

## **An Ecocritical Reading of Poetry from India's Northeast**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The northeast of India is an ecologically sensitive zone owing to its location in the Himalayan Mountains. For ages, these regions have been inhabited by tribal societies that have lived in close association with the natural environment and relied on the natural resources for their sustenance and survival. Many of these people continue to “practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world”<sup>1</sup>. Hence, nature forms an integral part of their ancestral wisdom, folklore, festivals, beliefs and everyday means of expressions. However, rampant industrialization and urbanization resulting from a maddening race for development is gradually degrading the harmonious relations that inhabitants of these regions once shared with nature into overexploitation and abuse. Besides, the invasion of consumer culture is gradually turning the once eco-friendly tribes into modern consumerist societies and having corrosive effects on the indigenous cultures. Consequently, “myth, landscape and nature, the particular predicament of people here and tribal folklore provide the core subject matter”<sup>2</sup> of the literatures emanating from these regions which makes them highly relevant from an ecocritical perspective. The present paper thus uses Ecocriticism as a literary tool to delve into such and several other aspects of human-environment relationships in the writings of two poets from these regions, namely Temsula Ao and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. Besides being a celebration of the region's ecological glory in its myriad forms, their poetry also reflects their vehement reactions against humans' ruthless acts of ravaging the environment. By writing and raising concerns about the endangered environment, these poets endeavour to create an environmentally sensitive consciousness. This paper thus attempts to read these poets from an ecocritical perspective and explore how literature can be instrumental in salvaging nature from an imminent crisis.

**Keywords:** India's Northeast, folklore, environmental crisis, ecocritical reading.

### **An Introduction to Ecocriticism**

Described as “an eclectic, pluriform, and cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature and other creative media in a spirit of environmental concern not limited to any one method or commitment” (Buell et al. 2011, 418), ecocriticism assumes a status profounder than that of being just another kind of literary criticism. Ecocriticism endeavours to draw on the creative and imaginative powers of literature and related arts to create an awareness of the concerns that afflict our environment today and believes that such an understanding of the environmental problems can eventually lead to a change in the way we live and treat nature. A sincere ethical stand and an attitude of commitment to nature and its concerns mark the spirit of Ecocriticism. The term “ecocriticism” was first used by William Rueckert in his 1978 pioneering essay on ecocriticism called “Literature and Ecology: An

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<sup>1</sup>Dai, Mamang. "Author's note." Preface. *Legends of Pensam*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2006. xi. Print.

<sup>2</sup>Daruwalla, Keki N. "Poetry and the Northeast: Foraging for a Destiny." *The Hindu : Literary Review / Book Review*. The Hindu, 07 Nov. 2004. Web. 11 Oct. 2016.

experiment in Ecocriticism” in which he tried to link up ecology and its concepts with the study of literature. “The fundamental premise grounding Rueckert’s argument ... is that the environment is in a state of crisis, largely of human making, and that urgent action is required if future disaster, encompassing humans and other species, is to be averted” (Brien 2007, 179). However, it was in the year 1996 that Cheryll Glotfelty defined the term as “the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996, xviii). Underscoring the close association between nature and culture, she elaborates that “Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (Glotfelty 1996, xix). In his essay titled “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” (Howarth, 1996), included in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, William Howarth expounds the term *Ecocritic* as a combination of two words, *eco* and *critic* with their roots in the Greek *oikos* meaning ‘house’ and *kritis* ‘judge’. Thus, the term in tandem means a “house judge” which may sound strange to someone interested in nature writing. However, Howarth clarifies later by defining an ecocritic as “a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth, 1996, 69). Buell et al. in a similar vein argue that while literature depicting environmental harm may not be able to completely transform the environmentally irresponsible lifestyles of societies across the world, “reflecting on works of imagination may prompt intensified concern about the consequences of such choices and possible alternatives to them” (Buell et al. 2011, 418) which eventually could help ameliorate the current crisis.

### **Ecological concerns in writings from the Northeast**

The writings from the India’s Northeast abound with ecological concerns and are replete with impressions of nature such as the rivers, mountains, forests, wildlife, etc. and the myriads of ways they are interconnected with the lives and cultures of the people inhabiting these regions. They are the lyrical reflections on the inextricable relationship that the peoples of these regions have been sharing with the natural environment for eons. Consequently, “myth, landscape and nature, the particular predicament of people here and tribal folklore provide the core subject matter” (Daruwalla 2004). The tribes inhabiting these regions long ago realized the important role nature played in nurturing and sustaining their generations and so over the ages came to learn and practice a way of life in harmony with the natural environment. They “practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world” (Dai, 2006). Their rituals, beliefs, social values, festivals, songs, dances, rituals and various transactions of life that comprise the tribal cultures are entrenched in the lap of nature. Quoting N. Chandra and Nigamananda Das from *Ecology Myth and Mystery: Contemporary Poetry in English from Northeast India*:

Indian English poetry from Northeastern part of India is rich in enshrining various aspects of the ecology, of the region. It has been a fashion with the poets of the region to celebrate the ecological glory of the region and their ecological awareness. The ruthless act of deforestation and oppression upon the Mother Nature in various ways by destroying the serenity of the nature, obliterating the natural environment, killing rare birds and animals and distorting the landscape and biodiversity, have been sharply reacted upon by these poets. (Chandra and Das 2007, 35)

However, the maddening race for modernization, industrialization and urbanization in the present times has taken its toll on the natural world and these regions are no exception. Humans' ever-increasing hunger for control and excessive exploitation of the natural resources for their selfish interests is adversely altering the harmonious relationship they once shared with nature. The poets hailing from these regions are very mindful of the deteriorating health of their environments. They have employed their poetry as a medium to lament the damages done to their vulnerable ecosystems and express their apprehensions about the impending apocalypse. The present paper uses Ecocriticism as a literary tool to delve into such and several other aspects of human-environment relationships in the writings of two poets from these regions, namely Temsula Ao and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. Besides being a celebration of the region's ecological glory in its myriads of forms, their poetry also reflects their vehement reactions against humans' ruthless acts of ravaging the environment. By writing and raising concerns about the endangered environment, these poets endeavour to create an environmentally sensitive consciousness. This paper attempts to read these poets from an ecocritical perspective and explore how literature can be instrumental in salvaging nature from an imminent crisis.

### **Temsula Ao**

A prominent literary voice from Nagaland, Temsula Ao has to her credit many designations such as being a poet, short story writer and ethnographer. Hailing from a society that is deeply rooted in the tribal tradition and herself being a tribal, her work is informed by a profound regard for her rich cultural inheritance and carries strong impressions of the folklore comprising the myths, legends, fables, rituals and beliefs that are an integral part of the Ao-Naga culture. As a custodian of her culture, her role is no short of being an environmentalist as she shoulders the responsibility of preserving her oral traditions and cultural heritage and salvaging them from the invasive forces of modernization. Consequently, several of her poems depict the strong bonding that these societies have with nature in the form of their beliefs, traditions, festivals and rituals. In the words of GJV Prasad, "Temsula Ao sings of her landscape, one that is often an objective correlative for her mindscape and even more for the community's ecology – the changes in the land reflect the damage done to her people, their rootlessness (a sense of uprootedness), their wounds and pains" (Prasad 2013, xvii). Her poetry reflects her earnest endeavour to return to her roots, and reclaim a lost identity that is inextricably linked with the hills and their ways of life. However, insurgency, violence, corruption, overexploitation of natural resources and a growing disregard for the traditional ways has resulted in the present conundrum and the nature is paying a heavy price for humans' aberrations. Temsula's poetry is marked by an insightful ecological sensibility which makes it relevant for an eco-critical reading and analysis.

A grave sense of foreboding looms in the poem "Distance" (Ao 2013, 12) as the poet voices her concerns about an apocalyptic future. "Fathers and sons" (4) turn hostile "struggling for supremacy" (6) over the earth that they "both want to straddle" (8). The next verse reflects her growing sense of anxiety over severing of ties with the cultural roots. Having forgotten the beliefs and myths that they inherited from their valuable past, humans wander aimlessly on a godless earth.

An earth  
Stretching out  
To a sky

### No longer abode of the celestials (14-17)

In a blind race for urbanization, human beings are gradually losing touch with and becoming forgetful of their responsibilities towards the environment, thus calling their own disaster. The natural reservoirs are depleting fast and soon may approach a day when this blue planet teeming with myriads of life forms becomes a dead space “no longer housing mortals” (21). “Lament for an Earth” (Ao 2013, 42-44) as the title suggests reflects the poet’s heartfelt anguish and concern for the miserable state of our planet and its natural environments. In this requiem for Mother Nature, the poet paints a plaintive picture of the disastrous effects of the human civilization on the natural environments. Her use of the phrase “once upon an earth” in alternate verses has a fairy tale like effect that she uses to evoke an, immaculate and unspoiled image of nature prior to human intervention. However, phrases such as “Alas for the forest”, “Alas for the river” etc that appear in subsequent verses heighten the sense of contrast and create a sense of despondence while they describe the earth as it is now, battered and spoiled due to excessive exploitation of its resources by humans. “Once upon an earth/There was a forest/Verdant, virgin, vibrant” (1-3) presents a complete contrast to the following lines:

Alas for the forest  
Which now lies silent  
Stunned and stumped  
With the evidence  
Of her rape. (21-25)

The use of alliteration throughout the poem is remarkable as it lends the poem a distinct rhythm that rises and falls with each verse. The cyclic structure of the poem with the pristine image alternating with the soiled one creates a sense of urgency and rouses attention and curiosity. Another interesting feature of the poem is the use of the epithet “two-legged animal” to refer to humans. It aptly depicts a race which despite priding itself to be at the top of the hierarchies of all life forms has stooped so low in its manners and actions that it is hell bent upon destroying its very abode and that of the fellow species. The poet wishes to distance herself from an insensitive and selfish breed that has come to signify humanity and feels ashamed to belong to it. It is also symbolic of the extreme depravity and cupidity that has today come to define the human nature.

Alas for the river  
It is muddy now  
With the leaving  
Of the two-legged animal  
Who bleached her banks  
And bombed her depths (45-50)

Use of personification and feminine pronoun to refer to the natural world stresses the plight of the environment and evokes a poignant image of the planet in the throes of an imminent apocalypse. This also reflects the tribals’ strong beliefs in the aliveness of earth. The tribals “believe all nature is sacrosanct, that the earth itself as a living organism is capable of experiencing pain and pleasure” (Chandra and Das 2007, 32). Many eminent scientists have made similar claims. James Lovelock, an independent scientist, environmentalist and futurist

collaboration with the microbiologist Lynn Margulis, formulated the *Gaia Hypothesis* in the 1970s according to which “the Earth is a homeostatic living organism that coordinates its vital systems to compensate for threatening environmental changes” (Badiner, 1996). The word *Gaia* is derived from the Greek word for Earth goddess. Based on recent research in the field of quantum experiments, physicists claim that “in spite of its obvious partitions and boundaries, the world in actuality is a seamless whole” (Herbert 1985, 18). In a similar vein, physicist Heitler argues that “The separation of the world into an ‘objective outside reality’ and ‘us,’ the self-conscious onlookers, can no longer be maintained. Object and subject have become inseparable from each other” (qtd. in Herbert 1985, 18). Similarly, “subatomic research has led the physicists to perceive the universe as an interconnected organism” (Oppermann 1999, 35). Weaver argues that such an organic model of earth can be highly relevant for our understanding of the reading process and the literary experience” (Weaver 1985, 302). In the light of these facts, it becomes all the more imperative for humans to review their relationship with the earth not as a separate entity requiring our concern but as an integral part of the life that constitutes us all. Only from such an understanding can we hope of a change in our perception of the natural environment that informs our actions wisely and helps in the rejuvenation of an injured earth. Echoing similar concerns is “The Bald Giant” (Ao 2013, 175-176) which portrays the ill-effects of deforestation and the consequent wretched state of hills. Using the analogy of a giant gone bald because of being shorn of his “green cloak”, the poet paints a poignant picture of a defaced hill that once exuded glory, grace and majesty.

All that is now gone  
All of him is brown  
From base to crown  
And his sides are furrowed  
Where the logs had rolled  
Once I thought him friendly  
But now he looks menacing (19-25)

The denuded hills can also be read as a metaphor for the human race that by destroying its own habitat has turned suicidal. Driven by a mindless hunger for amassing wealth and property, humans have degraded into a horrible species characterized by an insatiable desire for controlling and conquering nature. Similarly, “My Hills” (Ao 2013, 157-158) presents a dismal picture of a landscape that lies ravaged due to excessive human interference and alteration. The following lines are an idyllic depiction of the hills as they once were in their pristine state:

Once they hummed  
With bird-song  
And happy gurgling brooks  
Like running silver  
With shoals of many fish. (4-8)

In a later verse, the poet contrasts this utopian image with a gloomy one, which is suggestive of the adverse effects of human civilization on the natural environment. The following lines make this degeneration evident:

The rivers are running red  
The hillsides are bare

And the seasons  
Have lost their magic (24-27)

The poem titled “Bonsai” (Ao 2013, 72) is critical of human beings’ attempts at controlling and altering nature for their sensual gratification as evident in the lines: “Giant trees/Stunted by man’s ingenuity/In search of a new beauty (1-3). The poet sees bonsais as representative of humans’ insatiable greed for exercising power and control over nature and meddling with its course. It is reflective of human mind’s incessant hunger for new pleasures and beauty which reduces nature into mere objects of display. The poet laments this attitude of complete indifference and disregard for nature that induces humans to over exploit and tame nature as these lines reflect: “Earth’s vastness/Diminished and displayed/In tiny potted space (7-9). Inherent in the tone of the poem is a plea for refraining from interfering in the course of nature. Many of her poems are based on the myths of the Naga society that constitute an integral part of the Naga identity and the tribal heritage. In “The Old Story-Teller” (Ao 2013, 240-242), the poet lays claim to her role and responsibility as a chronicler of her tribal culture and sentinel of her traditions as she says: “I have lived my life believing/Story telling was my proud legacy” (1-2). These stories have travelled across many generations and are deeply embedded in the consciousness of the Naga people. As such, the stories carry reminiscences of the past and exhibit the strong connection that these tribes shared with nature, which makes them apt for ecocritical reading.

Warriors and were-tigers  
Came alive through the tales  
As did the various animals  
Who were once our brothers  
Until we invented language  
And began calling them savage. (21-26)

For eons, these tribal societies have thrived owing to their harmonious coexistence with natural world. Their ecofriendly traditions and beliefs in the sanctity of nature have kept them from over exploiting nature and disturbing the ecological balance. After an initial enthusiasm, the tone of the poem grows dismal as the poet expresses her apprehensions about the modern times which are witnessing a complete social and cultural upheaval due to the uprooting of cultural moorings as the new generations come under the sway of corrupting winds of change.

The rejection from my own  
Has stemmed the flow  
And the stories seem to regress  
Into un-reachable recesses  
Of a mind once vibrant with stories  
Now reduced to un-imaginable stillness (47-52)

“Prayer of a Monolith” (Ao 2013, 293-295) reflects the poet’s ingenuity in the way she uses her imagination to depict a first person poetic account of a rock’s despair at being uprooted from its mooring to be displayed at the village gate for decorating the entrance. The poet through this seemingly insignificant story of an inanimate object once again creates an extremely sensitive picture of the victimization and altering of nature by humans for their selfish pursuits. In doing

so, the callousness that humans' show towards nature is unnerving and devoid of the least regard for its sensibilities. Vera Alexander in an essay titled "Environmental Otherness: Nature on Human Terms in the Garden" exposes the exploitative tendencies of humans with regards to nature. Although garden remains the main context of her discussion, she implicitly refers to all such human actions that intrude into and interfere with the natural environment. The monolith mentioned in the poem easily relates to the garden that Vera refers to. In her words, "While decorative and recreational, even paradisiacal, the image of the garden also encompasses histories of displacement and violence: unwanted plants and animals are exterminated for the sake of aesthetic ideas, and many of the plants assembled in any garden have been manipulated and uprooted from their natural habitats" (Alexander 2013, 2). The poem employs anthropomorphism to tell the tale of a monolith who stood "proud and content" beside its beloved in the forest. However, as fate would have it, some strangers came searching for a perfect rock face to decorate their village entrance. The monolith was thus dislodged from its mooring, and torn apart from its beloved as well. Turned into an object that symbolized pride for some, a plaything for yet others, the stone thus "stand[s] now at the village gate/In mockery of ...[its] former state" (47-48). The poem ends with the stone pleading with the elements of nature not to tell its beloved the story of its humiliation.

O you elements,  
When you pass by the forest  
And my beloved queries  
Just tell her  
I have gone to my glory  
But please, please never  
Tell her the story  
Of my ignominy (49-56)

By animating the monolith and lending it a voice, the poet exposes and deconstructs the supposed superiority of regime of thought over silence of nature, which is taken undue advantage of by societies to serve their selfish ends. To address this concern, some strains of deep ecology have felt an urgent need to underscore and reestablish the link "between listening to the nonhuman world (i.e., treating it as a silenced subject) and reversing the environmentally destructive practices modern society pursues" (Manes 1995, 44). Expounding the concept of a silenced nature, Manes argues in the essay titled "Nature and Silence":

As a consequence, we require a viable environmental ethics to confront the silence of nature in our contemporary regime of thought, for it is within this vast, eerie silence that surrounds our garrulous human subjectivity that an ethics of exploitation regarding nature has taken shape and flourished, producing the ecological crisis that now requires the search for an environmental counter-ethics. (44)

Temsula's poetry provides an example of such environmental counter-ethics. By animating nature and lending it a discourse, she endeavours to break the silence of nature and empower it so as to safeguard its interests against the hegemony of an overbearing humanity whose intellectual capacity falls short of comprehending the 'silence of nature'.

**Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih**

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is a bilingual poet, fiction writer and playwright from Shillong, Meghalaya who writes both in Khasi (name of the indigenous tribe of Meghalaya as well as language spoken by them) and English besides teaching literature at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. His poetry responds to the exigencies of his place and time and is replete with a wide range of concerns from political to environmental. His work is marked by an innovative employment of nature symbolism, cultural and literary references and carries the essence of the Khasi culture and folklore. It bears testimony to the adverse changes wrought by a rapid rise in urbanization and industrialization in the past few decades on the sensitive ecosystems of this region which makes it significant from an ecocritical perspective. “An Evening by the Source of the Umkhrah River” (Nongkynrih 2011, 17) begins with an idyllic description of the Umkhrah as it flows “winding through the hills” with its “limpid water” and “bed of white sand” that has for visitors “occasional fisherman/washing the clean earth from their sturdy feet”, “country maiden, blushing and giggling/on smooth, swarthy water-worn stones” and “gambolling children” whose euphonious cries are carried by the wind as it “ruffles the deep grass” playing “a tune with the head swaying pines”. However, the poem ends abruptly in an anticlimax with the poet contrasting the countryside utopia with the urban sordidness.

Nobody cares that this limpid water,  
the bashful maiden, the tuneful pines  
are rolling down to the city  
where life itself wallows in the filth. (13-16)

The last line raises concerns about the deteriorating state of the river. Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyrpi are the two main rivers that flow through Shillong eventually draining their waters into the Umiam Lake, which draws great significance from being the first hydel power project of Northeast India. The two rivers, Umkhrah and Umshyrpi have for ages been a means of sustenance for the people of Shillong and neighboring areas and are solely responsible for providing electricity to the entire city. The rivers have been a source of identity for Shillong whose many localities are named after them. Besides, Wah Umkhrah has mythological significance as well. According to the beliefs of the Khasi tribe, the river is one of the nine streams of mythic origin that sprang from Shillong Peak, the chief deity of the Khasi tribe. (Acharya et al. 2010). However, down the years, increasing pressures of population, industrialisation and urbanization have taken their toll on the health of the river which has been reduced to an open drain during summer months with all the sewage, garbage and industrial waste being dumped into it without much treatment. If the people of Shillong didn’t respond to this warning sign now, they might lose their precious lifeline forever. In the poem titled “Hiraeth” (Nongkynrih 2011, 29-30) which is a Welsh word loosely meaning a form of longing, the poet expresses his nostalgia for the good old days of his childhood when life was a lot simpler, quieter, and more peaceful. He craves for the bygone days when lives were in harmony with nature and simple joys like waking up to the rooster call, sounds of different birds, the tenderness of his mother and living in a close-knit community where everyone was friendly and warm made his life blissful. He expresses his longing by recalling the sounds, sights and songs of the yesteryears, the memories of which are deeply embedded in his consciousness.

Out of that restlessness the past rises from dimly  
remembered songs and I watch my ghostly ancestors  
hasten from their dark pallets at the rooster’s



first reveille; warming up for their fields,  
boiling rice, packing their midday meal in leaves. (12-16)

The poem reflects the dilemma of the modern societies which in a race for urbanization and globalization are gradually losing their touch with the old familiar natural ways of the past. Consequently, the tribal culture is gradually losing its moorings and giving way to the modern ways. The poet's mention of the various sounds of nature in the poem also points to the rich musical tradition that the Khasis follow. Music forms an integral part of their life as "every festival and ceremony from birth to death is enriched with music and dance. One can hear natural sounds enmeshed in the songs - the hum of bees, bird calls, the call of a wild animal, the gurgling of a stream" ("Festivals and Ceremonies of the Khasis"). The poem contrasts the past marked by mellifluous sounds of nature with the present characterized by chaos and cacophony emanating from the concrete jungles that have replaced the natural environments due to excessive migrations and rampant urbanization of the regions.

No more do I hear the morning sounds of home:  
birds warbling, cicadas whining, crows cawing,  
chickens yapping about the yard and my uncle  
readying for the cement factory.

.....  
Strange sounds are crowding this town  
Like the rooster, I too, seem  
To have become obsolete. (4-7, 28-30)

"Rain Song 2000" (Nongkynrih 2011, 38-40) draws attention towards the adverse climate changes occurring across the globe as a result of the ecological imbalance which are nature's warning signs of an impending apocalypse. The introduction of the poem may remind one of the opening line of the General Prologue from the *Canterbury Tales*: "When in April the sweet showers fall/that pierce March's drought to the root and all", (Chaucer "From the *Canterbury Tales*: General Prologue"), the only difference being that here, "The April sky has taken us all by surprise/spouting incessantly for the last many days" (1-2). The poem is marked by a terse blend of folk symbolism and critical modernity and evokes a sense of urgency about the imminent ecological crisis that threatens our planet with dire consequences if not checked in time. The employment of anthropomorphism in the following lines creates a counter discourse that questions the exploitative regime of human thought by breaking the silence of nature and lending it a voice as evident in the following lines:

so why is the sky weeping  
a river of unseasonable tears?  
Why is the wind shrieking night and day  
and pines beating their chests in pain? (21-24)

"Killer Instincts" (Nongkynrih 2011, 96) is woven around the old Khasi belief according to which during the period of pregnancy, the family members of the gestating woman refrain from killing any insect or animal as they believe that this might hurt the baby resting inside its mother's womb. The poet expresses his reluctance and impatience about following the custom in the following lines:

I do not know  
how believers do it.  
For nine long months  
it was maddening  
not to be a killer. (9-13)

The poem draws attention to the growing scepticism and impatience towards the ancient beliefs and customs. Despite their apparent irrationality, these traditions/customs contain within eons of ancestral wisdom, and have advocated a peaceful and harmonious coexistence the environment, which makes them most relevant in present times. The need of the hour is to understand these beliefs/customs in the light of their eco-friendliness, and preserve and sustain them in that spirit instead of letting them turn into empty cultural symbols and die of neglect. Quoting Bharti Chhibber:

[...] For centuries, indigenous communities were used to surviving and adjusting their agriculture, fishing and hunting in the event of changes in climate. It is ironical that now when the threat of climate change is so imminent we are looking for solutions outside. However, there is another threat looming large, that is, of losing these communities to outright annihilation or due to their amalgamation in the mainstream. Moreover, with the commercialisation of even natural resources, traditional knowledge that managed to maintain sustainable levels of harvest has been sidelined... (Chhibber 2008)

In “Kynshi” (Nongkynrih 2011, 43-45), the poet expresses his heartfelt concern and anxiety about the deteriorating state of environment of the river Kynshi and its surroundings. The “sovereign river” which has bred “the truest Khasi braves” lies in a deplorable state today as a result of the human kind’s excessive greed for natural resources. The poet laments the loss of greenery and defacing of the serene hills that has been brought about as a result of indiscriminate developmental activities. The following lines reflect his anguish at the spoiling of pristine environments:

Inevitably, however, here too,  
time has left its ugly wounds  
Pines like filth are lifted  
from woodlands in truckloads.  
Hills lose their summer green,  
blasted into rocks,  
into pebble and sand  
and the sand is not spared. (36-43)

The poet is saddened by the mindless pursuits of the humankind “who cannot think beyond possessions” (45) which makes him feel “softer, more poetic with this land and Kynshi” (48). At the same time, the poet portrays the river as a benevolent and persevering force of nature which despite all the damage continues to flow its regular course as evident in these lines: “But Kynshi goes on, however fickle the people,/however treacherous the customs” (49-51). Reverberating through the poem is the poet’s voice of intervention and an urgent appeal for making concrete efforts to salvage the river from the impending doom. The river and its ecosystem, in the words of the poet:

need to be preserved  
in more than memories,  
or the words of a backwater poet  
ploughing clumsily through a foreign tongue. (14-17)

## Conclusion

The Ecocritical analysis of the two poets chosen for study, namely, Temsula Ao and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, reveals a poetic consciousness informed by a deep love and concern for their indigenous cultures, traditions and fragile environments. There is a poetic voice that employs the power of lyric to raise environmental awareness amongst the peoples of these regions and urges them to apprehend and check the demonic forces of urbanization that severely threaten our existence on this planet. These writings serve as an urgent reminder to the indigenous people of their great cultural heritage comprising sustainable customs and traditions. The roles these poets play as custodians and advocates of their nature-friendly ways of life gain great relevance especially in times when indigenous cultures are endangered and fast losing their moorings to an onslaught of the urban consumer-culture. Besides, these literatures represent the much needed environmental ethics that by lending a voice to the silence of nature can counter the ethics of exploitation and abuse of nature, the unfortunate characteristics of the modern consumer-centric world.

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