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Ecocriticism and Land Rights in Northeastern Literature

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Abstract:

This research paper explores the profound relationship between ecocriticism and land rights in the Northeastern Indian literature, with the focus given on how nature has such functioning as a landscape, but rather as a living organism, memory-bearer, and political witness. By conducting close analyses of some of the most important authors in Assam, Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Mona Zote, and many more, the given study proves that the ecological consciousness is impossible to be taken out of context of the indigenous identity and land-based sovereignty. The Northeastern texts continually describe rivers, forests, hills, and sacred grove as cultural archives which create the shared memory and strength, and at the same time reveal the effects of colonial invasion, resource exploitation, militarization, displacement and ecological destruction. This paper claims that ecocriticism in Northeastern literature is by nature political as it becomes a response of the anthropocentrism and exploitative developmental patterns. Using eco-spiritual metaphors, animistic narratives, and native epistemologies, writers claim land as heritage, not as commodity and present moral, emotional and historical arguments in support of indigenous land rights. Finally, the paper also brings to the fore how the Northeastern literature offers a comprehensive ecological philosophy based on the principle of reciprocity, justice, and custodianship, which does not only criticize the violation of the environment, but also aims at a vision of a sustainable coexistence.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Indigenous Land Rights, Northeastern Literature, Environmental Memory, Eco-spirituality

Introduction:

The Northeast India with Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim is the home to good ecosystems, and a wide range of indigenous cultures that are closely connected with land. The literature of this area shows a profound respect to nature and strong bond to the ancestral land; therefore, it is an excellent site to examine ecocritically. Ecocriticism is the methodology used in literature that looks at the connections between literature and the natural

world, and tends to criticize anthropocentric perspectives and emphasize the agency of nature (Glotfelty xviii) tljournal.com. Ecocriticism is often closely connected with land rights in Northeastern literature, as most works communicate indigenous assertions to defend their land, culture, and environment against external overuse. The article presents an extensive study of ecocriticism and land rights in the Northeast Indian literature, organizing the theoretical discussion and literary analysis of the most prominent authors. We are going to discuss how such authors as Mamang Dai (Arunachal Pradesh), Easterine Kire (Nagaland), Temsula Ao (Nagaland), and others (Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, etc.) integrate nature and land as the sources of self, memory and opposition. The aim is to demonstrate the way, in which Northeastern authors combine landscapes, rivers, forests not as picturesque decorations, but as a key factor in cultural identity and political awareness.

Indigenous Land Ethics and Ecocritical Situation:

Mainstream ecocriticism, in the sense of the term used by such scholars as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell, challenges us to accept the primary role of ecological thought in the study of literature and to consider nature not as an inert environment. This is particularly the case in indigenous situations where land and nature have spiritual and cultural meaning. In Northeast India, an elaborate number of communities regard the earth as an alive, sacred being and consider themselves as its custodians and not its proprietors. This view is consistent with the ecocentric world view - where nature takes the centre stage as opposed to anthropocentrism, where human beings are the most privileged. Indigenous land ethics of the Northeast are grounded in the idea of reciprocity and respect: forests, rivers and mountains are perceived as relatives or gods and damaging of them is believed to disrupt the balance of the cosmos. As an illustration, some of the Naga and Mizo tribes have folk beliefs that nature punishes when desecrated that take the shape of floods or calamities, which are reflected in their literature (Misra 2011).

The issue of land rights in the Northeast is not a legal or economic matter, but a very cultural one. Historically, colonial and postcolonial invasions of this land - the extraction of teak by the British and tea plantations in Assam, mega-dams in Arunachal - endangered the local people in their possession of the territory. This gave rise to political movements and even armed rebellions that were based on the defense of land and autonomy. As an example, the Naga political movement (which was mirrored in Naga literature) and the Mizo uprising in the 1960s were both based on the need to protect their homeland and lifestyle. In its constitution some parts of the Northeast have special protection (including Sixth Schedule autonomous councils and Article 371 provisions) which acknowledge customary land rights, which highlights the importance of land to identity and survival. Ecological consciousness, in literature, is therefore frequently encompassed with postcolonial resistance. The Northeast authors rebel against anthropocentric, exploitative development patterns and provide a

comprehensive ecological perspective based on reciprocity between human and non-human realms (Brahma). That is, their narratives and poems often criticize the powers that strip people of land - be it colonialism, insurgency or modernization - and they, instead, shine light on the native lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Nature, Memory, and Identity Northeastern Narratives:

The prominent aspect of the Northeast Indian writing is the manner in which the landscape and cultural memory are interwoven making nature the repository of the identity and the history of people. Arunachal Pradesh writer Mamang Dai has said: In the world we live in, the land is where our stories have their roots. This feeling can be traced in her works and those of her colleagues in the region. Indeed, rivers, forests, and hills tend to be characters in their own right, with memories of generations and having been witness to the joys and struggles of man. Scholar Meena Kohli explains that Mamang Dai sees rivers and forests as archives of memory, which connects history with natural elements. Likewise in most readings, the land bears the burden of oral traditions and spiritual philosophy to the extent that the disappearance of land is similar to the disappearance of culture itself.

To Northeastern literature, nature is identity. The hills and valleys are not interchangeable sceneries; these are homelands where cultures have a particular meaning. A comparative analysis of Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire, and Temsula Ao reveals that in all three, the aspects of ecology and identity are intertwined. The trees of Nagaland, the waters of Arunachal, the holy groves of Meghalaya - every element of the environment is connected with the way communities perceive themselves. Such close relationship is usually expressed in myths and folklore that is entrenched in literature. Northeast Indian writers use the indigenous folklore in which, to give just one example, mountains can be the ancestors of the people and rivers can be the personifications of the protectors. This type of storytelling does not just establish cultural identity but also claim indigenous epistemology - ways of knowing that acknowledge the sentient nature of land. In these stories, nature is often given an anthropomorphic personification and is given voice and agency, which is what scholar Nandini Dutta calls an ecological memory kept alive through the voices of women in folk traditions (Dutta 118). Through their animated depiction of nature, the Northeastern writers oppose the exploitative paradigm that nature is inanimate property. They show a relational perspective instead, human beings are a constituent of the land, and the land is a constituent of the community. This school of thought is implicitly in favor of the land rights - in case land is a part of the identity and heritage of a person, it will be a great injustice to alienate it.

Spiritual Ecology:

Ecocriticism mingled with indigenous spirituality and land ethics can be illustrated by one of the most outstanding Nagaland literary authors Easterine Kire. The novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014) by her can be viewed as a highly ecocritical account of the mystical forests of Nagaland. The

main character Vilie is a single hunter who spent 25 out of 48 years of his life in the forest - he does not see forest as a wild nature but as home and family. Actually, Vilie says, the forest is my wife (Kire 7) tlhjournal.com, which is a dramatic metaphor by which Kire refers to the marriage between the native individual and the land. This repeated phrase - the forest is my wife - means how essential the forest is to the Naga life and identity, meaning that it is a relationship of mutual care: Vilie takes care of the creatures of the forest (being an official caretaker of tragopan birds and mithun cattle), and the forest takes care of him tlhjournal.com. This kind of personification of nature is an intentional narrative decision. The novel by Kire does not subscribe to anthropocentrism but instead, to an eco-spiritual worldview in which nature is an equally significant partner to the human being (Tialila 179) tlhjournal.com.

In addition to this main metaphor, *When the River Sleeps* is a rich representation of animistic folklore and land rights. The numerous Naga folklore elements in the quest of Vilie to retrieve a heartstone of a sleeping river implies that the natural world is vital with spirits and characters. The forest not only speaks and interferes with human life: it threatens Vilie the harm and tries his honesty. Through such interactions Kire claims an indigenous ecological ethic - the land is conscious and it is wise. It is worth noting that more than often Vilie is threatened by human enemies who want the same mighty stone; these armed men are the symbol of greed and violence that invades the forest. It is possible to read the novel as an allegory about the need to safeguard the land against exploiters - Vilie is the representative of the native custodian, and the potential exploiters (some of which are outside of his society) are the external powers that are interested in the resources of the forest. In this respect, *When the River Sleeps* becomes ecocriticism mixed with the land rights, the need to defend nature becomes associated with the need to protect it against people who would destroy it in order to get profits. The meaning of the story as told by Kire suggests that the forest has a right to its worshippers and not the business people.

When the River Sleeps has received praise by critics due to its environmental awareness. According to one analysis, Kire is a mix of environment with cultural, spiritual, social and historical analysis to elicit the ecological consciousness of the Naga people (Tialila 179-180) tlhjournal.com. At the climax of the novel, the strong connection that Vilie has with the land is paid in a spiritual way even as he faces the brutality of human beings. The work by Kire is therefore an example of how Oriental literature has influenced the understanding of nature as a source of power and heavenly meaning to support the idea that protective land is a moral and spiritual task. This rings closer to land rights struggles in the real-world Nagaland when customary law dictates that land is owned not by the state but by the tribe and the village and therefore should never be easily displaced by outsiders. Overall, Easterine Kire employs the themes of ecocritical writing (as the living forest, folklore of nature agency) to comment upon the ownership of the land as well. Her response is straightforward: land is

not something to be owned, it is to be loved; and people who love it most are those who should possess it most.

Temsula Ao: Memory, Home and Ecofeminism:

The other giant in Nagaland is Temsula Ao, a poet, short story writer and ethnographer. The works of Ao echo with the ecological motives and tend to make comparisons between the use of nature and the use of people, particularly women. This renders her a key voice where the ecocriticism and ecofeminism meet. In such poems as Lament of Earth (Songs That Tell, 1992), Temsula Ao puts the rape of the natural world in an absolutely shocking way. She writes: "Oh, alas to the forest / Which now is silent / Stunned and stumped / With the evidence / Of her rape). In this case, Ao employs the symbol of a woman who is violated to explain deforestation and environmental looting. The visual of the now silent and stumped (cut) forest with traces of rape implies not only the brutality of nature but also the gendered perspective - Mother Earth is victimized by the hands of the patriarchal militarized greed. The poem goes on to explain how her elephants used to roam on her breast... life now is a part of her belly through... bombings and contamination and lists the atrocities of logging, bombing (of wars) and pollution. The ecofeminist opinion of Ao is in line with the concept of the similarity between women and nature, both being oppressed in patriarchal societies (Salleh 20). In making the female body have a feminine shape in her poetry, Ao brings out the fact that women and land rights are urgent and thus compares the two struggles to dignity and autonomy.

The theme of land as witness and refuge is brought to the fore in *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) by Temsula Ao, in her collection of short stories. These are connected narratives that take place in the middle of the 20th century Naga insurgency and the violent retaliation campaign. In the stories, Ao does not merely portray the Naga hills as a setting, she portrays it as an active source that helps the people go through the trauma. Even the title - *These Hills Called Home* - insists that regardless of the upheaval, the hills are still a place of destination and familiarity. In a single tale, the villagers run into the hilly forest to avoid the reprisals of the army; the countryside provides them with protection and privacy. In another one, the mother who is grieving sings her last li (folk song) to the hills as she is led away by soldiers and it is said that the wind carries her song all through the forests - meaning that nature does not forget about the stories of those who lost their lives. These aspects depict what one of the scholars describes as nature as an archive of memory that stores the voices and experiences of the indigenous people (Kohli 50). It also promotes the notion of land rights in a very subtle manner: when the hills are home in the most ultimate meaning, then the struggle to defend the sovereignty (the Naga political struggle) can be perceived as the struggle to defend home and all that is sacred about it. In her stories, Ao does not lecture directly on the issue of ownership of land but she easily illustrates how closely the Naga people are connected to the land, by the way she emphasizes that their identity and rights cannot be separated to the land.

Temsula Aos fiction and non-fiction frequently allude to aboriginal knowledge and sacred places. She has authored on the myth of Lungterok of the Ao tribe (the six stones out of which mankind was formed) emphasizing a perception of the earth as the first ancestor. Her characters often interpret omens in the nature or resort to rivers and groves to get spiritual comfort. This spiritual ecology is accompanied by an actual recognition of environmental degradation. Ao has explored personal relationships to nature in stories of Laburnum for My Head, (2009): in the title story, an old woman is defying all social conventions and planting a laburnum tree over her grave - a very quiet form of radicalism, of seeking immortality through communication with nature. The other narrative is the death of a Hunter in which a man that boasted of hunting a rare bird is also later plagued by the feeling of guilt and misfortune which suggests that there is a spiritual cost of killing the creatures of nature. These stories confirm aboriginal beliefs according to which land and its life forms should not be desecrated. According to a critic, Banduram Brahma, textual materials of the Northeast such as Ao frequently show the relationship of reciprocity between the human and the non-human world that undermines the modern exploitative mentality. The works of Ao, with her heavy metaphor and actual historical circumstances, require us not to think of land as a commodity but as a common property belonging to women and men, spirits and animals, all of whom have a stake in it and have the right to protect it.

Mamang Dai: Rivers of Memory and Land of Stories:

Relocating to Arunachal Pradesh, Mamang Dai gives a strong contribution that unites ecocriticism and narration and history. Dai is a poet and novelist of the Adi tribe, and the elemental splendor of the mountains and rivers of Arunachal explains her writing. Both of her novels, *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and the historical romance *The Black Hill* (2014) base their human stories on the environment of the Eastern Himalayas, and nature is seen as the preserver of legends and an actor in the process. According to critic Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi, the environmental settings in this work by Dai are connected to the cultural identity and memory (Thongchi 2012). In fact, the stories of Dai can be taken as prose poems to her land - the river Siang (Brahmaputra) running through Arunachal is presented as the witness of the circles of life, the image of the cultural continuity. The river and the forest are indistinguishable in the existence of the people in the village of Pensam set in an Adi village. There are myths about spirits of the river, forest watchers and voice of the ancestors in the wind, mixed with the stories about 20th century transformations (such as the arrival of roads or administration). By mixing myth and history, Dai is trying to make the argument implicit that land is the repository of collective memory of the people and the literature should recognize this rich pool of truth that lies beyond the written word.

The theme is further enhanced by the poems of Mama Dai. She describes a river as a timeless source flowing past a town in her popular poem *Small Towns and the River* (2009) with a flow that transports centuries of memory and meaning and which contains sentient wisdom to the attentive. The

river knows and witnesses, and this is based on the Indigenous views of the alive spirit of the nature. The poem laments the destruction of the Indigenous communities - the flood of sorrow of the people who have to leave their ancestral lands and ways of life and live in the turbulent times. This is a direct allusion to the fact that colonial expansion, missions and subsequent development in the area had displaced several tribes. The grief of the river is transferred to the grief of the people, and symbolically, it expresses the grief of dispossession (Swetha 104). However, the poem also lays stress on tenacity: rituals do survive and rituals are the only things that are unchanging despite the fact that life and death move on implying that the culture of ties to land remains (Dai, "Small Towns"). It has a promising sight of cool bamboo, rejuvenated by the sun, and the symbol of the Indigenous life rebirth and the preservation of traditions despite the invasion of change. What Dai is emphasizing through this type of imagery is that land (symbolized here by the river and the plants) grounds Indigenous identity and brings recovery as long as people do not forget and respect it.

The land rights issues emerge as subtext in her fiction also. An example is the Black Hill, the setting of which is in the 19th century, which portrays the encounter of the world of an Adi tribe with colonial outsiders (a French priest). Although the novel is about specific destinies, it indirectly points at the way colonial invasion introduced new ideas of partitioning and possession of the land that did not fit the original concept of territory that the indigenous population had. The characters of Dai tend to express a sense of awe towards sacred groves, clan territory and the cosmology of the place - things that can never be translated into the language of ownership of the colonizer. Such a juxtaposition is used to remind the reader of the unfairness of the way the Northeast territories were demarcated and taken by foreigners. When the roads and government officials come to The Legends of Pensam, the locals sense the cosmic balance is being imbalanced - forests start being regarded as timber, rivers as resources and the ordinary custodians of the land lose control. Dai brings the personal experience of land loss through these changes and makes them personal by telling the story behind these changes. Her works can be put in the same category as Linda Smith (a scientist of Indigenous methods) who mentions the necessity to resume tribal history and re-connect their ethnicity and relationship to land (Smith 1999). The literature of Mamang Dai is in a way a literature of cultural reclamation, that the land and the people are the same by story and song. To conclude, the fact that Dai is a so-called river poet (also known as one) highlights how Northeastern writers tend to become the environmental custodians of their work - maintaining the memory of rivers and hills in such a way that the future generation will become aware of their importance (Kohli 59). In this way, they declare in a less direct way the rights of these landscapes to stay intact against the destructive forces.

Other Voices: Regional and Common Themes:

Although Dai, Kire, and Ao can be considered some of the most prominent writers of the Northeast in the English language, there are numerous voices of other states to the ecocriticism and

land rights discussion. Poets and novelists across the region incorporate images of mountains, forests and rivers into their stories on how the culture can survive. As an example, the Assamese literary works (via English translation, too) often emphasize the great Brahmaputra River and the fertile valley, not merely as the beautiful backdrop, but as a nourishing source and an unreliable god. Arupa Patangia Kalita is an award winning Assamese writer who is known to mesh nature and political conflict in one piece. Her collection of short stories *Written in Tears* (2015, translated into Assamese) describes how the decades of insurgency and turmoil in Assam left a mark on both human and natural spheres. In one of the studies it is made known that the stories by Kalita are indicative of the constant agitations and violence of indigenous people that make a profound impression on nature... The beautiful nature so dear has ceased to be so because the agitators have misused it as a means to convert it into a place of violence". Differently put, the human conflicts in the Northeast are depicted to destabilize the ecological balance, which is also reflected in *The Collector's Wife* (2005) by Mitra Phukan (Assam) who correlates the anxiety of insurgency period with earthquakes and storms on a symbolic level. The echo of the images of mountains, hills, rivers, myths, traditions and culture of the people in the works of Kalita confirms the fact that in Assamese storytelling the human trauma and landscape are bound together. It is worth noting that one of the stories that she translated was named *The Loneliness of Hira Barua*, in which the orientation toward the rural territory is predetermined; the feeling of belonging to the hills, rivers, birds, landscape is impossible to break even using violence. These illustrations reinforce the line of thinking that to the Northeasterners, the need to keep rights to their land is what is keeping them alive.

In Meghalaya, sacred groves and waterfalls are part of the cultural heritage in which writers tend to focus on spiritual ecology. Writing in English, poets such as Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Desmond Kharmawphlang add Khasi-Jaintia philosophies of the sacredness of nature to their poems. An example of this is a poem by Kharmawphlang, called *The Sacred Grove*, which praises a forest in Mawphlang that has undergone generations of preservation by tribal law - it is an allegory of the power of culture in the form of ecological conservation. The other Meghalaya-origin author, Anjum Hasan (born in Shillong), does explore a theme of land and identity in certain of her books, but in her novels the setting is mostly not in the area. At the same time, direct nature is brought up by Janice Pariat, also a native of Meghalaya, in her collection of stories *Boats on Land* (2012). In one of the tales of Pariat, one of the Khasi legends about a cliff on which a sad sacrifice was made is described, where supernatural folklore intertwines the history of the landscape - once again, emphasizing the fact that landscape is the memory of the people. The concepts of these works although subtle, highlight the foundation of environmental stewardship that was built in the tribal practices. In Meghalaya, societies traditionally use their own forests; therefore, the literature of the region tends to suggest that it is land rights (community control of land) that makes this ecological stewardship possible. The unspoken

message is that any outside power - whether a mining firm or the government - that violates this control (e.g. coal mining in Jaintia hills or proposed uranium mining in the sacred forests) endangers nature and culture.

Our own echo of ecocriticism, in relation to land, is heard in Manipur and Tripura. The beautiful but troubled topography of the state is frequently a reference in ethno-mythical writings like the Cheitharon Kumpapa (the royal chronicle) as well as modern day poems by Robin S. Ngangom in Manipur. In such poems as A Poem for Mother, the Manipuri poet writing in English, Ngangom addresses the scars which decades of violence have put upon the hills and lakes of Manipur, but he also finds a way out of the way in which nature remains constant. One commentary says that he is haunted by the hills of Manipur and he is ardently admiring their ecological beauty despite his lamentation about social turmoil. Images of nature are also employed by another Manipuri poet Saratchand Thiyam to reflect the war that the state is involved in, signifying how much land and politics are inextricably linked (one of the examples of these is a poem written by Thiyam where a violent struggle is compared to a storm-torn landscape). Much of the native Kokborok literature in Tripura is oral, with folklore of forests and mountains which stressed the communal ownership of land under village chiefs (now lost through migration and land alienation). In an interview, one of the poets of Tripura, Chandrakanta Murisingh, commented that the poetry of the Northeast has been inscribed with the face of time, with nature and political struggle as the two heroes. This face of time is an indication that historical trauma is left behind on the land. Proclaiming the memory of the land in such poetry is a form of proclaiming rights to that land a pushback against the erasing narratives about Indigenous tenure.

Mizoram is no exception to the chorus. Miza poet Mona Zote works in English with wrathful creativity; one of her most renowned phrases says, I live in Terrorism and Poetry, which reflects the painful and stormy past of her country. The poetry of Zote regularly refers to the land (the hilly country of Mizoram) and condemns the aggression of development. A research poll indicates that Mona Zote wants to conserve the abundance of natural and cultural diversity of her land. Her poems are full of the consciousness that, following the devastation of the 20-year Mizo insurgency (in turn that was caused by a forgotten famine associated with the growth of the bamboo), the terrain must be repaired and defended. This is another clear example of literature, ecocriticism and land rights intersecting: the struggle of Mizo people (against the colonial rule, and later against the state after the famine) was primarily over the right to self-rule in their own land and their own resources. Therefore, diversity of her land which Zote talks of is not merely an ecological, but also a cultural one and to protect it is an environmental and political undertaking. In all these regional illustrations a certain theme is evident: when nature is abused then the men are abused, when the men are abused or displaced, nature is abused. This confirms an Indigenous holistic perception that is also observed by the characters in Easterine

Kires writings, namely; that land and people have a common fate. In this way, the Northeastern literature suggests in general that the protection of the land rights is the key to the human justice, as well as to the well-being of the ecosystem itself. Literature is the testimony and the warning at the same time: It praises the symbiotic relationship between the local community and the environment, it warns that such relationship should be broken.

Land Rights and Resistance in Literature:

The theme of resistance, memory and justice is a common Northeastern writing topic that reveals land rights issues. Instead of instructive political treatises, these literary pieces employ narrative, metaphor and myth to propel home why authority over land is not a bargaining point to Indigenous communities. One of the tropes is the revenge or revenge of nature. This was reflected in the mentioning of floods or ecological frenzied violence when the natural is damaged (as an author notes through the commentary by Misra). In fiction, a comparison could be made: dislocation of communities of land results in the tearing of social fabric and the outbreak of violence, or in other words, a break in the sanctity of the land results in repetitions of misery. Northeastern accounts of insurgency, many of which, suggest that the insurgency is based on alienation - land alienation and cultural alienation. Literature is therefore a place to reclaim the land in a symbolic manner. Writers reclaim the narratives by writing about sacred rivers, ancestral forests and customary laws which had frequently been overlooked in the mainstream discourses. In this way, they claim what scholar Dustin Lalkulhpuia (2025) found in Northeast poetry: that these pieces of writing testify to the power of the Indigenous identities, those that are strongly connected to the land.

Other manifestations of resistance in literature include the practice of oral histories and place-based stories. Since a good part of the Northeast Indian heritage is oral, the very act of writing down the folktales or local legends in the English (or local) language is itself a political statement - it implies: we have our sense of history that is connected to this territory. Indicatively, by retelling an Adi legend, or by Temsula Ao reciting an Ao folktale of the genesis of a hill, they are essentially marking a territory: they testify to the long-range relationships with the land which predate the existence of modern states. This has practical effects on land rights particularly in the argument on autonomy and governance. The implicit argument in the literature is that the natives of the Northeast are the rightful custodians of their land - their cultural recollections date centuries back to that land therefore any outsider (whether by unjust laws or corporate over-exploitation) has no right to it. This position is echoed in the world of Indigenous writing too where appeals to, e.g., not leaving this land or this is our ancestral soil are the usual refrain (e.g., in Native American, Australian Aboriginal literature). The Northeastern writers are part of that worldwide indigenous chorus, with the local stories of the land and struggle.

Also, theoretical criticism and lyrical propagand includes, often, a balance in such writings.

We can see overtures to environmental philosophy - such as the concept of pantheism (a belief in the divine in nature) can be found in the works by Mamang Dai and numerous Naga authors, which is an instance of a spiritual argument in support of conservation. Eco-socialist thought, including the criticism of the military or capitalist encroaching on ecologically sensitive areas, is also present. As an example, although the central theme in Easterine Kires novel *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) is the human price of war, there is an allusion to how decades of war left the land poor and disrupted the agrarian lifestyle - a very indirect remark that political oppression and ecological destruction are closely linked. The writing of Temsula Ao also echoes how the war in the hills caused silence of the forests (as normal life and folk songs died) and therefore the peace has to be reinstated to bring back harmony in the environment. These strata of meaning demonstrate the extent to which the land rights are woven into the texture of the Northeastern literature: to struggle in defense of the land is to struggle in defense of the way of life that is in harmony with nature. In a part of the nation that has been generally marginalized in national histories, literature has been one way of expressing what the discourses of academic development may ignore, which is, that progress cannot be determined by alienating individuals to their surroundings.

Lastly, the theme of reciprocity and respect in these texts provides a positive way to go. Instead of just deploring the loss, a great number of works give us the visions of hope based on traditional wisdom. In other tales and poems, the healing follows the low-tech contribution of the characters who go back to the old ecological ways or re-associate with the sacred places. This implies that respecting the land rights of indigenous people is not the case of paying back past injustice; it is promoted as the solution to the future. These accounts have subtle connections to the present ecological crisis (intense flooding to loss of biodiversity) through the diminution of indigenous care. Therefore, in promoting land rights, that is, putting the land in the hands of the people who have traditionally been managing the land, the literature can be seen to promote environmental sustainability. To conclude, the instruments of the ecocriticism concept to which the Northeastern literature appeals with the elements of the evocative imagery to the folklore and personal testimony are the proclamations of the concept of land and people as inseparable. Even the right of these communities to their land is described as a question of justice and as a vital one to the maintenance of the fragile ecological and cultural landscape of the area.

Conclusion:

The discussion of ecocriticism and land rights in Northeastern literature is showing a web of stories where nature and culture are so deeply intertwined with each other. Through genres - poetry, novels, short stories, folklore - authors in the so-called Eight Sisters states of India describe the land as a living character who has its own memory, spirit, and rights. This literature puts the reader to task and forces them to reevaluate the traditional anthropocentric discourses and to acknowledge what

indigenous peoples of the Northeast always knew: human beings are members of ecological community, and our liberties and duties are distributed among land. We have observed how writers such as Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire and Temsula Ao construct a worldview where rivers, forests and mountains construct identity and history. They and other writers in the region claim with their art that almost in order to destroy the land is to destroy the self and vice versa, to defend the land is a self-defense and a tribute to the ancestors. These themes have the strength of being a counter-follow up to exploitative models of modernity that have historically marginalized the Northeast. Northeastern literature in place of the prevailing discourse of development is what Banduram Brahma calls a holistic ecological vision that is based on reciprocity, resilience, and reverence.

We also find a balance in the literature itself in the balance between theoretical discussion and literary analysis: in a mixture of criticism and celebration. The criticism is reflected in images of environmental destruction the stumps of the forest Ao raped are silent, the river in the poem by Dai cries about the dead fish, and the feeling of impending loss of the forest is present in the novel by Kire. These pictures are not purely national matters but they resonate with wider-ranging environmental problems at the international level such as deforestation, pollution, climate change among others, but through a localized approach. Conversely, the celebration glitters through in the love of both the authors to their homeland. It may be with a green luscification of a mountain top like Japfu in Nagaland, or the heartfelt personification of the Brahmaputra in Assam magic, the literature is full of appreciation of the gifts of nature. It gives an example of coexistence - an environmentally friendly ethos based on indigenous knowledge. This bidirectional tactic reinforces the argument of indigenous land rights: showing what is taken away when land is abused and what may thrive when land is honored, these pieces of art appeal to the heart and soul of the audience by telling them to acknowledge and reclaim indigenous custodianship.

To sum up, Northeastern literature is reflective and predictive. It is a reflection of the complicated nature of land as life in a place where people have struggled in the past and still struggle today to own their own land. Meanwhile, it is a signal, leading us to another paradigm of treating nature - it is respect, empathy, and justice. We have to reference our sources as the guidelines of the MLA 9th edition encourages us to do so, and rightfully so, and the reasons are that this is a profound research that has been guided by the voices of researchers and narrators who shed light on the importance of ecocriticism in the given context. The sources testify to the increasing scholarly acknowledgement of the distinct contributions of Northeastern writings to the ecocritical thinking and the discourse of postcolonialism. Finally, the most influential supporters are the stories and the poems themselves. In their myths of mountains, their songs of rivers, their witness of the soil we can hear this message: secure the land rights of the Northeastern Indigenous people, and it is not only that you will be honoring human rights, you will be protecting an indistinguishable connection to nature that would serve the

whole humanity. When we listen to the wail of the earth, as Temsula Ao so eloquently suggests in her poem, and react by taking care of the land, then we start to heal the land as well as ourselves. It is a promise Northeastern literature is making - the promise that depends on keeping in mind that land is not an asset that can be possessed, but a heritage that needs to be honored and preserved.

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