills. Foreign and domestic tourists frequently visit the rich flora, fauna, tea estates, temples, rivers, hills, valleys, tribal communities and ruins of ancient kingdoms. Exuberant beauty of flora and fauna is explored by awe-stricken tourists in Kaziranga National Park and Keibul Lamjao National Park. The various species feature in their oral traditions, myths and folklore, and the stories narrate their peaceful coexistence to such an extent that there are stories of human beings transformed into animal and bird species, and vice versa. For instance, the Ao myths have transformation stories of human beings into the animal form of the tiger, which establishes their close bonding with the animal and natural world.

The hill people live in accord with nature, and nature teaches and guides the people in their daily routine and lifestyle. The innumerable oral literature, folk tales and songs have related images of human qualities to the animals and winged creatures. For example, the locust grasshopper called a puit tangkuli kynjih mawsiang is equated to a person who spends his life in merriment, feast and pleasure without hard work and consideration of one's livelihood. Even the flowers, animals, orchids and grass are connected with a symbolic association with man and his well being. Medicinal herbs mentioned in ancient mythologies are found in abundance in the region; nature forms a separate hospital where all types of medicines for bodily ailments are found.



Fig. 1. Map of North East India

The eight states Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim constituting Northeast India are introduced briefly in the following paragraphs to have a better understanding of their bond with nature. Arunachal Pradesh, the largest region among the eight northeast states, earlier known as the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), is called the ‘land of the rising sun’ and the ‘land of the dawn-lit mountains.’ It has high mountain ranges, difficult terrains, snow-capped peaks, alpine forests, formidable streams and thick forests, and is shrouded with mythology, traditions and several archaeological sites of ancient times. The major rivers of Arunachal are: Tirap, Lohit and the Dhiang or Siang, Subansri and the Kameng, and the region’s five districts are named after the major flowing rivers. It is known for its rich biodiversity sites harbouring many flowering species, wild genetic resources; endangered species like white-winged wood duck and many other rare species. Beetles, aquatic creatures, butterflies, reptiles and insects are found in varieties. The forests of Arunachal cover approximately 8.4 million hectares and in distinction has two species of pine namely *Pinus Merkusi* and *Abies Aelavavi* which are not found anywhere else in India.

Assam, appearing in the map as hawk resting on a mountain edge, receives the highest amount of rainfall and also accounts for the largest population of wild water buffaloes in the world and accounts for the highest diversity of birds in India with 800 more bird species residing. Kaziranga Games Reserves, in the district of Sibsagar, is the key sanctuary covering 166sq.miles and the wild elephants and a few herds of one-horned rhinos present in the valley along the great river are preserved from extinction. A total of 464 sq.miles accounts to the area of Games Sanctuary in Assam and other Games Reserves include; Manah, Sonai Kupai and Pabha covering the population of rhinos, wild buffaloes, elephants, other animals and birds. The government takes meticulous initiatives to preserve wild animals and various policies of protection to ensure the safety of animals. The richest flora is found in the Khasi hills; there are different kinds of orchids, balsams, rhododendrons, azaleas, wild roses which bring light and colour to the valleys.

Manipur, the bejewelled land, is described by Lord Irwin as the 'Switzerland of India'; with 29 tribal communities inhabiting, the land is surrounded by hills on all sides. Manipur's thick forest preserves many wild animals, and a large variety of species like brow-antlered deer, Himalayan black bear, long-tailed monkey, Krait, Jungle cat and grey mongoose are found. Among the birds, the common wood Partridge, the red jungle fowl, several species of duck and quail are found. Manipur consisting of hills and valleys is called 'valley of the valleys' and also termed as the 'Hawaii of India' due to its picturesque landscape and festivity. Manipur dance is known throughout the world, and Lai Horaba is a festival that lasts for five months, making it the longest of the human festival celebrated by the entire Manipur valley from February until June.

Meghalaya commonly referred to as the 'abode of the clouds' and the 'Scotland of the East,' is known for the matrilineal practice of tracing the descent through the female. The

predominant tribal population in Meghalaya consisting of the Khasi, the Jaintia and the Garo are the few surviving matrilineal communities in the world. It is also known for the town of Cherrapunjee, receiving the highest amount of rainfall in the world. Traditionally, people believe that the groves are sacred as they are the abode of their gods and deities. The land is richly endowed with mineral deposits like sillimanite, coal, clay and limestone.

Mizoram, the 'country of the highlanders' is derived from the two Mizo words 'Mi' and 'Zo'; 'Mi' means man and the term 'Zo' denotes highland thereby meaning people living in high hills. The cashew nut like area of Mizoram has steep and rugged hill ranges running from the north to south with an average height of about 900 meters. Blue Mountain or Phawngpuri is the highest peak with an altitude of 2,065 kms. The two main rivers are Nawng (Dhaleswari) in the north and Kolodyne (Chhintuipui). Mizo poetry explores the natural landscape and cultural realities of the land.

Nagaland, the 'land of the Nagas,' is one of the smallest states of India, with thick forests and rugged topography. The hills are covered with dense evergreen forests with vegetation like cotton, reepul, bamboo, orchids, potato, apricot, pineapple and many more along with the growth of indigenous tea. Fauna consists of Mithun, tiger, wild cat, sambar, leopards, jackal, bison, hornbill and skylark. Minerals like coal, oil, gas, limestone, chromite, nickel, and iron ore are found in Nagaland. Nagaland has seven mountain peaks, and Mt.Saramati is the highest peak in the state which is situated in the Burma-Nagaland border. The main rivers of the state are Doyang, Tapu, Dikhu, Tizu and Dhansiri. The Naga myths and other glories of their land are exposed in their poetry, and the continuing deforestation is protested in their poems.

In Tripura, people acknowledge themselves as ‘children of the water goddess.’ Tripura lies to the south-west of Assam and the east of Bangladesh and is situated within the monsoon zone of the Bay of Bengal, thereby receiving a heavy amount of annual rainfall of more than 400cm. The terrain has various geographical features like rivulets, brooks, rivers, plains, valleys and lakes. The land has many rivers, namely Gomati, Haora, Longii, Juri Deo, Maner, Dhali, Khowai, Muhuri and Feni. Jampai and Sakhantary are the highest hills among the seven-bay ranges and hillocks. The loose soil structures and shallow river surfaces cause soil erosion and flood frequently. Tripura is called ‘herbarium’ because of the abundance of flora and fauna, especially the tribal medicinal herbs present.

Sikkim, situated in the Eastern Himalayas, is the tiniest and least populated state of India. Sikkim is picturesque with hillsides, deep blue lakes and known for Buddhist monasteries against the backdrop of snow-clad mountains. The place is known for the Nathu La, the silk trade path connecting Sikkim with Tibet. The poets in the region glorify their motherland. Rajendra Bhandari’s poetry revealing the life and ecology of Sikkim through his imaginative poems is an example.

The cycle of nature forms an integral component in the existence, tradition, belief and custom of the Northeast people. Natural phenomena like winds, stones, rivers and mountains are perceived to be endowed with spirits according to their beliefs. They hold the natural elements as deities, which marks their reverence, sanctity and respect. The presence of nature is worshipped with a benevolent spirit by the natives. They have been maintaining the natural resources vehemently as they draw sustenance from these bounties of nature. Basic requirements for living, food and clothing were derived from their physical environment for daily use. The tribal

ancestors humbled themselves before nature as their survival depended on the ecology, which further taught them to show reverence for the mysteries of creation.

Every tribe has their cultural folktale depicting the world of humans and animals, which are never considered far apart. The Mizo folk narratives reveal the relationship between animals and humans along with trickster elements in the stories of Chawngchilhi, Samdala, Chemtawta and Kungawrhi. The relationship between animals and humans are narrated in ancient folk tales. The natives have their own stories describing how every kind of animal and plant came into being. According to one story, the elephants at first were gifted to fly, but they created a nuisance by sitting on the roofs of the houses and breaking them down, which led to the cutting off their wings. Another story narrates how the monkey originally was a man. He was so lazy and showed stupidity in his behaviour; hence he was driven out into the jungle. While running, he had a pestle between his legs which turned into his tail. The stories are humorous yet are carried through still as bedtime stories to the children. The stories are numerous, which show how the natives admired, pondered and looked after the creatures from ancient times.

Women play a significant role as traditional knowledge keepers and have a special association with the environment. Throughout the ages, they are the creators and initiators of various aspects of traditional knowledge. Their knowledge never ceases on various subjects; in particular, about their folktales, sayings, religious rites and rituals, herbal medicines and specifically, their knowledge on the perceptions of the environment. The traditional games of the natives were designed according to their hilly creatures. The Apa Janis tribes have a snake game in which boy players cover their head with shawls go running around with their heads down as the snake does. In the short-tailed bird game, the boys imitate the singing lament songs of the birds. They dress up with clothes like tails and hop around singing on the shortness of their tails.

From primitive times, the richness and fertility of the land are considered as a blessing of God upon the people, and hence they express their joy through rites, rituals, songs and dance. Bihu is a nature-based festival celebrated in mid-April, marking the advent of spring to the fields. The popular agricultural festival, celebrating the cycles of nature denotes the arrival of springs into the empty fields; bringing festivity, music and joy in the hearts of men. There are three Bihus: the Bohag, the Magh and the Kati. The native's devotion to nature can be traced in their Bihu songs which praise nature and the change of seasons. Sri Lila Gogri, a professor in Dibrugarh University, Assam has made a comparative study of Assamese Bihu and Pongal of Tamils. The similarities between the festivals concerning reverence for land and agriculture are brought out in the study, like the similarities in the cultural songs and dances arranged during Bihu and Pongal. Both the festivals have corresponding practices from decorating their houses to preparing special foods, offering rituals and taking a holy dip in the river. The elements of nature, in particular, the land is celebrated with a spirit of zest.

Northeast is a land filled with paradoxes, complexities and contradictions due to the diversified territories, people and cultures. Literature brings out the uniqueness in their cultures, customs and social practices through their oral and written records. Northeast in the past was a land rooted in harmony among communities, and due to the violent insurgency in the land, peace is deterred. The various literary forms inculcate to bring out the lost unison and community living. Apart from identity crises, trauma and suffering themes, social and political forums represented, nature conservation is also voiced by the authors to save 'Mother Earth' which is their caregiver and nurturer.

Northeast Indian English writing, as a discourse gradually developed in the late eighties and nineties. The literary forms of poetry, drama, prose and short stories are penned by writers.

Many translation works appeared to narrate to the universe about their rich oral traditions. Insurgency movements and their struggle for autonomy are voiced out by the writers powerfully. The various issues articulated in their works of literature comprise alienation, tribal dislocation, identity crisis, westernisation, religious intrusions, erosion of values, political unrest, cultural and linguistic conflicts and in particular their denudation of natural resources.

Northeast, like other tribal literature, has first emerged out of ancient folk songs and narratives. The tribes had their own interesting and creative chants, songs, proverbs, myths and tales. The oral tradition being translated at present proves to be an invaluable source of data to understand the history, structure and culture of the tribes. Contemporary poets mix memory with myth and significantly describe the land, its smell, the wind that blows over it and the rain that beats its hills and forests. At present, the Northeast authors and poets explore social issues and environmental conditions in their writings.

The contemporary poets raise their voice against human interference in their ecological hills, as urbanisation increases encroachments, poachers, erosion of religious taboos related with nature, central government activities and other illegal business which have reduced the richness of the hills vehemently. Northeast Indian insurgency greatly affected the natural resources and the physical environment. The hill people claim to manage the natural resources taken up by the central government, as the natives believe they have a better understanding of flora and fauna of the hills. At present, many conservation programmes are widespread in the hills to recover the lost glory of their region.

In early 2000, the timber ban controversy is an example of the interference of the government, which was opposed by the local inhabitants of Meghalaya as their livelihood

depends on the revenue from timber. Environmentalists advocate measures to protect the forests as hundreds are daily carrying loads of timber for export which will virtually wipe out the forests in the state. Further, the Forest Department is responsible for the devastation of forests due to their allowance of illegal felling of trees, hunting and other activities. The diminishing forests day by day is causing serious environmental damages in Meghalaya as people have started to fear a shortage of water and the effects of soil erosion.

Coal mining in the hills causes several problems to the environment, though it provides employment to many people. The land area faces the maximum rate of exploitation due to the practice of primitive ways like rat hole mining. Locally, the coal extraction is known as rat-hole mining, as the hole has 1m length and the local miner crawls inside the opening and excavates coal. The miners go inside up to 50-100 m from the opening and bring the coal in small wooden barrows. The continuation of these practices without scientific replacement harms the land; further deforestation occurs simultaneously, causing increased wastelands. The mining process disturbs the land surface and underground aquifers. It sometimes caters to acid mine discharge whereby the vegetation lands, forest areas and topsoil are damaged.

The natives have specialised knowledge about the hill environment they inhabit. The common agriculture pattern of the villagers is shifting cultivation method, and it is widely called Jhum cultivation and the cultivators, Jhumia in the Northeast states. Contemporary research testifies that shifting cultivation done by the tribes was not harmful rather it maintains a diversified forest ecosystem and aids the regeneration of forests; added when it is done with in-depth environment knowledge and managerial skill. In the present times, it is unrealistic to practice shifting agriculture due to the problems of increased population, industries, wildlife interests and lack of land. However, the natives can never be denied of their environmental

stewardship, the knowledge and ethos vested in these indigenous people to practice such a system of shifting cultivation which leads to the balance of ecosystem and regeneration of forests.

The natural resources extracted from the hills are carried out in the name of economic development of the Northeast. In recent times, debates and conflicts among the natives have raised questions on the benefits they receive from the natural environment. They claim that majority of the profits from the natural resources are taken away by outsiders, rather than aiding their development and the local people gain minimal income from the nature projects and programmes. The natural resources are commoditised by the outsiders as they never have any sentimentality attached. To illustrate, timber being cut down in blocs of wood by local labourers are transported to the respective timber contractor in the plains. From there, the outside merchants' take over with bases of dictating his low price for the logs but later in the cities sell it for a huge profit. The locals, even on knowing this, are not able to sell for a higher price or find an alternative for the situation.

West Khasi hills are regarded to possess the best quality asset of uranium in India. Debates and controversies regarding the mining of these deposited resources in Meghalaya occurred. Many people made peace with the decision to mine these assets after the visit of former President of India, Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam. During his visit, he stated that uranium mining would never harm the people, or affect the health of the natives. With his knowledge in the science stream, he advocated uranium as an eco-friendly clean source of nuclear energy. He welcomed mining in Meghalaya as it would boost the economic development of the state, yet many environmentalists and conversationalist opposed the mining process. It is considered at present to be the important energy security of the Indian nation, but what level the natives are

benefited is questioned as outsiders take the major benefits though they claim it as a development programme for the region.

The rich ecology of Northeast which was celebrated by the poets of the bygone age faces threats in the form of deforestation, destruction of natural serenity, the killing of rare birds and animals, oppressing the landscape and distorting the biodiversity. The contemporary poets sharply react and voice out that these ruthless acts should be ended. Their anger is vented out in the poems to conserve Mother Nature. The Northeast poems' prime concern is to enlighten humankind to save green and to raise ecological awareness. The poets' conscious journey into the past is evident in the close reading of their verses, indicating the recreating aspects of the poems. The canonical writing is subverting the anthropocentric world view, and the poets instil hopes for the valuable hills and valleys. The poems may as well be treated as an appeal of apology and mercy to the natural world on behalf of the injustice done to their habitations by the intrusion of human activities.

Contemporary poets act with commitment to create changes in the natural environment. To mention few poets from each state: In Arunachal Pradesh -Mamang Dai, Yumlam Tana; Assam -Hem Barua, Hiren Bhattacharya, Nilim Kumar, Nabakanta Barua, Harekrishna Deka; Manipur- Robin S. Ngangom, Saratchand Jhujam, Thangjam Ibopishak, Yumlembam Ibomcha, R.K Bhubonsana, Memchoubi; Meghalaya- Desomd Lee Kharmawphlang, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Ananya S. Guha, Paul Lyngdoh, Anjum Hasan, Esther Syiem; Mizoram – Cherrie L. Chhangte, Mona Zote, H. Ramdinthari; Nagaland- Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang, Monalisa Changkija, Easterine Iralu; Sikkim- Rajendra Bhandari, Sudha M. Rai, Guru. T. Ladakhi; and In Tripura Jogamaya Chakma, Bhaskar Roy Barman, Chandra Kanta Murasingh, Pijush Routh, Sejali Debbarma.

The four poets chosen for study are Mamang Dai, Desmond L Kharmawphlang, Temsula Ao and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. The poets praise the dense forest areas, waterfalls, wildlife sanctuaries, hills and stunning canyons beautifying the land along with the various natural resources. Elements of nature are incorporated in their verses, and poets express the notion of nature turning into a commodity. The poets narrate trivial things present in their lands like the sunshine on their shoulders and the quietness of their hills during the rain. The green earth and the fresh air are disappearing by established factories producing chaos in the hills. To overcome the environmental apocalypse and ecological destabilisation, poets sought to reclaim the lost traditions and customs to support the future of the hill environment. Poets cater to the need for human responsibility towards elements and to survive in harmony, rather than contaminating the elemental world. The nature forces are never the ones creating calamities, and rather it is the humans creating an endangered world, and the selected poetry emit a powerful overflow of feelings for the elements of nature to be protected.

Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh is the first woman from the state to be selected for Indian Administrative Service; later on, she started to pursue journalism and at present lives in Itanagar as a reputed writer. Dai is a renowned poet and novelist, who won for her novel *The Black Hill* the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017. In 2011, she received Padma Shri award from the government of India for her contribution in the field of literature and education. From the government of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai won the state's first Annual Verrier Elwin Award in 2003 for the work, *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*. To mention a few works of Mamang Dai: *The Legends of Pensam*, *Mountain Harvest: The Food of Arunachal*, *Stupid Cupid*; illustrated folklore texts: *The Sky Queen* and *Once Upon a Moon Time*; Poetry: *River Poems*, *The Balm of Time*, *Hambreelmai's Loom* and *Midsummer Survival Lyrics*.

Mamang Dai worked in the World Wide Fund for Nature, in the biodiversity hotspots conservation programme. This association was a catalyst to exhibit the emotional responsibility towards nature in her hills. The nature bound writer in her numerous poems, fictions, and articles exposes her emotions through images of nature. Mamang Dai from the Adi tribe believes in the union of life in rocks, rivers, hills, trees and all other natural forms and she praises the scenic beauty of nature, traditions, customs, heritage, tribal values and identity which forms the mosaic of her poetry. In the present thesis, poems giving significance to the elements of nature are taken from her poetry collection, *River Poems* and *Midsummer Survival Lyrics*. To mention a few poems presented in the thesis: “In the Light,” “Missing Link,” “Rain,” “Tsunami,” “Birthplace,” “Remembrance” and “The Balm of Time.”

Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang from Meghalaya is a Professor in the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He is a bilingual poet who writes in his native Khasi language and English, and his poetry collection includes *Touchstone* and *Here*. He is an active folklorist, and his collection of essays like *Ki Matti Byrshem* is a representation of his rich folklore weaving of the local communities. To mention few of his works: *Narratives of North-East India I & II*, *Folklore in the Changing Times*, *Attributes of Khasi Folklore*, *Khasi Folksongs and Tales*, *Orality and Beyond*, *Folklore Imprints in Northeast India* and *Essays in Khasi Folkloristics*. His playwright experiences and plays were written in Khasi language feature the admiration Kharmawphlang displays for the community. His works have appeared in numerous anthologies, magazines, journals and he has published numerous scholarly articles in national and international journals.

The prime concerns depicted in Kharmawphlang’s poetry are related to the cultural past, heritage, contemporary socio-cultural concerns and particularly the environmental changes in the

state. His poetry revolves around folk narratives and songs of the different communities of Northeast India. Kharmawphlang reflects keen interests to safeguard the sacred groves, which is depicted in his poetical collections. The powerful Elements of nature beautifying the hills and the deteriorating state of the elements at present are versified with warnings. To mention a few of Kharmawphlang's poems incorporated in the thesis are: "Poems during November," "Dikrong River," "Letter to a Dear Friend" and "Thaiang Buried Roots."

Temsula Ao is fondly called as the 'Nightingale of Northeastern India.' She is a recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013 for her short story collection, *Laburnum for My Head*. Ao is a retired Professor of English from the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. To her credit, she received the Padma Shri Award in 2007 and from the government of Meghalaya received the Governor's Gold Medal in 2009. Ao is recognised as one of the major voices of Northeast India, and the Naga community is delineated in her works. Her two short story collections are: *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* and *Ao- Naga Oral Tradition*. She has five books of poetry to her credit which is compiled into a single volume titled, *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. The five poetry collections of poems are titled: *Songs that Tell, Songs that Try to Say, Songs of Many Moods, Songs from Here and There and Songs from the Other Life*.

The ecology of Nagaland is brought out par excellence in the poetry of Ao, who is a nature poet. Her poems advocate changes in the environment polluted by the evils of industrialisation in modern times. The poet addresses the dissatisfaction and ignominy due to the exploitation of man over nature. The elements of nature present in the hills are magnificently described in her verses, and the tensions exhibited towards the natural surroundings are opposed in her verses. Trivial encounters with the elements of nature are depicted with vivid narratives and through aesthetic verses. To mention a few of her poetical works taken for study are:

“Distance,” “Lament for Earth,” “Fire-Fly,” “December Rain,” “Lesson of the Mountain,” “The Bald Giant,” “An Old Tree,” “Bonsai” and “My Hills.”

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih born in Cherrapunjee works in North-Eastern Hill University as Deputy Director of Publications. He edits the university newsletter, NEHU news, The NEHU Journal and the Khasi Journal, Rilum. His poetical works include *Moments*, *The Yearning of Seeds* and *The Sieve*. He has published works in Khasi and English languages. He was honoured with the first North-East Poetry Award in 2004 by the North-East India Poetry Council, Tripura. His works are translated into Welsh, Swedish and many Indian languages. Nongkynrih brings in references to myth, customs, cultural, folklore, arts, politics and nature in his work of creation. He received the Fellowship for Outstanding Artists in 2000 from the government of India and three bursaries for Khasi texts from the government of Meghalaya.

Nongkynrih from Meghalaya has two volumes of poetry in English and three poetry volumes in the Khasi language offering a variety of fabric interwoven with the contemporary concerns of North East India. He mingles myth with ecological concerns to highlight their glorious past to the contemporary people of his land. Elements of nature find significance in his poetical collections, and the vibrant lines from selected poems are chosen for the study. The poet laments the destruction of nature in the hills, and he calls the younger generation to alter the modernised landscape. Major poems from Nongkynrih’s *Moments* collection and poems like “Kynshi,” “An Evening by the Shore of the Umkhrah River” and “The Season of the Wind” are explored along with the elemental principles in the thesis.

Many writers have expressed their views on ecology and concern for the elements of nature that need conservation and protection in the present times as people become more

materialistic and technology-driven without any regard for ethical living in harmony with the environment. Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher, contributed towards the field of poetics and philosophy of science. His imaginative works gained recognition, and the five books on the elements of nature are *The Psychoanalysis of Fire, Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Material Imagination, Air and Dreams, Earth and Reveries of Will* and *The Poetics of Space*. The reading of Bachelard's books on elements leads to the acquisition of knowledge about elements and changes one's way of looking at the material world. The joyful side of the elements, along with the darker side of nature, is explored in his works.

David Macauley in *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire and Water as Elemental Ideas* exhorts man to rediscover the lasting connection with the elemental world and in the process, find oneself. To reside with the bewildered elements surrounding everywhere is narrated in awe, and the four elements: Earth, air, fire and water are explored as both philosophical ideas and environmental issues. The importance of elements and significance to comprehend the elements are advocated for elemental thinking and to respond to ecological problems.

Nirmal Selvamony in *Portable Homeland: Robin Ngangom's Take on the Dying Tinai Tradition of the Indian North East* discusses Robin Ngangom's writings with a unique approach to nature. The elements of nature are the subjects of literary treatment in Ngangom's works. Human value and relationship towards nature are explicated in comparison to Cankam poems of Tamil Poetic tradition.

Indu Swami in *Exploring North-East Indian Writings in English* incorporates an analysis of contemporary literature genres evolving in Northeast India and to mention few critical essays on poetry: "Writing Nature, Reviving culture: Exploring North-East Indian Eco-Critical

Perspectives in Temsula Ao's Poetry" by Nandhini Choudhury Bora; "Poetry on the Lips of the Earth: An Analysis of Poetry from the North-East India" of Lalthansangi Ralte and Farddina Hussain's "An Alternate Vision: Time, Space and Memory in Kynpham S. Nongkynrih's Haikus and other Poems." The essays radiate the ecocritical aspects found in abundance in the poetry of Northeast India.

Amrita Bhattacharyya in *An Ecocritical Reading of Select Northeast Indian English Poetry* explores the concept of deep ecology and ecotone to estimate the poetical concern and ecological planning. The intertwined relationship of the poet with nature and the enriching relationship of native people with space are analysed. *Ecology, Myth and Mystery: Contemporary Poetry in English from Northeast India* by N.D.R Chandra and Nigamananda Das explores the poetry of Northeast voicing out major values of contemporary living conditions. All the famous poets of the states are discussed to highlight the rich ecology, myth, rituals, mysteries and natural environment of the region.

Contemporary Writing in English from India's Northeast: A Study in Ecopolitics by Debashis Baruah examines the aspects of ecopolitics entailing ecomysticism and ecofeminism. The writings manifest different aspects of the entire ecosystem of the region, and the writings celebrate the ecological glory of the Northeast with keen ecological awareness. Bhattacharjee Shimli in *Changing Equation between Man and Environment in India's North East: A Sociological Analysis* attempts to look at the disruption of man and environment relationship in North-East India. The Marxist approach is used to analyse the ecological degradation, with traces of British Empire and post-independent period domination of Central India leading to further deterioration of the environment in the northeast regions.

An Ecocritical Approach: A Study of Selected North East Indian Poets by Chingangbam Anupama expounds on nature forming an integral part of Northeast poetry. The intricate relationship between nature and culture, nature becoming the identity of communities and the benevolent spirit of people towards nature are explicated in the analysed poems.

Air's Appearance: Literary Atmosphere in British Fiction, 1660-1794 by Jayne Elizabeth Lewis compiles the notable British fictions which explore the literary sense of air. Lewis's chapters picture the writers' diverse conception of the atmosphere of their times. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* is a work drawing ground from Heidegger where Irigaray clears the ground on the importance of the element of air. She critiques Heidegger's emphasis on the element earth and his forgetting of air. Ken Hiltner, author and professor of environmental humanities, 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.

Life Lines: Water, Life, and the Indian Experience- Cultural Meanings, Social Significance and Literary Implications by Murali Sivaramakrishnan examines the socio-cultural significance and the imaginary implication of water as a vital element. The aesthetics metaphor, human imagination and the image, as well as symbol, are narrated. The presence and absence of water playing a crucial role in human history and its symbolic and spiritual dimensions are analysed. *The Dam(n)ming of Rivers: Stark Realities and Literary Echoes* by U. Sumathy attempts to analyse a few dam projects which cut across the natural boundary and relates them to the response of select literature. The work questions man's right to destroy the eternally flowing river in pursuit of development and progress.

Charlotte Merlin in *Kaschnitz, Enzensberger, and Sandig: The Ecopoetics of Water Pollution* from the University of Minnesota studies epic poems and contemporary poems to analyse the key shifts in poetic representations of water pollution. The shift from the aesthetic appreciation of water to the ongoing transformation of water pollution is registered with scientific understanding, social, political and legal dimensions. *Water-Imagery in Yeats's Works* by B.M. Singh studies the significant role water plays structurally and symbolically in Yeats' works. The images of elements are recurrent in his verses, and the element of water and fire are the dominant images.

Symbolism of the Mountains: A Study of Selected Poems of Mamang Dai by Harpreet Vohra examines the significance and symbolism of mountains in the poems of Mamang Dai. The antiquity, sacredness, mystique, myths and tribal oral traditions depicting the importance of mountains are woven to the modern-day concerns about environmental protection. *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* by J. Scott Bryson incorporates element earth in the essays: "Landscape and the Self in W.B Yeats and Robinson Jeffers" by Deborah Fleming; "Earth's Echo: Answering Nature in Ammon's Poetry" by Gyorgyi Voros; Richard Hunt's "How to Love This World: The Transpersonal Wild in Margaret Atwood's Ecological Poetry" and "'Between the Earth and Silence': Place and Space in the Poetry of W.S. Merwin" by J. Scott Bryson.

Namrata Chaturvedi in *Of Tiger Man and Sacred Groves: English Poetry from North-East India* examines the natives' association with the element earth. The Contemporary Northeast Indian poets like Mamang Dai, Robin S Ngangom and Temsula Ao's poems dealing with the ancient practices, myths and customs regarding the natural world are studied to explore the strains between humans and nature.

The various studies on Northeast Indian poetry's connection to nature and numerous researches on elemental significance depicted are compiled together in the present thesis. The fifty ecological poems from Northeast classified into elements of nature reveal the unique feature of the thesis. The three vital elements: Air, Water and Earth, examined with the elemental principles of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert alongside with ecological poetry of Northeast India advocate ecoactivism and ecological awareness. The alarming environmental degradation caused by human activities in the name of urbanisation is warned and the poems aid as a tool to cater to equilibrium in the elemental world.

The present study focuses on the three vital elements of air, water and earth, which are highly polluted. Unless measures are taken for the conservation and protection of these elements, the life of human beings will become risky. Human beings should learn to be more humane to these three elements for their sustenance. The need of the hour is to reactivate and restore these elements, which are dynamic sources and active forces. The poems of the contemporary Northeast poets express their deep concern for the protection of the environment.

Thesis statement:

The thesis aims at comprehending the significance and essence of the three vital elements and the elemental principles illustrated through the Northeast Indian English Poetry which reflects *philia* and environmental ethics to enable enrichment of existence with ecstasy emphasising the retention of elements in their elementality

The Objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the salient features and principles of the three essential elements; air, water and earth and their relevance in the contemporary scenario
2. To exemplify comradeship, the selected Northeast Indian poetry has with the elements of nature, and ethical human behaviour implying the urgency to reconcile with the macrocosm
3. To analyse the selected poetry advocating atmospheric awareness and amendments required to elevate air quality
4. To explicate water as the elixir of life and eco-activism for an adequate supply of clean water
5. To examine the pragmatic earth-friendly policies to alter the mechanised earth into a humane and heavenly abode
6. To elucidate the significance of philia and environmental ethics for bringing in behavioural changes in the readers

Methodology:

Fifty poems of four contemporary Northeast Indian poets, Mamang Dai, Desmond L Kharmawphlang, Temsula Ao and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, are selected and analysed in the light of nine elemental principles given by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert and concepts from three texts relevant to each element – air, water and earth. The eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook* is followed for documentation and citation.

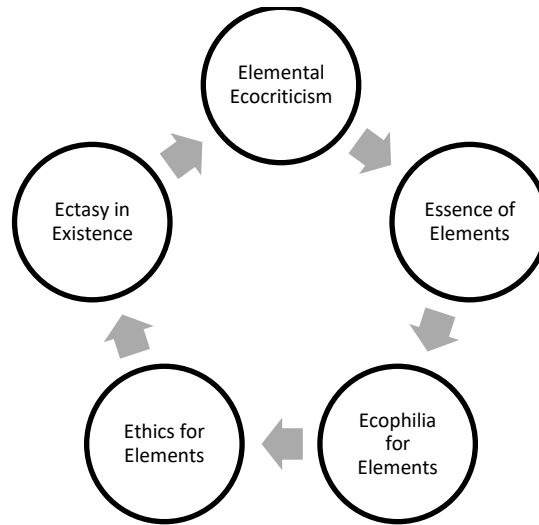


Fig. 2. The cyclic representation details the outline of elemental ecocriticism studied in the thesis

The eleven principles are examined with the contemporary poems of Northeast India, which reflect elemental fortification and ecophilia, which is to be inculcated and nurtured. The ecophilia inherent in their poetical writings provide ecological ethics to be practised in daily living. The eco-consciousness arrived from ecophilia facilitates the elemental significance, which remains enduring in the humans; in other words, it leads to the comprehension of elemental ecocriticism.

Limitations:

- Out of the five elements of nature, the basic three elements vital for human existence are studied.
- From the eleven principles advocated by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert, nine essential and relevant principles are studied; further three principles are explored in each of the three main chapters examining air, water and earth.

- Four contemporary poets of Northeast India are chosen based on their representation of the elements of nature in their poetry through images, motifs, subjective and objective connotations.
- Biophilia hypothesis is not analysed scientifically rather ecophilia is extracted from the poetical versification.
- Environmental ethics is not dealt in depth from a theoretical perspective; rather, ethics are based on the Northeast poetry rendering of ecological reverence and further enhanced by elemental principles to practice ethics towards elements.
- Microanalysis of environmental issues and problems in Northeast are not analysed.
- The three critical essays incorporated in each chapter are based on the practicality relevance, exploration of the elemental features and depiction of elemental deterioration.
- The poems are chosen from the contemporary period, and region oriented selection of poets is not followed.
- With the increasing environmental crisis, eco-awareness is concentrated in the thesis, thereby poetical devices, rhyme schemes and aesthetics are not concentrated in the study.

The present study has five chapters, including the introduction and conclusion.

Chapter 1 –Introduction gives an account of nature writing evolving as ecocriticism, delineating elemental ecocriticism and the need to preserve the three core elements; air, water and earth. The prosperous Northeast hills and their nature writings are explicated with the contemporary poetical voice. A review of the relevant literature is also given.

Chapter 2 – Atmospheric Alert and Appeasement with Air traces air from its metaphorical usage in the work of past poets describing the pleasant living, to the present day poetry lamenting the contaminated air with verses filled with cautions given to people to stop

pollution. North East poets exhibit a unique style in picturing the concept of air and the relationship between atmosphere and humans is emphasised in the verses. The introduction to the work *Air: The Restless Shaper of the World* by William Bryant Logan enumerates the various characteristics of air, its spirit and underlines the need to advocate the purity of air, which is applied in the chapter along with the core concept of elemental ecocriticism. The eleven principles regarding the thinking of the earth, air, water and fire elements of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert recreate companionship and ethical establishment with the elements. The principles discussed invariably adhere to all the elements of nature and in the present chapter three principles are taken for detailing the element of air namely, 'The Elements Are Never Still,' 'You Are Never Out of Your Element,' and 'You Are Always Exposed to the Elements.'

Along with the poems of the four poets Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond Kharmawphlang taken for study, cross-references to the poetical works of Robin S Ngangom, Anupama Basumatary, Nini Lungalang, Rajendra Bhandari and Shefali Debbarma are made. The maintenance, preservation and management of the blissful air surrounding their hills are advocated in their poetical lines. The significance and the need to conserve the pleasant air is the driving force of the chapter, which analyses ten contemporary poems of Northeast India.

Chapter 3 – Wavering Waters in the Wobbly World studies Northeast Indian poetry in English by Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Desmond Kharmawphlang, which abounds in descriptions of the numerous water bodies like the rivers, streams and ponds. The aesthetic descriptions, livelihood revolving around the waters, waterways contaminated by urbanisation, deprivation of purity and scarcity of water, reduction of

rainfall and rising pollution in the current times are recounted in the verses. The three principles by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert of utmost relevance to water discussed in the chapter are, ‘The Elements Are Never Easy,’ ‘Elements Are Steps, Not Stairs’ and ‘The Elements Oblige.’ A critical study of the element fosters radical environment enhancements, and in the contemporary period, water catastrophe rising requires water stewardship initiations. The principles studied, reveal the knowledge of elemental powers, their magnificence and presence, as good companions or betrayers.

The chapter explores how the practical narrative, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World’s Water* by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, acts as a clarion call for the fightback against the worsening global water crisis and the corporate giants profiting multifold. “Red Alert,” the first chapter in the unit ‘The Crisis,’ of *Blue Gold* narrates in detail the water catastrophe occurring in the contemporary world. The present chapter takes up this issue of “Red Alert” to facilitate a better comprehension of the water element. “Red Alert” pictures the alarming rate of freshwater reduction in the world with a detailed description of the root causes and “Red Alert” termed for the blue zone indicates the critical state of waters. Fifteen poems are analysed from the selected four major poets’ writings which are interpreted with the three elemental principles and concepts of “Red Alert.”

Chapter 4 – Earthlings and the Endangered Earth analyses twenty-five poems selected from the poetical works of Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Desmond Kharmawphlang. The number of poems studied in this chapter exceeds the number of earlier chapters dealing with air and water because the deterioration on the surface earth is extending to greater global and undesirable levels resulting in calamities and catastrophes. The

key priced qualities of the element of earth are analysed based on the glorification of the native hills, lamentation over the reduction of natural resources and calling forth for a reunion with ancient earthly ties. The three most acknowledgeable and alluringly embracing principles pertinent to earth are, ‘The Elements Make Love and War,’ ‘The Elements Rise and Fall,’ and ‘To Live with the Elements Is to Dwell within Catastrophe.’ The three principles are explicated in the present chapter in detail to foreground the essentials of the element, earth.

The widely acknowledged critical work of Greg Garrard’s *Ecocriticism* published in 2012 reinstates that the key threat areas of ecology be monitored, to enhance the relationship between nature and human beings in the chain of existence. The final chapter of the book entitled, “Futures: the Earth” signifies the principles, historical importance, geographical features and criticisms of the planet. The narrative aims to avert the anthropocentric claims, thereby elevating the elements of nature, including the earth. The chapter drives home a strong message, as is evinced in the poems of the four Northeast poets.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion justifies that literature serves as a platform to project contemporary problems of the society and these prominent poets of Northeast use the medium of literature to sensitise people regarding environmental diminution. The four selected poets analysed in the chapters present the rich Northeast culture, ecological wisdom, aesthetics in nature, traditions, myths, folklore of the ancient times and contrast them with the contemporary loss of biodiversity, declining green spaces and increased pollution levels in their beloved hills. The features, characterisation, power and sublimity of the three elements of air, water and earth are demonstrated in the versification of the poets chosen for the study. The eleven principles

framed by Cohen and Duckert explained in each of the three chapters remind people about the elemental glory and comradeship maintained once.

The ecophilia venerated by the poets for the lush green spaces are to be inculcated by the public for prolonging coexistence in the web of ecology. Ethical commitment to the elements is required to alter the contaminated crises occurring across the globe. Elemental ecocriticism covers many wide-ranging issues and themes under the field of ecocriticism as the chapters bear witness through the macro and micro-level analysis of the injustice done to the elements of nature through systematically conveyed narratives. The principles and features of the elements projected in the poetical verses of the four poets evidence the essence of elements essential for ecstasy in human existence.