

**Poetry as History: A Pragmatic Study of North-East Poetry
in English and in English Translation**

A Thesis Submitted

To

Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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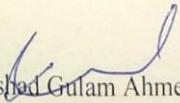
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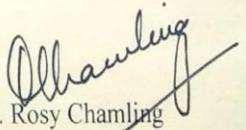
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ABSTRACT

This thesis entitled “Poetry as History: A Pragmatic Study of North-East Poetry in English and in English Translation” has attempted to probe into the diverse forms of existing contemporary issues represented by the Northeastern poets in their poetry and analyze how that poetry represents itself, eventually to become a history of Northeastern part of India. It has focused on the three selected North-Eastern poets from three states namely, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (Meghalaya), Robin.S.Ngongom (Manipur), and Temsula Ao (Nagaland) and their poetry and has managed to demonstrate how these poets have mastered the art of witness thereby becoming the recorders of history of their place and time. It has examined the causes and consequences of numerous socio-political issues confronting the poet. This thesis has tried to establish the notion of history as a record of objective and empirically verifiable events as witnessed by the poets.

Since the inception of human civilization, poetry meant imagination with exaggerated words, written to flatter, eulogize, motivate and express one’s emotions, which is not the case in the recent times. It is something more than that. From the dawn of the 20th century poets have realized that the function of poetry should be to address the reality of the time. Thus, they started writing on the current situation they were witnessing. That is how poetry of witness was born. In the past poetry did address issues of war and violence but in a very different way. It was a jingoistic representation of an imagined situation and the warrior was rarely the poet. The first hand experience of war and violence was rarely the subject-matter of poetry. As a matter of fact poetry was filled with the glories of war, the heroic acts, and praise for the hero right from the beginning of human civilization but portrayal of stark reality and mirroring of events as they really take place is a recent phenomenon. In short,

poetry of witness has an unequivocal social message. It is in this kind of poetry that authentic history lives because the poet writes about what he has personally gone through and not what he has merely imagined.

This type of poetry emerged and gathered currency in the North-Eastern part of India from 1980s onward. The distinctive feature of Northeastern state is its poetry and their uniqueness lies in the representation of contemporary events and problems like ecological degradation, corruption, loss of identity and cultural values, conflict, migration and violence. Their writings are compact, lucid and present the issues as they occur. Poets like Robin S Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Temsula Ao, write what they encounter. Although they hail from different states of Northeast India, and their agendas vary, one thing they stick to is writing what they have witnessed. Most of their poems seem like prose written with absolute clarity and free from any kind of ambiguity so that the message to the reader is not lost or diluted.

To the natives of the Northeast there is history behind every sphere of the natural world. Thus, a keen sense of history characterizes their collective consciousness. Although the writers from this region have produced a commendable body of literature that includes most of the literary forms in the last few decades it is poetry that has remained faithful to the contemporary changing reality and stood out as a true historical narrative. Most of them write in regional languages and these writings are being recently translated into English.

Since the poets in question write about terrorism, ethnic clashes, insurgency, human rights abuses, environmental and ecological concerns, erosion of tribal values, displacement and the corruption their work has a distinct identity within Indian English language poetry. They declare in various interviews that they write to inform

and their writings are inspired by the events happenings around them. Given this, there is only one conclusion that one may draw from the above discussion and that is their poetry with its documentary and evidentiary nature is history. When a poem depicts an event without exaggerating or delimiting it and with a sole aim of recording and spreading the message, it can be called history and the approach becomes pragmatic. Pragmatic here refers to taking up a study by identifying and recognizing the existing problem.

The thesis has been divided into six chapters which are as follows:

1. **Introduction-** The first chapter casts a cursory glance at the English as well as Indian national scenario of poetry to see how it has changed over the passage of time from being subjective and fictional, to objective and pragmatic. It has talked about the Poetry of Witness and its influence on the works of Northeastern poets and has also introduced the concept of history and its significance for Northeastern poetry.
2. **Colonisers, Christian Missionaries and the Northeast People-** This chapter has discussed and explored the relationship between colonisers, missionaries and the Northeast people. It has attempted to delve into the manner in which the tribal people of the region were affected by the process of colonisation and proselytisation.
3. **Poetry and Ecology: Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih-** The third chapter of the thesis focuses on ecological concerns as represented in the poems of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. It seeks to examine the poet's treatment of the relationship between man and environment/nature in Shillong. It further looks into the issue of ecological violence and injustice meted out by human beings to nature, thereby causing a serious threat to the ecology of Shillong.

4. **Voices of Resistance: Robin S Ngangom-** This chapter deals with the representation of violence, conflict, corruption and problems of migration in the poems of Robin S. Ngangom. The chapter further shows how the poet has raised his voice against the ongoing problems and conflicts thereby creating history through the medium of his work and how Northeast poetry as represented by Robin often emerges as a diatribe, a tirade.

5. **Poetry and the Representation of Cultural Decay: Temsula Ao-** This chapter attempts to show how Temsula Ao takes upon herself the task of representing cultural death, loss of identity, myth and folklore of Ao community of Nagaland in her poetry which is deeply rooted in her personal experiences.

6. **Conclusion:** This chapter sums up the findings, limitations, contributions, and further scope of this research. It highlights the various issues raised in the above chapters in terms of their relation to the discourse of history. It is hoped that this project has succeeded in some measure in opening up new horizons of interpretation and understanding creating scope for fresher insights into this relatively neglected domain of poetry and contribute to the appreciation of Northeastern poets and their significance in their society and in the world at large.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Poetry is derived from the Greek word *poiesis* which means to make or to create. It is the predecessor of all other literary genres; hence said to be the earliest form of art. It was used as a medium to narrate heroic tales, expressed emotions, feelings, thoughts and ideas in a specific way. Poetry was one among the other important sources of learning during the ancient times, through which stories and fables were recited and passed from one generation to another. From its beginning, it was used to preserve historical events, and the oral stories of the earlier era. The origin of poetry is still debatable and based on various surmises. Therefore, dating the exact time of poetry is difficult as it was transmitted orally in its early phases and was penned down at a very late stage. *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2100 BC) is considered to be an ancient surviving poetical work. The other oldest specimens of ancient poetry are the Indian epics the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*, Greek epic poems the *Illiad* (8th century BC) and the *Odyssey* (8th century BC). The ancient Greeks and Romans who were known for their great epic poetry wrote about gods and goddesses and the heroic deeds of noble people. It is generally assumed that earlier poetry was in the form of hymns and was sung or recited. Religious epic poetry was the hallmark of the early period hence early poetry was recorded prayers and stories on religious and historical subjects. Gradually, it became a literary art and language was used aesthetically. Once the genre of poetry was properly established ancient thinkers questioned its nature and character, which resulted in critical works like Aristotle's *Poetics* (330 BC).

Horace, a Roman poet-critic in his work *Ars Poetica* (19 BC) declared that poetry should be “dulce et utile” or “sweet and useful”. Plato, in his *Republic* (380 BC) deemed poetry as immoral and based it on falsehood and imitation. He considered poetry as non-philosophical, unethical, unpragmatic and “twice removed from reality”. Aristotle agreed with Plato’s idea of poetry as an act of imitation but he did not believe that poetry is “twice removed from reality”. Aristotle compared poetry to history; in chapter nine of the *Poetics*, he wrote, “Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal and history only the particular” (35). According to Aristotle, the difference between history and poetry is that history focuses on the specific and on the particular fact that has happened whereas poetry focuses on what had taken place and what ought to happen, therefore, it has a worldwide appeal. Stephen Gosson in his *School of Abuse*, (1579) attacked poetry as “the mother of lies” which corrupts the mind of the people and hence sheer wastage of time. Philip Sydney defended poetry in his *Apology for Poetry* (1595) stating that poetry is more effective than either history or philosophy in rousing its readers to virtue and virtuous actions. According to him, “poetry is the oldest of all branches of learning. It is superior to philosophy by its charm, to history by its universality, to science by its moral end, and to law by its encouragement of human goodness” (936).

Caedmon, Bede, Alfred the Great and Cynewulf, were the earliest poets, whose names are still known today. During the Medieval times, mainly it was through reading or listening to poetry that men could expand their historical and political knowledge but many works of medieval times still remain anonymous. Poetry developed its proper form after undergoing many evolutionary processes. During these periods numerous forms of

poetry have emerged across time and space. As the time unfolded, poetry spoke of the political, social and economic scenario of the era. In different periods, poets adopted varied themes and modes of expression but their main aim was to reflect, represent and reform the society. Poets then as such had no freedom as their writings were constantly under the scrutiny of the monarchs. Therefore, some poets chose to speak the truth despite the threat and yet some were compelled to write what was demanded of them; hence fictionality was attached to their poems. Some poets chose to record the social, political, and religious tendencies of their time while some represented doubt, faith and despair of their time. Some welcomed the change enthusiastically society was experiencing while some poets lamented about the change. Some poetry was elitist in nature as the poets wrote largely for intellectuals and a learned audience; hence glaringly lacked in mass appeal. They gave importance to fundamentally aesthetic considerations, vivid pictures and minute details of nature. Whichever way they chose to depict, they tried their best to represent the history of their times.

Since time immemorial, history and poetry share a bond and they are complementary to each other. The history of a particular period can often be found in the poetry of the time which makes the two interconnected. A proper knowledge of history of the time and place can help in understanding poetry and reading poetry also helps in comprehending history of a certain period hence they complement each other. Poets are influenced by social, political and economic circumstances of their period. Their surroundings, milieu, history and culture not only shape their poetry but also become important ingredients of their works. Moreover, they make use of allusions to many historical events that have taken place before, thus, understanding history is mandatory in

order to understand poetry. History is essential because the past shapes and guides the present and the roots of the present day predicament could be traced back in history.

The term 'History' is derived from the Greek word *historia* which means inquiry, and knowledge acquired by investigation (Joseph and Janda 163). It is a blanket term that relates to past events, discovery, memory, collection, and interpretation of information about these events. To comprehend the present and move towards the future requires an understanding of the past, and the past is all history, written and interpreted by different writers. Now the question arises, how far history is authentic? Just to read history and say that, what is given is true is incorrect as there are numerous histories written on one subject.

Since the inception of human civilization, poetry often meant imagination with exaggerated words written to flatter, eulogize, motivate and express one's emotions, which is not the case in the recent times. From the dawn of the twentieth century poets have realized that the function of poetry should be much more than presenting what is not. Thus, they started writing on the current situation they were witnessing. That is how poetry of witness was born. In the past poetry did address issues of war and violence but in a very different way. It was a jingoistic representation of an imagined situation and the warrior was rarely the poet. The first hand experience of war and violence was rarely the subject-matter of poetry. As a matter of fact poetry was filled with the glories of war, the heroic acts, and praise for the hero right from the beginning of human civilization but portrayal of stark reality and mirroring of events as they really take place is a recent phenomenon. In short, poetry of witness has an unequivocal social message. It is in this kind of poetry that authentic history lives because the poet writes about what he has

personally gone through and not what he has imagined. This type of poetry emerged during and after the First World War and developed a greater interface with reality and contemporary events, largely dominated by war and its horror. This group of poets by virtue of their affinity to life may be seen as forming a corridor to the more incisive and poignant holocaust and post holocaust poetry of witness to be produced in Europe and certain parts of India like the North-East, which will be taken up at a later stage.

Pain and suffering was reflected in the literature and art during and after the First World War. The War changed the very fabric of writing poetry. Many of the conventions and rules of the earlier poetry were done away with, the previous notion of optimism, glory and power associated with war, was considerably blown up and was replaced by poetry with the motive of representing the stark reality of the time. The then poets grew up in politically and socially unstable environment; hence themes of injustice and war dominated their poetry. War poets like Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, experienced, witnessed and wrote about the incomprehensible horrors of the war. Oxford University English lecturer Dr Stuart Lee said, "The First World War was one of the seminal moments of the twentieth century in which literate soldiers, plunged into inhuman conditions, reacted to their surroundings in poems." (*The Week*) The poets though did not live long endeavoured to bring about global awareness about the war. Their poetry absolutely dismantled the previous idealistic and jingoistic views of war. In retrospect, these writers have initiated the tradition of poetry of witness. The soldier-poets through their words conveyed to the reader their experiences and made them feel as well, their various emotions such as sadness, hurt, wrath, emptiness, distrust, shock, characterizing their poetry. Percy Bysshe

Shelley's idea in his essay "A Defence of Poetry" (1840) that, "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" (63) became irrelevant during this phase. Many war victims who experienced torture, persecution, imprisonment and trauma used poetry to share their memories. John William Streets, an English soldier and poet expresses his inspiration behind writing his poem "A Soldier's Cemetery" (1916) in a letter to the poetry publisher, Galloway Kyle stating that:

They were inspired while I was in the trenches, where I have been so busy I have had little time to polish them. I have tried to picture some thoughts that pass through a man's brain when he dies. I may not see the end of the poems, but I hope to live to do so. We soldiers have our views of life to express, though the boom of death is in our ears. We try to convey something of what we feel in this great conflict to those who think of us, and sometimes, alas! Mourn our loss. (95)

The poets were awake to the reality of the war and about the innocent young men being killed before their lives had barely begun. They remained truthful to their experiences and wrote with a vision, a clear message and an aim to warn and communicate. Many poets did not survive but their work lives on reminding of the gruesome times they lived in. It is through their poetry that one can learn that such occurrences had ever taken place. The aftermath of war altered the world for many years to come and poets responded to the horrors and losses in as many ways as they could come up with. Just months before his death in 1918, English poet Wilfred Owen in the preface to his *The Collected Poems* (1965) famously wrote:

This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds, or lands, or anything about glory, honour, might, majesty,

dominion, or power, except War. Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the pity. Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful (preface).

These lines recapitulate the quintessence of war poetry. Owen chose to speak on the pity rather than the magnificence, power, sacrifice and honor of the war which the previous writers extolled in their works:

As they wrote their historically oriented laments or elegies for those fallen in wars, they sought to comfort and inspire readers by placing the deaths and war itself in the context of sacrifice for a significant cause. But Owen's message for his generation, he said, must be one of warning rather than of consolation....He used an unmitigated realism in his description of events: the true poets must be truthful. (Poetry foundation)

He was trying to warn the readers through his poems. Owen was aware that what the world needed was not hero idolizing but understanding and empathy. He was skeptical about his own generation's ability to come out of trauma that they went through, but he was sure that his works would help the next generation and he was right. Owen kept away from jingoistic representation of earlier poetry like that of Rupert Brooke's sonnet "The Soldier", (1915) where he says, "That there's some corner of a foreign field / that is forever England" (2-3) and focused on representing the reality of the events he had witnessed. Owen message is clear, war is not fun and games with glory awarded to the victors at the end, it is vile by causing man to kill its own kind. He warns reader not to make light of such a topic in his last words of the poem "Dulce et Decorum Est", "My

friend you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The Old Lie : *Dulce et decorum est/ Pro Patria Mori*” (25-28). He has particularly emphasized on stating the fact that there is no nobility or fame in sacrificing one’s life for one’s country because it demolishes human energy, capacity and power which could be use in rather productive way. By writing so he is dismantling the earlier belief that glory lies in war and preventing such occurrence as war and further loss of human potentiality in the future. Owen’s poems are replete with meaninglessness of war, the vulnerability of not only the soldiers, but also the general condition of the men who were involved in the war. War was an eye opener which changed the very visage of poetry and brought about a transformation of the way people looked at it. War was no more a joyful commemoration but an articulation of the bitter reality of the age. Earlier celebration of war and extolling the virtues of heroism and glory were no longer appreciated. In his introduction to *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, (1984) Jon Stallworthy highlighting the emotive faculty of the war poems says:

'Poetry', Wordsworth reminds us, 'is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', and there can be no area of human experience that has generated a wider range of powerful feelings than war: hope and fear; exhilaration and humiliation; hatred-not only for the enemy, but also for generals, politicians, and war-profiteers; love-for fellow soldiers, for women and children left behind, for country (often) and cause (occasionally). (xix)

No longer was the poem fanciful, complicated and ambiguous. It was lucid and to the point as in John McCrae’s “In Flanders fields” (1915):

We are the Dead. Short days ago

We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
 Loved and were loved, and now we lie
 In Flanders fields. (6-9)

According to Carolyn Forché, their poetry is “an attempt to speak for more than one and to engage all others” (34). They wrote it as a tribute to the dead, for the survivors, for the civilians who did not experience, for the reader, for the general public and for the posterity in order to bring general awakening about the brutalities of the war. They wrote to preserve their memories and to give voice to their experiences. Their records are evidence, a legacy and bear the testimony of what has occurred. Many poets did not survive, but their work remains as a witness to the harsh times in which they lived. “Poetry of Witness argues that such poets are a perennial feature of human history, and it presents the best of that tradition, proving that their work ranks alongside the greatest in the language” (Forché 11). Carolyn Forché in her seminal book *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (1993) termed this kind of poetry as “Poetry of Witness”. It is a type of poetry that tries to express human pain and suffering through the medium of words. Simply put, it is a literature of that which happened and presents the struggles of the poets who have lived through and survived extremities such as war, exile, torture, imprisonment. The term “Poetry of Witness” became popular after the publication of Carolyn Forché’s *Against Forgetting: Twentieth -Century Poetry of Witness*, which she perceives as “a symphony of utterances, a living memorial to those who had died and those who survived the horrors of the 20th century” (Ratiner). The companion volume to *Against Forgetting* is *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001* edited by Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu published in 2014. These two

books have brought awareness about Poetry of Witness to the wider audience. Regarding its veracity, Forché in *Against Forgetting* comments:

A poem that calls us from the other side of a situation of extremity cannot be judged by simplistic notions of “accuracy” or “truth to life”. It will have to be judged, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said of confession, “by its consequences, not by our ability to verify its truth”. In fact, the poet might be our only evidence that an event has occurred: it exist for us as the sole trace of an occurrence. As such, there is nothing for us to base the poem on, no independent account that will tell us whether or not we can see a given text as being “objectively” true. Poem as trace, poem as evidence. (31)

These poems were written while the poets were passing through afflictions and present the historical records of the time. In the introduction to *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001* Duncan Wu reveals that, “these poems were composed at an extreme of human endurance, while their authors awaited execution, endured imprisonment, fought on the battlefield, or labored on the brink of breakdown or death; all bear witness to historical event, and the irresistibility of its impact (1). Such emotional turmoil makes a mockery of Walter de la Mare’s earlier belief that “quietness of mind” is necessary for poetic creation. It is a revelation of memory that otherwise might be lost. It preserves the events of an era. It has the capacity to make the reader ponder upon the situation being represented in the poem; hence invites for human bonding, communication and strength. The Shoah or holocaust, testimonial literature and the previous history were actually the inspiration behind this kind of poetry. In 1938, Muriel Rukeyser described the death of over two hundred mining workers from silicosis and

highlighted the importance of witness in her poem *The Book of the Dead*. In 1980, in an essay “El Salvador: An- Aide Memoir” Forché used the term “Poetry of Witness” which appeared in *American Poetry Review* in 1981. Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish poet, delivered a series of lectures at Harvard University on “The Witness of Poetry” in 1982 and published in 1983 as a book entitled *The Witness of Poetry*, after that the term “Poetry of Witness” entered into the dictionary of literary terms. In her essay, “Poetry of Witness” 2011, Forché wrote, “The poem makes present to us the experience of the other, the poem is the experience, rather than a symbolic representation...we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us” (4). Therefore, witness takes place in the reader. The transmission of energy from the poet to the reader happens almost abruptly.

Forché has historicized poetry through her depiction of poets and their poems who have survived the ravages of war. The voice in the witness poetry is not merely the voice of the poet alone, but also of many witnesses who did not dare speak about it. Thus, the poet is sharing the experience of the larger community in which he lived. The poets give importance to the subject and not the style, hence they employ harsh, blunt and vivid language which have the ability to shock and surprise the reader. They stay away from ornate language and other forms of embellishment that would detract them from the subject matter. In his speech at Bremen, Paul Celan, a holocaust survivor, said, “One thing remained attainable, close and unlost amidst all the losses: language. Language was not lost, in spite of all that happened. But it had to go through its own responselessness, go through horrible silences, go through the thousand darkness of death-bringing speech (164). Emanuel Levinas based his notion of witnessing as “the owning of one’s infinite

responsibility for the other” (Creswell). It makes the reader experience the struggles of the poets as though it were readers own experience. According to Forché:

In the poetry of witness, the poem makes present to us, the experience of the other, the poem is the experience, rather than a symbolic representation. When we read the poem as witness, we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us. Language incises the page, wounding it with testimonial presence, and the reader is marked by encounter with that presence.

Witness begets witness. The text we read becomes a living archive. (33)

It appeals for collective resistance and revives general attitude towards the war. And finally leaves the reader in Forché’s words “feeling not less but more human, more aware of the motion of our lives and-though I say it with some sadness-a bit wiser for the journey. (Ratiner)

Poetry undoubtedly is a compound of representation and expression. It creates a powerful impact on the reader by instructing and inspiring them. In a way, in Pablo Neruda’s words, their “Poetry is an act of peace.” War poems are moving account of an event and will not be forgotten in the course of history as they shed light on the madness and cruel reality of war. Reading war poems gives, in the words of Rumi, “the illusion of having had the experience without actually going through it.” It was no longer an expression of the imagination as Percy Bysshe Shelley had defined it but an expression of the inner turmoil caused by outside reality. Poetry as a form of literature is a reflection and representation of the society; hence the poets found poetry a medium to reach a larger audience. Through their poetry they recorded the history of that period. Poetry

once was one of the most significant literary forms that fascinated the broader audience but at present many other genres have flooded the market and publishing a book on poetry has indeed become a challenge. With the changing time poetry is evolving from what it was before, today there are various forms of poetry like digital poetry, slam poetry, performance poetry, transgender poetry, popular poetry etc that cater to worldwide readership of different ages, interest and categories. Internet poetry with its unprecedented accessibility has gained rapid global readership. Sharing of ideas and opinions has never been so effortless. Getting varied commentaries and opinion, both constructive and critical is easy as in the present day audience online is much larger. Linda Ashok poet and founder of the RaedLeaf Foundation for Poetry and Allied Arts stated, “it is the time of the internet poetry, although it is transient in nature but it brings world closer to the reader. What is undeniable though is its incredible reach. It brings Nagaland closer to Norway.” (Ghoshal)

While tracing the growth and development of poetry it becomes evident that poetry has undergone a sea change since its inception. From being jingoistic about war heroes to giving importance to morality, logic, feeling, nature and ultimately to arrive at the reality indeed took eons. As the poetry evolved over time so the definition of poetry differed from time to time. It is the time period and events that defines the poetry. Poetry acquired a different flavour as writers became acutely conscious of what they were representing. To be able to portray reality as it is, requires immense grit and determination. It was possible in the previous era to communicate the corruption and nefarious activities of the monarch but poets were frightened to go against them. It was also possible to display the reality of French Revolution but the English Romantic poets

escaped and returned to nature in order to save themselves from further distress. They were only jubilant when French Revolution proffered hope initially but when the situation turned grim they became disillusioned as well. Poetry could have become history but they did not represent the prevailing issues that remained unaddressed. Their imagination gained precedence over reality that in turn got diluted. Poetic representation changes according to the social changes of the era. Here, for the first time the fictionality of poetry represented by the writers so far was questioned and it drew many detractors. In the light of changing scenario they re-invented themselves in conformity with the need of the society and with the changing reality. Slowly element of historicity began to be realized in the domain of poetry. Poetry previously was antithetical to history but now it became history.

History as its definition goes by is knowledge acquired through extensive investigation, discovery, memory and collection. It is an account of the origin, development, milieu and significant events of a particular period. It recaptures the memory of the past. The Greeks considered history as guide to direct them to their future course of actions. Earlier history merely recorded the great events in the lives of important people. The historian of that period laid emphasis on the political events to the neglect of the equally important socio-cultural issues of the time. Thus Voltaire wrote, "All our ancient history is no more than accepted fiction". Comprehending the present requires an understanding of the past, and the past is all history, written and interpreted by different historians. Now the question arises, how far history is authentic? Just to read history and say that, what is given is true is incorrect as there are numerous histories written on the same subject. According to EH Carr, "History means interpretation. He

argues that historians arbitrarily determine which of the facts of the past to turn into his facts according to their own biases and agenda. It was impossible to write an objective history because all historical facts were themselves subjective” (42). Now the discipline of history is being questioned and it is gaining a different perspective. Since the commencement of history as an academic subject, the technique of writing history has changed to a greater extent. In the article “Postmodernist Approach to History” (2007), Yilmaz observes:

Historiography has become more pluralistic today than it had ever been. Present day history is characterized by particularities and divergences. The kind of history we have today is the one with “the multiplicity of versions competing for attention and emphasizing alternatively elites or non elites, men or women, whites or nonwhites. (4)

At present with the development of mass media, the proliferation of the sources of information have changed the way history is written and researched. With so many sources available finding accuracy has been difficult and often misleading. Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, (1817) chapter xiv on History says: “I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention” (87). Study of history combines historical facts and the historians’ interpretation of those facts. Nineteenth century German historian Leopold Von Ranke once stated that the work of a historian is to find out what really occurred. However, in most instances, historians write about events at which they were not present but heard, read and assumed. Oscar Handlin in his book *Truth in History* (1979) says:

We can never be certain that we have recaptured (the past) as it really was. But the least we can do is to stay within the evidence. History does not recreate the past. The historian does not recapture the bygone event. No amount of imagination will enable the scholar to describe exactly what happened to Caesar in the Senate. History deals only with evidence from the past, with the residues of bygone events. (412)

The first law for the historian, Cicero had written “is never to dare utter an untruth and the second, never to suppress anything true” (Handlin 414). But what the historian really does depends on his ideology, intention, assumptions, world views, belief systems, personal orientation and academic trainings. He selects and arranges the materials appropriately as per his requirements and presents it to the readers; in fact it is he who decides to give the facts its place, order and context. All historical judgments vary from person to person and there is no objective historical truth. In the present time where choices are in abundance, verifying the authenticity of the work has become complex. Although, great events and significant figures help to shape history but eventually it is the historian who make history.

Leopold Von Ranke, a German historian “methodology was based on classical philology with its maxim: check the source for trustworthiness and against its own context” (Breisach 233). He believed that if history was to be written in a dispassionate and objective way, it would have been authentic. Ranke claimed, “historians should not take sides, nor should they seek to make propaganda out of the past; their task was essentially one of reconstruction” (Yilmaz 9). It is the strength of these claims that made history become an academic discipline in its own right. Rankeans approach was to

explain the past “the way it was” without any judgment. Some Rankeans or the classical historicist believed that if history can be written the way it is then it has truth. Geoffrey Elton, a British historian argued that the truth of the past exists in materials of various kinds and that historical evidence is not created by the historian.

For Carr history gets reflected through the minds of the historians, it is biased because they select it. With the onset of postmodernism the method of writing history has been challenged. Postmodernists advocate the view that history is what historian makes of it hence, they seek for testimony before believing history. They are less interested in the past and for them past is only a medium to comprehend the present. Understanding past has become a challenge as there are different versions of history for the same period. Instead of relying on history fabricated by the historian, they believe that the reader should come out with his own interpretation without believing in any particular version. Postmodernists believed that it is impossible to capture the past in its entirety. Keith Jenkins a major advocate of post modernism argues that “traditional academic history is just a representation of bourgeoisie ideology.” He further said in “What is History?” “Objectivity is impossible to achieve in the study of history, as actual past has gone and creating history in present means content is as much invented as found. It is impossible for historian to remove his or her preconceived ideas and personal motives to write history in an objective way. (Kundra)

At present the study of history, authenticity of historical materials has been increasingly challenged. Postmodernist thinkers prompted historians to reconsider their ways of writing history. If history is perceived as biased then the reader should construct his own historical understanding of the past choosing from various sources available.

Since the 1970s the question of historical truth has been debated. Many scholars however have been critical of the postmodernist view of history, at the same time several scholars have appreciated their views for exposing the limitations and allowing historians to look at writing history through objective lens. The debate among the historians still persists as they do not seem to agree with each other. There is more freedom of choice today to question and find truth than ever has been before. At present, the invention of technology has made the availability of every form of historical sources easy. Hence, History could be documented the way event happens rather than writing after several years of actual occurrences.

It is believed that the first historians had been poets because they had a combined duty of both poet and a historian. Ancient poetry was used in the writing of history and was accepted unquestioningly. Thus, the connection between history and poetry is very old and cannot be ignored. Thomas Warton in the *Observations on the Fairie Queene* (1754) said, “They preserve many curious historical facts, and throw considerable light on the nature of the feudal system. They are the pictures of ancient usages and customs; and represent the manners, genius, and character of our ancestors.” (259)

In recent times people have realized that history cannot reflect the era in its entirety and is not always reliable because it is an account prepared by the historian with a certain degree of subjectivity and an ideological leaning. They are also aware that history is heavily agenda laden and hence as a source of knowledge it has become questionable. Ironically, objective verifiable truth can be found in a significant body of contemporary poetry. In this regard, Plato was right when he said, “Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history.” History can be altered and manipulated but history found in

poetry cannot be diluted. History reflects the past and poetry reflects the history of the given period. The paradox is that poetry is considered as a product of imagination and history is regarded as an absolute truth. History and poetry are interconnected. In the article, “The Battle of Aughrim: History and Poetry” JG Simms remarks:

For both historian and poet, the battle is more than the firing of guns and the slaughter of men; for both it is a conflict of ideas and interests, religious fervour and pride of race, the possession of houses and lands, continuity with the past and anxiety for the future. But the treatment is different. The prosaic narrative of the historian sets out the issues in as orderly a way as possible in an attempt to impose form on the formless. The poet is not bound by documents or rules of space and time; he is freer to make use of traditions, other men's songs or his own fancy. But he has also familiarised himself with the documents that the historian has used, such as contemporary narratives or correspondence, and he has read the writings of successive historians. His poem has echoes of phrases quoted or used in past narratives. Familiarity with the history adds to the pleasure of those who read the poem and savour the allusions. (41)

Thus, the poet could not have written as he has done without the work of the historian. His creativity and ideas have emanated from various sources like observing the events around, reading and researching, from the literature, folklores, cultures, traditions and customs. He also speculates about the naïve people who equally had to pass through cruelty and projects them without judging. In the present age where choices abound finding truth has become a challenge thus, in order to get a closer look at the reality it is

better to read the text of the writers who were present while writing, rather than blindly relying on the materials of the past.

As in western poetry, considerable element of historicity is visible in the works of modern Indian English-language poetry. Indian poetry shares similar history with English poetry in terms of its origin in religious hymns. Nevertheless, it has gradually evolved with themes of several kinds, encompassing diverse historical events that shaped Indian poetry into what it is today. Initially, while poetry in England was flourishing and acquiring new modes and techniques, Indian English poets in the pre-independence phase were writing in an idiom that was highly influenced by British Romantic and Victorian poets. Hence, the Indian touch seems to be missing in the poetry of this phase. Factors like culture, environment, tradition, and struggle for independence were responsible for the growth and development of Indian English poetry. Poetry is an integral part of Indian English Literature. Initially, it was through poetry that Indian English literature was globally recognized. In accordance with India's diversity Indian English Poetry is also multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-regional. One of the formidable regions of India that has yielded a rich harvest of literature in general and poetry in particular is North-East India with its high bio-cultural and ethnic diversity. The diverse cultures, traditions, history, languages, in the region have abundantly contributed to its enrichment.

As is popularly known, after the independence India was divided into several states and at present it is a country of twenty-nine states. Most of the major Indian cities are well known to everyone but regions of North-East are hardly heard of or in many ways ignored. Often it is stereotyped as conflict zone, war zone and tribal areas and many

are still unsure about its existence. The emerging literature from North-East is still assumed to be replete with violence, bloodshed and conflicts unaware of the fact that the region has already contributed a substantial body of literary works. North-East part of India is neither developed nor it is underdeveloped but it is gradually progressing towards growth and development. Many assumptions from outside the region are still such that the North-East poetry is replete with bloodshed, conflict and violence even after publication of considerable amount of work from the region experimenting different ways yet rooted in contemporary reality. Violence is used by the poets only as a response to their surroundings.

The North-East is an umbrella term used by the rest of the world to describe the seven states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. In the year 2003, the state of Sikkim has also been added by North Eastern Council, making it eight states of North-East. It shares border with Bangladesh, China and Bhutan. These states have different cultural heritages and are dissimilar in several ways. There are few common issues that link the poetry of these states. They follow their own unique traditions and have their own different ways of life. North-East India is under represented in many ways. There are poets who are being recognized globally and there are still so many whose works have not seen the light of the day. Their works mostly in the form of poetry speaks volumes about the various contemporary issues of their place. They are the observers and a witness of the situation and they depict it in their poems. All the troubles in the region have given birth to a body of writing which is absolutely different from mainstream India. According to Tillotama

Misra in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays* (2011):

The modern poetry exhibits a rootedness in the lived experience of the people and depicts certain enduring truths. They are the children of the violence. Many of them have grown up in close contact with people who have memories of the partition of the subcontinent and its tragic after effects in the North-East. Others have experienced at closed quarters the violence associated with the insurgent movements in different parts of the region that have changed the very character of the societies in many ways. Still others, including the large influential group of younger writers, are living through the traumatic experience of those daily incidents of violence that disturb the seemingly idyllic surroundings of the region and leave a deep scar on the sensitive mind. (xxx)

Till several years ago their works were unacknowledged but at present they are widely recognized. In an interview with *The Times of India*, Easterine Kire reveals that:

Because of the politics of publishing-for many years, the media presented us as the region of conflict. Ordinary life was not valued. We became defined by the conflict. The people and their lives are interesting ...there are people whose stories need to be heard but the big Indian publishing houses don't think the North-East will sell. For many years, they didn't want to publish books from the North-East. (Arora)

Modern North-East Indian poetry possesses a strong element of historicity. Authentic history lies in their poetry as they have firsthand experience. Their poetry has become a source of unalterable facts. The burning issue of their time has propelled them to pen

witness poetry. They feel that they have an obligation to write about the crucial contemporary happenings of their region. They celebrate common people whose voices have faded into oblivion and were so far pushed into the periphery. Their idea is to represent the voice of the voiceless and the least regarded. Their poetry is reflective as their instinct is more involved than intellect. They prefer identification with the subject of their poetry.

Witness poetry emerged and gathered currency in the North-Eastern part of India from 1980s onward. The distinctive feature of North-Eastern state is its poetry and their uniqueness lies in the true representation of contemporary events and problems like ecological degradation, corruption, loss of identity and cultural values, conflict, migration and violence. Their writings are very simple and present the issues as they occur. In the Editors' Note to the *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the North-East* (2003), Robin S. Ngangom and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih have argued that:

The expressive concerns of the writer from the North-East cannot be the same as that of a writer from elsewhere in India. The writer from the North-East differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but perforce master the art of witness. (ix)

Poets from the North-East like Robin S Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire, Mona Zote, Desmond Kharmaphwlang, Mamang Dai, Chandrakanta Murasingh and host of other poets write what they encounter. Although they hail from different states of North-East India, and their agendas vary, one thing they stick to is

writing what they have witnessed. Most of their poems seem like prose written with absolute clarity and free from any kind of ambiguity so that the message to the reader is not lost or diluted. To the natives of the North-East there is history behind every sphere of the natural world. Thus, a keen sense of history characterizes their collective consciousness. Although the writers from this region have produced a commendable body of literature that includes most of the literary forms in the last few decades it is poetry that has remained most faithful to the contemporary changing reality and stood out as a true historical narrative. Genres like short stories and novels though very rich often lose sight of the historical reality. Most of them write in regional languages and these writings are being recently translated into English.

Since the poets in question write about terrorism, ethnic clashes, insurgency, human rights abuses, environmental and ecological concerns, erosion of tribal values, displacement and the corruption their work has a distinct identity within Indian English poetry. They declare in various interviews that they write to inform and their writings are inspired by the events happenings around them. Given this, there is only one conclusion that one may draw from the above discussion and that is their poetry with its documentary and evidentiary nature is history. When a poem depicts an event without exaggerating or delimiting it and with a sole aim of recording and spreading the message, it can be called history and the approach becomes pragmatic. The word pragmatic is derived from the Greek word “pragma” which means action or deed. The Greek historian Polybius called his writings pragmatic by which he meant that his writings were created to be instructive and useful to the readers. In common parlance pragmatist is viewed as a person who is result oriented and very sharp in finding solution to problems despite many

hindrances. Some defines pragmatic as realistic, practical and far sighted. The term usage varies according to the context it is used in.

Primarily, Pragmatic criticism shares the view that literature has the capacity for healing and puts emphasis on the reader's response to the work. It perceives the literary work as something that is constructed in order to achieve positive and moral impact on the audience, reader and society. Pragmatic critic judges the value of the work according to its success in achieving the aim. They believe that the chief motive of an art is social in nature and an art houses the potential in bringing individual as well as communal changes. Hence, an artist creates his work in accordance with the changes and requirements needed in the society. Philip Sidney, a Renaissance critic, described literature as a powerful tool having an immense capacity for doing good in the society. He opined that poetry has a purpose to achieve certain effects on an audience and good poets are those who write both to delight, teach and to improve. The pragmatists believe in the enrichment of ideas through experience and human knowledge. Hence, this research becomes pragmatic by bringing to light the fundamentally melioristic agenda of the poets of the region under consideration. As part of this teleological enterprise, the research has sought to evince poetry's interface with history, which is identified and presented as its intrinsic property.

Research problem

The vast corpus of North-East Indian poetry in English and in English translation is comparatively less explored, questionably camouflaged by mainstream Indian English poets. Their anthologisation is a recent phenomenon—mainly late 20th century and post-

20th century. Poetry is the forte of the region but still it is not adequately figuring on the Indian literary map and attracting very little research in the area. Poetry and history have been held in antithesis in spite of the ontological shift in the poetic domain and the ever broadening thematic spectrum of poetry with its more pronounced interface with history in the contemporary times in North-East India as well as other parts of the globe.

Research Statement

Inherent in the traditionally held mimetic and representational view of poetry is its fictionality, an attribute, which has largely been a cause of its rejection at the various stages of its development by its detractors. The present research questions this myth of fictionality of poetry by focusing on the historically rooted English-language poetry of North-East India, thereby showing that poetry can also be read as history and a considerable bulk of poetry in general and North-East Indian English-language poetry in particular, carries in it the history of its place and time. This historicity is a defining quality of the poetry of witness, a major sub-genre of contemporary poetry and it is against this backdrop that the three selected poets are examined in the present research. The study is pragmatic as it is end-driven avoiding mechanical adherence to any particular literary theory and the end being the history imbedded in the poems of these poets.

Research Questions

The thesis has raised and tried to answer some of the following research questions:

- How can poetry have historicity in it and in what way poetry can be history?

- Can the assumed objectivity of history be reconciled with the subjectivity of poetry?
- How are history and poetry interconnected?
- What purpose does a pragmatic study of North-East poetry can serve?
- Can any particular school of criticism or theory do justice to this huge corpus of North-East poetry?
- Can poetry be seen as an alternative history? If so, what is the nature of history embedded in this kind of poetry? In what way Poetry of Witness is a faithful record of events?
- Is aestheticism completely alien to the Poetry of Witness of the North-East?

Aims and Objectives

Some of the aims and objectives of this research are as follows:

- To probe into the diverse forms of existing contemporary issues represented by the North-Eastern writers in their poetry.
- To analyze and examine how the poetry of the region emerges to become its history.
- To focus on the three representative poets of North-East Indian like Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Robin S Ngangom and Temsula Ao with a view to demonstrating how they have mastered the art of witness becoming thereby the recorders of history of the place and time.

- To examine the mode of poetic representation of contemporary events- Insurgency, violence, terrorism, and the poets' negotiations with the socio-political issues confronting them.
- To establish the notion of history as a record of objective and empirically verifiable events witnessed by the poets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical material on North-East Poetry is scarce barring some meagre published articles by the poets as well as by some scholars. First and foremost, Carolyn Forché's *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness* (1993), has brought general awareness among the reading public about the term "Poetry of Witness". This book contains the intense poems of nearly 150 poets that paint the picture of different wars that had taken place earlier. All poems are marked by historical event and bear testimony to the times they have lived. She highlights the importance of recalling those forgotten disaster, woes and sorrows of mankind during the war so to further prevent it. It is in a way, poetry of commitment, poetry of responsibility that the poet undertakes in order to share among the readers and to bring awakening and transformation in their thinking about the brutal realities of war. Similarly, Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu's edited book *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English Poetry, 1500-2001* (2014) contains 300 poems of the poets whose lives had been scarred by the marks of the historical events and reintroduces them who were absolutely ignored. It attempts to share the experience of the previous poets such as John Donne, John Milton, William Wordsworth, John Keats and re-investigate their works in a different light. It suggest that witness among the poets had been the prime motive behind their writings but was never as strong and articulated as it

is in the twentieth century. This anthology contains the work of poets who had been a witness to the stark reality of their time.

Mark Bender in his research article “Ethnographic Poetry in North-East India and Southwest China” (2012) reveals the threat of globalization and modernization on the culture of the natives. He talks about the poets and their use of folklores in the context of the effect of modernization and globalization in their region. Whereas he finds similarity in the way poets have represented the common effects of globalization in Southwest China and in North-East India but their experiences differ in the way they represent them from their context, milieu, location, experiences. They are successful in writing modern poetry with particular emphasis on the themes from the past. Likewise, Ananya S Guha in his article “Violence to Peace: Story of Contemporary North-East Indian Literature” writes about how stereotyping the themes of violence alone on the poetry of North-East India is an injustice to the emerging body of work that are replete with themes of various kinds and issues that are prevalent in the region. Due to limited understanding of the people outside the region the very thought that often hover around their mind when it comes to the poetry of North-East is violence and conflict ridden poetry. But a closer look will reveal that it is a poetry marked by the events of the poet’s times. Introducing briefly many poets from the North-East such as Robin, Kynpham, Temsula, Easterine, Nini etc he says how they have been the witnessed to the particular issues encompassing their region and the same has been depicted by them in their poetry. He further says that there is also an argument that the poets from the North-East often go back to the past which is true but they are doing so to remind the people from their respective regions about their history and strengthening bond among them. In the same vein, Saikat Guha

paper on “Quest for another New Literature: Poetic Contours of North-East India” (2015) talks about the emergence of a new literature in North-East India that gave more importance to the voice of subdued and marginalized. He also writes about the advent of British and Christian missionaries into the North-East regions, and the result was subsequent abandonment of primitive faith by the natives. Further he speaks about the onset of resistant movement and the emergence of protest culture and various insurgents in the North-East after its assimilation to India.

Monalisa Changkija “Finding our Lives” asserts that how women in North-East India are emerging as reputed writers after all they are highly educated and have many things to share with the readers. Once due to patriarchal society they were not given education and had hard lives, now when they got education they strived harder to occupy some space and share their wisdom to their daughters so that they don’t have to share similar fate. They not only depict about being them as a victim of violence in their writings but also their joys and sorrows, follies and foibles, victory and failure. Writing provides them the necessary platforms to be themselves, sometimes laugh at themselves and share issues that are of universal relevance.

Prasanta Das’s essay on “Indian English Writing from the North-East” speaks on how North-East region is homogenized and stereotyped by the people from outside the region, it is looked up to as an insurgent land, land of primitive colorful tribes and green beauty. Making several references from both the Indian poets and North-East writers he further shows how the themes they have chosen makes them distinct in several aspects. They have already created a distinct niche in the history of North-East Literature with their literary versatility. The future of North-East writings in their hands as well as many

of the emerging young budding writers certainly deserves a closer look than what it is represented at the surface level. Besides, his article on “Waiting to be Taken Onboard: The Poetry of Robin Ngangom, Desmond Kharmaphwlang, and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih” explains how these poets not only employ single themes but multiple themes taking into considerations the contemporary issues of their times. They are bitterly critical about their people and their deeds. The motive behind writing appears to be a deep seated desire for communication directly rather than being represented by the poets from other nation state. They write on behalf of their people the troubled situation, impact of the rampant development on the environment, the effect of colonialism on their life and land is reflected in their poetry. Kharmaphwlang resents the fact that second conquest took place in the form of merger of Shillong with India in 1972 and it is just assimilation and not integration. He feels that these poets although very popular in their states are not included in the anthology published in India by Bombay Poets; hopefully future anthologist of Indian English poetry may consider their names and works. Furthermore, Aneesa Mushtaq “Being at Periphery: Literature as a Tool in Bringing the Fringe to Center” (2018) highlights how the poets from the region write so to bring their community to the center, to connect people from different regions and find out their commonalities. Many voices from the region are yet to be heard so the poets write in order to be heard and also to bring forth the real experiences of the people to the center. In addition, Pramod Nayar’s essay “The Postcolonial Picturesque: The Poetry of North-East India” (2008) discusses the picturesque aesthetics about North-East Indian poetry where beauty and harmony shifts from aesthetics of suffering and decay. He says it is only through finding contradictions between these two that the poetry of North-East

could be really appreciated. The poets from the region manage to convey the depth and unique aesthetics of North-East India. Next, Soibam Haripriya's "What Good is Poetry in Desolate Times" says when history was denied to the natives they embraced mythology fiercely making and adhering every aspect of it. She explores tension between the personal professional poetry and ethnographic writers of majority community representing the lives of their communities in particular and region in general. Moreover, KB Veio Pou's article "Contesting Marginality: Literature and the Dissenting Voices from the North-East of India" (2017) explores the literature from the region which has given voice to the voiceless. The literature from the region speaks about the marginalization of the people in the hill and protests against the social ills that have affected the harmony of communities. Their stories have been narrated through poetry so that it would not be forgotten. While talking about the violence the poets do not keep aside the theme of beauty of nature. Their writing is not only a creative art but also defiance and an assertion rooted in their culture.

Robin Ngangom's in his essay "Poetry in the time of Terror" (2005) gives vent to his pent up feelings and restlessness growing inside him and his poetry as an outlet to convey his desperate desire to be heard, accepted and understood. He says he has always tried his best to speak about the terrible things that are happening in Manipur. He confesses that the writers from North-East cannot afford to indulge in wooly aesthetics when terrible incidents are taking place. Refusing to lie about what they have witnessed and the resistance to oppression are the main characteristic features of their work. Ngangom believes that poetry should transform a reader and it should comfort and heal them. In the same way, Kynpham Sing Nonkynrih's "The Writer and the Community: A

Case for Literary Ambidexterity” (2003) says that he believes in witnessing and representing. The role of the poet he believes should be that of a chronicler. He says how he has tried to capture the changing realities of his time, cultures and issues and how he wishes to address his people directly about migrants, terrorism, loss of roots and identity, importance of observing festivals, following the wisdom of their ancestors and learning a lesson from myths and legends, importance of translating the works into language of interaction and to know to write in their respective mother tongue so to perpetuate its bond.

Research Gap

The research articles discussed in the above literature review dwell upon different aspects of poetry from North-East India in English but none of the authors have taken the issue of history and historicity attached to the poetry of the region, the fact that the poetry of the North-East to a large extent can be seen as a record of historical events shaping the poetic sensibility, is glaringly absent from these writings and it is this lacuna in research which may be identified as clear research gap in the field which has necessitated the present research and my topic on poetry as history stems from this conspicuous lacuna.

Scope of the Study

This dissertation will not attempt an exhaustive study of all the North-Eastern poets in English but will limit itself to those poets who can be considered relevant in terms of themes from the perspective of contemporary issues and seem deserving of critical consideration. I intend to discuss and evaluate only some selected poems of some selected poets which will reveal new possibilities in the North-Eastern English-Language

poetry while keeping in mind their thematic and stylistic variations. Attempts will be made, as stated above, to examine selected poems rather than other genres for two reasons: first, a major portion of North-Eastern poetry comes under the category of poetry of witness which provides adequate platform for discussion; and second, the poems realistically reflect people's life and history which makes the study worthy of attention.

Methodology: The methodology adopted in this study is qualitative and interpretative with recourse to critical pluralism.

Chapter Division

The present study shall be carried out in six chapters which are as follows:

1. Introduction

The introductory first chapters casts a cursory glance at the English as well as Indian national scenario of poetry and see how it has changed over the passage of time from being so subjective and fictional, to objective and pragmatic. It introduces the term "Poetry of Witness" and its influence on the works of North-Eastern writers. It further introduces the concept of history and its significance for the North-Eastern poetry.

2. Colonisers, Christian Missionaries and the North-East People

This chapter seeks to discuss and explore further the relationship between colonisers, missionaries and North-East people. It attempts to delve into the manner in which the tribal people of the region were affected by the process of colonisation.

3. Poetry and Ecology: Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

The third chapter of the thesis focuses on ecological concerns as represented in the poems of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. It seeks to examine the poet's treatment of the relationship between man and environment/nature in Shillong. It further looks into the issue of ecological violence and injustice meted out by human beings to nature, thereby causing a serious threat to the ecology of Shillong.

4. Voices of Resistance: Robin S Ngangom

This chapter focuses on the representation of violence, conflict, corruption and problems of migration in the poems of Robin S. Ngangom. The chapter further shows how the poet has raised his voice against the ongoing problems and conflicts thereby creating history through the medium of his work.

5. Poetry and the Representation of Cultural Decay: Temsula Ao

This chapter attempts to show how Temsula Ao takes upon herself the task of representing cultural death, loss of identity, myth and folklore of Ao community of Nagaland in her poetry which is deeply rooted in her personal experiences.

6. Conclusion

This chapter sums up the findings of this research. It highlights the various issues raised in the above chapters in terms of their relation to the discourse of history. It is hoped that this project has succeeded in some measure in opening up new horizons of interpretation and understanding creating scope for fresher insights into this relatively neglected domain of poetry and contribute to the appreciation of North-Eastern writers and their significance in their society and in the world at large.

CHAPTER II

Colonisers, Christian Missionaries and the North-East People

This chapter briefly introduces the history of the entry of the British and missionaries into the North-East India, their subsequent colonisation, missions and activities that had both positive and negative impact on the North-East tribes. The chapter further explores the relationship between the colonisers, missionaries and the North-East people in order to see how the North-East people were affected by the process of colonisation. The chapter also seeks to find out the reason behind rapid increase in conversion despite the general belief of negative impact that Christianity has brought about. The idea behind introducing the history of the colonisers and the missionaries is to examine their various activities that have led to the present day issues in the regions which are analyzed in the subsequent chapters. It is in this history that the poetry of the region lies deeply embedded.

After the discovery of sea route in 1498 by a Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama, it became accessible for other Europeans such as the Dutch, the Danes, the French and the English to set foot on Indian soil. The era of British colonialism in India began in 1600 AD when British East India Company entered the trade with India. As is popularly known, initially their motive was merely trade but very soon it was replaced by motive of economic exploitation and territorial expansion. They influenced and exploited the economic, social and political fabric of the country. Right from their arrival in 1600 to the point of their departure in 1947, they left no stone unturned to perform their best in trading, administering, ruling, dominating and exploiting the country resources. They were daedal in manipulating various Indian rulers and in short span of time became their

rulers. Their strategy of divide and rule created conflict among Indians. In 1844, English became an official language and Indians with knowledge of the language were preferred for employment. They introduced western education in India which influenced Indian society in an unprecedented way. It made a tremendous impact on Indians and instilled in them nationalistic fervor. Theories of philosophers like John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith, Voltaire and the notions of freedom, liberty, equality and democracy inspired the educated Indians. As a result of exposure to those ideas and learning educated Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy recognised the need for a change and worked towards eradicating social ills of the society. With his initiatives and with the effort of other compatriots, Sati was made illegal, slavery was banned, child marriage was abolished, widow remarriage was introduced, polygamy eradicated, child sacrifice at the altar prohibited, female infanticide and untouchability to a certain extent ceased. The Indian civil service was started during the reign of British and the present Indian Administrative System is their legacy. They improved roads, introduced steamships, railways, telegraph, and postal system. Books, journals and newspapers were made available and widely circulated. The improvement in various forms of communication helped to develop a sense of unity among Indians. Modern India with its present federal structure is fundamentally post independence reality.

Just as many parts of India in the pre-colonial period were ruled by its own kings and chiefs so was the North-East India. Prominent among them were the Ahoms and Koch kings who administered most of the parts of Assam. Initially, British overlooked North-Eastern part of India because they thought that the place would not serve their economic interest due to heavy economic costs, inhospitable locations, and geographical

condition. Soon, they discovered that the region was rich in natural resources like tea, coal and petroleum. These discoveries boosted their commercial interest in the region.

When the first missionary sought for permission to the British East India Company for propagating Christianity, they were not given permission on the ground that Indians were civilised and religious enough and did not need the help of any foreign missionaries. But with their persistent attitudes the missionary succeeded in convincing the British of the need for their purported proselytisation. Besides, they reiterated that it would be an added advantage to the already stabled British Empire as the support from the missionaries would assist them to further strengthen it. Eventually, the Charter Act of 1813 permitted the missionaries to propagate their faith as well as English language. With the expansion of British Empire missionaries began to arrive and Christianity began to spread by establishing churches in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Thenceforth, came to exist a renewed cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power in aiding each other in their respective missions.

Historically, the areas in the North-East region came under the British rule much later than the other parts of the country. By 1230, Ahoms, 'a tribe of Tibeto Burmese race from central Asia' began to invade the region, assimilated the native cultures and gradually controlled Assam. However, in the 18th century their rule declined due to constant attack from Burma and in 1818 disturbed by the attack, Ahom king Gaurinath Singh requested the British to assist him in resolving the political conflicts. British responded to his plea, fought and subdued the Burmese armies and helped Gaurinath regain the throne. The war ended with the signing of Treaty of Yandabo by which the Burmese consented to leave Assam. As a token of gratitude, the Ahom king gave a part

of the territory to the British East India Company as a gift which marked the formal beginning of the British rule in North-East India. The Treaty of Yandabo, was a peace treaty signed between General sir Archibald Campbell on the British side, and the Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin from the Burmese side on 24 February 1826 which ended the First Anglo-Burmese War. The time followed by the signing of the treaty ushered a major change in the lives of the North-East people. Gradually, the entire region fell under the administrative control of the British thereby leading to many economic, social and cultural transformations in the region. Due to their growing interest in trade in the region they adopted the policy of Better Government of India Act in 1858. This act introduced British governance over all regions of India so far ruled by the East India Company. British encouraged large number of migration from other parts of India into Assam for their expanding tea and mining industries. Therefore, taking the migration opportunity many Bengali, Bihari, Muslim and Nepali migrants infiltrated the region to work as laborers. Later, many labourers from other parts both from across the border as well as from the neighboring states illegally migrated into Assam thereby altering the demographic and ethnic structure of the region. In addition to that, they also hired a large number of Bengalis to assist them administer the region. Besides English, in 1836 Bengali became the administrative language in Assam.

The British introduced the Waste Land Regulation and imposed higher land revenues in order to obtain extra lands for their trade and industry which led to the impoverishment of the local farmers. Further, the establishment of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 restricted the entry of all non-tribal people into these areas except by a permit. This led to the division of the region into two areas, the excluded and the non-

excluded areas which further isolated the region from the rest of the country. Once again they adopted the policy of 'divide and rule' in the North-East to safeguard their interests by separating the hills and the plains communities apart. Subsequently, the introduction of The Government of India Act 1919 pronounced the hill areas as 'backward zone' and The Government of India Act 1935 as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded areas'. All these phrases introduced by the British such as excluded, partially excluded, segregated, isolated also has to an extent made the natives feel different and alienated from the other parts of India. The various policies adopted by the British were for their administrative conveniences, and to protect their economic and territorial interest. However, it had an adverse impact on the development of the tribal communities and their indigenous social and political set up. This policy of seclusion based on ethnicity and areas later became the cause for the ethnic politics in the region and inhibited the natives' growth and progress which led them to remain in underdevelopment, backwardness and ignorance for a very long time. Once the policy was strengthened they encouraged the Christian missionaries to carry out their mission activities among the upland communities. They had their selfish interest in promoting the growth of Christianity as much as possible throughout India. The exclusion policy did not apply to Christian Missionaries as they were not debarred from entering and undertaking religious conversions almost anywhere. This indicates the fact that the British motive in the hills was not the security of the tribal communities but to strengthen their territorial interest with the help of Christianised communities. They also believed that, "*Every additional Indian Christian is an additional bond of union and a source of strength to the British Empire.*" (Rajkumar 102)

One among the several reasons for adopting Christianity by the tribal communities in the North-East is said to be due to earlier Hinduism discrimination towards the region's upland tribal communities. In a way the communities embraced Christianity to strengthen their tribal identity which was facing a threat and also as a revenge against Hinduism discriminatory practices towards them.

Before the advent of Christian Missionaries, the natives believed in spirits, sacrifices, rituals of their own animistic and mythical traditions. They worshipped ancestors and forefathers and had the greatest reverence for them. Till 13th century they lived in their own world without much interference from the outside world. There were frequent raiding, feud and warfare among the hilly tribes and the plain people but they amicably solved with their law of the land. As stated earlier, British marked their beginning in the North-East region after the treaty of Yandabo in 1826. Then, the entire hill was a part of Assam. Gradually, they expanded their territory and the Ahom kingdom came into the East India Company's possession in 1826, Cachar in 1830, Khasi hills were annexed in January 1833 and Jaintia Hills in 1835, Mikir hills in 1838, North Cachar in 1854. Garo hills and Lushai hills in 1892, 1872-73 and 1890. And ultimately Naga hills in 1877. Thus, the whole region came under British administrative control on 20 February 1887. This entire region was never in its previous history ruled by a single king or chief, only the British brought it under one administration. Therefore, the history of Christian activities in North-East India began full-fledged with this British rule.

According to 2011 census, Christianity is India's third largest religion with maximum population in Goa, Kerala, the Konkan Coast, Nagaland, Misoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. The North-East has highest Christian population in

India. Out of 2.78 crore Christians counted in 2011, 78 lakh Christians are in the North-East. As per the 2011 census, the Christian populations in the North-East are Arunachal Pradesh 30.26 percent, Assam 3.74 percent, Manipur 91.62 percent, Misoram 87.16 percent, Meghalaya 74.59 percent, Nagaland 87.93 percent, Sikkim 9.91 percent and Tripura 4.35 percent. Unlike other regions of India, the spread of Christianity in the North-East occurred mainly in the 20th century. The arrival of Christian missionaries and the spread of Christianity introduced new religion and brought profound changes in the lives of the people through their various activities. Christianity transformed social, cultural lives of the tribal communities and replaced tribal traditional value with the Christian value.

The history of the advent of Christianity in India dates back to 52 AD when one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, Saint Thomas arrived in Kerala. The spread of Christianity in India barring southern region proved cumbersome for the missionaries because they encountered resistance from the other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. This led them to move to the eastern part of India namely Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. Alexander Duff, a Scottish missionary founded the Scottish Church College in Calcutta in 1830. Initially, Raja Ram Mohan Roy welcomed his effort however, the relationship grew worse when Duff persuaded a group of Calcutta boys to become Christians. This event caused a great uproar among Bengalis and Roy distanced himself from the Christian missions which led Christianity suffered in Bengal for a number of years.

The arrival of the British in the North-East India was followed by the American Baptist Missionaries. Initially, the British made an effort to prevent the settlement of

missionaries and followed the principle of non-interference in the religious life of the Indians as well as the North-East natives. However, they changed their mind with the introduction of the Charter Act of the 1813, which granted the license to the missionaries who wished to propagate their faith among the Indians. Since 1830s, the American Baptist Missionaries transformed the social milieu of Assam. They made a deep impact in the realm of education by opening a number of schools thereby showing a new world to the indigenous society. Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter established printing press which published a number of books in English, Bengali, Assamese and elementary books for mission schools. This establishment of printing press initiated literary activities in the region. They also introduced the first magazine *Orunodai*, meaning “sunrise/ the dawn of the day”, in 1846 in the Assamese language. *Orunodai* published from Sibsagar mission press did not limit itself to religious teachings but also catered to the current social, national and international affairs, science, religion, and history although spreading Christianity was its main aim. The publication of *Orunodai* paved way for the publication of number of other journals such as *Asam Bandhu*, *Asam Bilasini*, *Asam Darpan*, *Jonaki*, *Goalpara Hitashadini* and *Mau*. In a way *Orunodai* brought modern literacy in Assamese society, created a new era in the world of Assamese literature and gave birth to many notable authors in the later years. American Baptist Missionary Miles Bronson is still remembered for giving first Assamese dictionary. British played both constructive and destructive role during their period in Assamese society. They discontinued the Sanskrit education and stress on scientific knowledge so to begin the western education. They educated, trained, and disciplined the young people in order to mold and fit them into English way of life. The introduction of western education made them suitable for

various employments in the British administration and enabled them to shed their long held superstitious beliefs and many other false notions taught by their conservative society so far. In other words, the introduction of modern education revolutionised their life.

With the foundation of The Baptist Missionary Society of England in 1793, English Baptist William Carey brought Christianity in Serampore. Carey founded the Serampore College in 1818 which became one of the main centres for academic as well as missionary activities into the North-East. It facilitated missionaries entry into the Khasi and Jaintia hills due to physical proximity of the hills from Serampore. It was from here that the Christian missionary entered present day Cherrapunji in Meghalaya. Carey translated the Khasi Bible into Bengali and Shella dialect spoken in Cherrapunji hence, Christian evangelisation achievement process first began in Meghalaya.

Thomas Jones and his wife arrived at the village of Cherrapunji braving many challenges in order to bring gospel to the hill tribes. Initially the Khasis resisted their entry but seeing the commitment towards their work for the welfare of the Khasis they eventually cooperated and showed interest in their religion. In spite of several hurdles the missionaries remained determined to carry out their mission activities. The missionaries stopped them from practicing their traditional rituals and ceremonies and participating in their social and religious functions. Their job in the field of eradication of fear, ignorance, and superstition is significant. They adopted the Roman Script for the Khasi language. Thomas Jones is considered as the ‘father of Khasi Alphabet’. His decision behind starting schools reveals his main intention of evangelising the natives:

The only plan which appears to me likely to answer a good purpose is to establish schools in the various villages, to teach the Khasis-children and adults-to read their own language; and to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion; or in other words, to give them the same kind of instruction as is given in our Sunday Schools at home, and not to introduce any other feature, except what may be necessary to draw the children to the schools, or to train native teachers; and to make use of the natives to teach their fellow-countrymen to read....In this way we shall not only bring up the young people in the knowledge of Gospel doctrines, but we shall also teach them to read; and when we shall have translated and printed the Holy Scriptures into their language, we shall have some, at least, in every family, able to read them, and I may add, able to understand them also; and I would regard this an important step towards their evangelization. (Downs197-98)

The above lines explicitly indicate missionaries' method of proselytisation through the medium of education. Before the arrival of the missionaries, the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos were steadfast to their respective indigenous religions. The impact of Christianisation among them greatly affected their native religion practiced extensively at the time. Some scholars believe that, "the prime factor which induced and fostered silent and mammoth changes in the Khasi society was the work of the missionaries for nearly a century or more. Missionary influence was a major catalyst for the metamorphosis in the Khasi society" (Natarajan 256). The missionaries motive behind opening hospitals, dispensaries were inspired by the example of Christ healing the sick. "It is difficult to measure the impact of Christian humanitarian services in general and medical work in

particular. The basic arguments used can be summed up with the Latin words *imitatio* and *preparatio*- imitation of Christ, and preparation for the preaching of the Gospel (Downs179). Their teaching was a *preparation evangelica* (preparation for converting to Christianity by educating a person). Dr Gordon Robert taught them an active life and an optimistic spirit and under his guidance numerous health centers were opened and till today Robert hospital exists in Shillong. Welsh Presbyterian Mission in general brought a lot of medical changes in Khasi hills. They empowered women by training them as nurses thereby helping them overcome centuries of superstitious beliefs. Furthermore, the introduction of the Wood's Education Dispatch 1854 and Zenana System new education policies were formulated to emancipate women.

The various European powers in India assigned their own missionaries to spread the teachings of the gospel within their territory. For instance, the British East India Company did not allow other European missionaries to work in their occupied areas and allowed only one missionary set up for one area in order to prevent clashes of interest. It was also observed that people responded differently according to the denominations they were following:

An analysis shows that two different churches in the region have evoked two distinct socio-political responses from the people and communities they converted. The problem of insurgency is prevalent more in protestant dominated areas whereas in Roman Catholic Church dominated area it is less conspicuous and subdued. Nagaland and Mizoram have the highest Christian population belonging to protestant denomination and surprisingly insurgency in the North-East began from these two states. Whereas in Roman Catholic dominated areas

like Khasi, Garo, Jaintia , and Arunachala insurgency movement is comparatively less. It is due to the reason that protestant churches unconsciously entangled in the politics of ethnic-nationalistic aspiration and Roman Catholic has been free from this sort of association. (Rajkumar 204)

The protestant church as such was not responsible in inciting the ethnic movement in the North-East but indirectly it became an agent for the same. Mizoram is one of the most intensely Christianised states in India. Mizos religious belief, cultures, society and their lives are regulated by a code of ethics known as *Tlawmngaihna* an untranslatable term, which requires every Mizos to be hospitable, kind, unselfish and helpful to others. The first missionary to visit the Mizo Hills was William Williams of the Welsh Calvinistic Church but he died soon and about two years later JH Lorrain and FW Savidge arrived at the Lushai Hills to spread the gospel. They were ignorant about the life and culture of the Mizos but shortly they learnt the Mizo language, gave it a Roman script and taught them reading and writing. They translated the Bible in Mizo language and a number of other books based on the Bible for use in the Sunday school. They also wrote a book on *Grammar and Dictionary of Lushai Language* and side by side worked for the dissemination of their faith. In the famines of 1911-12 and 1929 instead of escaping from this deadly famine they stayed back and carried on their relief work. This helped them earned the goodwill and trust of the Mizos. Due to this and many other humanitarian services rendered by the missionaries made the Lushais gradually accept their supportive presence in the region. As the missionaries provided relief they also made use of the public gathering to propagate their faith that took place during relief operations.

Mr. Watkins R Roberts and his wife along with Dr. Peter Frazer of Welsh Calvinist Methodist Mission established churches. The spread of Christianity was so rapid then and even at present almost every Mizo has embraced Christianity. There were different denominational missions but despite denominational differences they share a similar outlook in religious matters and worked in cordiality and mutual cooperation. The methods of evangelism used were similar- education, medical services and preaching. The positive impact of Christian faith is apparent in almost all spheres of Mizo life. The most apparent being the rapid growth of literacy. The missionary introduced alphabets for the Mizo language. The speedy growth of Christianity in Mizoram is credited to a series of revival movements which contributed to the indigenisation of Christianity. Christian revival movements revived many things that had been prohibited earlier. In other words, the revivals became instruments of indigenisation. The rapid growth of Christianity in Mizoram certainly cannot be credited to missionaries alone because in most of the cases Christianity was propagated by the converts and in some cases by Indians from other parts of the country.

In Naga Hills, Edward Winter Clark and his wife Mary Mead Clark formed the first Baptist Church. Clark focused on learning Naga language, their character and medicine which helped in winning the natives trust. The attempts at proselytising the Nagas to Christianity were not without problems. Initially, the Nagas resisted the presence of British and missionaries but gradually they yielded to the various activities they undertook for their welfare. They introduced Roman script to their language and translated Bible into it. They prohibited indigenous worship, headhunting, rice beer drinking and many other social practices prevalent during the time. They also

discouraged their cultural practices such as festivals, dress, ornaments, religious beliefs, imposed restrictions, insisted on changing their lifestyles and termed their mode of living as primitive. This reveals the adverse effect of Christianisation in the region. In spite of several drawbacks Christianity brought societal reforms and Nagas gradually accepted them. The church setup schools wherever possible and this impressed many Nagas. While Christian missionaries like Clarke were busy converting the Nagas into Christians, the British administrators were busy consolidating their position. Starting from a converts in 1872 and the present when 92.48 percent of the Nagas are Christians they are remembered with affection because of the many changes brought to them through Christianity and gift of education. Christianity enabled to break the mental as well as the physical barriers among the myriad Naga tribes. The church became their guide to lead them to their right path which indirectly changed their history. The Sunday services offered by the church provided an opportunity for the members of the same and various tribes and communities to interact, pray and socialise. It is through such gatherings that provided the platform for political activities. Therefore, the church indirectly and unintentionally assisted the Nagas to assert their ethnic identities without the awareness of missionaries. Church as such was not directly involved in inciting anti-national inclinations among the Nagas. Undoubtedly, there were a few church leaders who indulged in anti-national activities but their numbers were less as compared to those who have contributed positively towards the growth of nation as well as towards the development and welfare of the Nagas. Thus, generalising all Christian foreign missionaries in the region as anti-national would be wrong. Their role should be objectively assessed without any prejudice:

The role and contribution of the Christian Church to the Naga should be objectively assessed devoid of any prejudice. What needs to be appreciated is the fact that in the absence of any form of governmental intervention and welfare measures at the time when Christianity first made inroads among the Nagas, it is these Christian pioneers or missionaries who provided some hope and undertook some welfare measures for the benefit of the Nagas. One has to be grateful to the Church for these acts of charity, even if these were undertaken purely for religious considerations.... One thing is certain, the Christian Churches infused the sense of belonging together as a group among the various Naga tribes, which in turn generated the idea and concept of a Naga ethnic identity (Rajkumar 216).

Undoubtedly, church has played a greater role in bringing harmony among the tribes, and a sense of belonging which indirectly formed the idea of ethnic identity. However, Haimendorf, in his book *Naked Nagas* (1939), criticised the Christian missionaries for converting the tribal communities. He perceives that these sudden introduction of Christian and western value greatly affected the Naga cultures and traditions, and caused damages which they are yet to recover from. While he appreciates the Missionaries contribution in the field of education and making thousands of Naga children literate, at the same time he feels that many cultural clashes of later years would have been avoided had they been considerate towards the Naga culture. In this way, they would have contributed more and might have brought more happiness.

Meiteis were once tribes they converted to Hinduism from their indigenous religious beliefs. This conversion led to the dramatic change in the future of the ethno-political history of Manipur. The first missionary who came to Manipur was William

Pettigrew. He started the first school in 1872 in Imphal and translated the Bible into local Meitei language. He encouraged inter community marriages and worked hard for the development of the Meitei language besides spreading Christianity in Manipur. He changed the medium of institutions in schools from Bengali to the Meitei language. Christians of Manipur, including Meiteis owe much to him for remaining loyal and faithful to the cause of the Manipuris. Dr GH Damant published the Meitei script for the Asiatic society of Bengal in 1877. The Johnston Middle School started in 1885 at Imphal. However, he failed to carry on with his mission among the Manipuris who were already converted into Hinduism under the patronage of King Gharib Nawaz in Imphal. Therefore, he went to Ukhrul and started the first branch of the American Baptist Mission on February 1896. He established schools, learned the Tangkhul language and reduced it into writing for a common language. From Ukhrul Christianity spread to other villages of Manipur. After the social segregation with Meitei the tribal communities accepted Christianity. By 1915, conversions among Tangkhul Nagas took place and by 1932 Christianity was well established in this part of the region. Colonialism and Christianity did not have strong impact on Manipur because of the then existing Vaishnavite tradition.

The British had planned to keep Arunachal Pradesh, then named as North East Frontier Agency isolated from outside external influences. They did not directly interfere with the village administration but indirectly ruled them through the officers placed at various villages for administration. The growth and development of the area was not their concern and were solely interest in the security and control of the frontiers. The act prevented the missionaries from entering the state and their activities were restricted. The history of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh can be traced back to the time when the First

American Baptist Missionary Nathan Brown and Mrs CA Bruce opened schools for providing education to the Abor and Miri children. However, they could not succeed in their mission and carried out their activities among the hill tribes from Sadiya mission centre. Christian movement in Arunachal began only after post independence period. The spread of Roman Catholic Church in Arunachal Pradesh began slowly with the foundation of mission centres, schools, hospitals along Assam-Arunachal border town. Some students of the border town school were converted and were made evangelist and teachers. The sharp rise in conversions to Christianity created serious social and religious tensions in the state thus Arunachal Pradesh anti-conversion laws was imposed to check proselytisation. The idea behind the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 1978 was to ensure that the tribes do not get converted to Christianity or any other faith for that matter. The intention was to preserve their indigenous faiths however, the sudden increase in Christian converts has challenged this law. The census of 2011 indicates Christianity as one of the leading religions in Arunachal Pradesh. Despite the various oppositions Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed a tremendous growth in spreading Christianity. Christian constitute more than thirty percent of the state's population making it single largest religious community. The local religion known as Donyi-Polo involves the worship of the sun and the moon. For an extended period of time, there was no proper religion or belief system as the Donyi-Polo religion did not have written sacred text, religious teachings and a place of worship. Therefore, the arrival of Christianity delivered a proper religious belief system with its teachings simple to comprehend and follow. The early entry of Christianity before the reformation of the Donyi-Polo religion is therefore, the key reason for conversion to Christianity. Healing through prayer, proper

education, and medical facilities were some of the attributes that significantly attracted them to accept the Christian faith.

During the famine in Lushai Hills, many Mizos migrated to Tripura and brought Christianity along with them. After their arrival they constructed a church and it was through them that Christian faith first began in Tripura but it spread with the advent of New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society. The Maharaja of Tripura did not allow the early missionaries to enter Tripura; earlier several attempts made by missionaries failed to gain an entry. Maharaja expelled the Christians and preaching, teaching, and selling of Christian books was totally prohibited. Missionary work was not permitted until the 1930s. It was only in 1938 the New Zealand Missionary Society managed to get permission to live and work with the conditions that the missionary would not preach among two tribes Halams and Riangs. They contributed in the field of health, medicine, education, literature and rural development. They started Bible schools to impart the theological education and also opened hospitals and dispensaries. The Christians in Tripura did not have an easy time and opposition and obstacles were the order of the day in the early stage. In spite of severe hurdles the missionaries were determined to carry the gospel to Tripura. Dr. Dorothy Daintree, one of the first missionary doctors in Tripura writes. "Hand in Hand with the purely medical work in the Evangelistic efforts and it is my strong conviction that while we must provide physical healing to our Christians, the primary function of the mission hospital is, as in all branches of mission work, Evangelistic, the bringing of the message of love of Christ to non-Christian" (Beilby 81). This open claim as made by Dorothy reveals that their mission work was purely motivated by evangelistic pursuit. They certainly worked hard with but in each and every

area of their undertaking they had evangelistic aims. Propagating education, relieving the sufferings of the people were regarded as their primary duty but the attempt of conversion were also not neglected. They gave Roman script to Tripuri language and translated the Bible in Tripuri language as was done in other regions of North-East India. They also contributed in the publication of newspaper. With the sole initiative of BN Eade, the Mission's paper *Nabajug* (new era) was published bi monthly. In 1983 a new monthly English newspaper *Tripura Baptist Herald* was started that dealt mostly with the works of churches in Tripura. Development of literature was slow because majority of Tripuris were illiterate and literate did not show interest. The missionary discovered the condition of tribal Christian folk who were illiterate and ignorant and under the domination of Hindu landlords and money lenders. In such circumstances, the Rural Reconstruction Fund was established to ensure all round development and achieve a better standard of living. The Society also carried out relief work in times of natural calamities and distress. Thus, their humanitarian services and contribution in the field of education, health and hygiene, and the empowerment of Tripuri rural folk are noteworthy. In 1973 and 1974 the foreign missionaries left Tripura and the national Christians took full charge to manage their own affairs for the church but the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society continued to financially support by annual grants.

The study of history of Christian Missions in India gained momentum only in recent years. Previously its study was neglected and its sources were doubtful hence the theologians produced history from their own perspectives. The earlier history about the Christian Missionaries in India projected only their account, effort and struggle in bringing changes in the backward Indian society. The sacrificing works of the local

pastors and evangelists who worked equally hard braving every challenge in carrying the gospel to the remote villages were never projected. The reports and records available about North-East are highly subjective due to unavailability of the cross checking references to validate the accuracies of these reports. Often the local administrators decided the nature and content of reporting, which was often untrue. Thus, oral and folktales available in the traditional histories became an important source as counterbalances. The records kept by the British are biased therefore there remains much more unwritten and untold than what is written and left behind as records. Falguni Rajkumar in *Rainbow People: Reinventing North-East India* (2012) observes that:

In one way, therefore, the so-called history of the North-East, is replete with 'wrong emphasis', often biased and based solely on the versions and interpretations of the British as they saw and want the world to see and perceive. The assumption is that many events and happenings that were detrimental and against British interests went unreported or underreported. From the North-Eastern perspective or view, what this means is that the British administration in the region gave detailed reports of many events and incidents, which sub-served their interests, but those which could be critical or question their decisions later were cleverly either sugar-coated or not reported at all. This is because there was no local tradition of history writing except for the few records maintained by rulers of Assam and Manipur, which were incomparable to the record keeping traditions of the British officials. In addition, verification of the facts recorded by the British administration was not possible as these were not easily accessible at that time. The records of British in India, more particularly of the North-East in

short, are British versions of the history of the North-East and not necessarily the 'true' version history of the region written objectively and dispassionately. (115)

This clearly indicates the fact that discerning especially the history of the missionary activities in the region is replete with surmises and assumptions. The North-East tribes were not coerced into conversion by the missionaries. They consented to be a part of their religion as it benefitted them in most of the arenas of their life. The Missionaries came with the intention of helping the tribes to lead a better life and help them to come out of their narrow world alongside proselytising them:

Indigenous Christians in India have often been looked down upon as a denationalised or deculturised community by many scholars, the conversion of dalits and tribals into Christianity was explained mostly in terms of colonial patronage or victims of inducement or social circumstances. These explanations indirectly viewed the tribals as dumb and devoid of consciousness. They were also seen as passive participants in the whole process of proselytisation. On the contrary Christianity was not forced upon but adopted by the people who had their own agenda for doing so. They were active participants who influenced and shaped the events that affected their own history. Thus it basically recognises them as makers of their own history and destiny. (Downs 177)

Certainly, the hilly tribes then accepted Christianity as their religion because they were influenced by the various mission activities. Just like missionaries had an agenda behind their "selfless" work likewise the people behind had their own in accepting Christianity as their religion. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist believed that the ruling class can

influence the system of a society. In Terry Eagleton's words, "Gramsci normally uses the word hegemony to mean the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates" (112). Gramsci's idea of hegemony rests on the idea of consent. According to the orthodox Marxist view it was coercion that stopped the working class in rising against the exploiters. But Gramsci deviates from this views and argues that the ruling class maintains their dominance over the people and the society using several mediums such as church, schools, trade unions, media, etc. They spread their political, social, moral and cultural values in the society in such a way that the masses tend to accept them as their own. Hegemony, to Gramsci, "is the cultural, moral and ideological leadership of a group over allied and subaltern groups" (Orellana). Gramsci first noted that in Europe the bourgeoisie, ruled with the consent of subordinate masses without any social uprising or revolution. While Karl Marx and George Lukacs have also written extensively about hegemonic states, it is with Antonio Gramsci the *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935) that hegemony acquired clarity and theoretical significance. Hegemony provides an understanding of how the working class masses are led to accept their subservient status. "As Carl Boggs wrote in his Critique of Gramsci, where hegemony appeared as a strong force, it fulfilled a role that guns and tanks could never perform" (18). The Church played an important role in establishing hegemony by exercising the power over the masses. The concept of hegemony through consent by Antonio Gramsci is very much related and relevant in regard to the consensus and conversion process of the natives by the missionaries. Adam White in David Scott's memoir states that:

The colonial policy was to convert the natives into Christianity by adding certain efforts for their welfare which would fill their hearts with gratitude to the

missionaries and thereby to the Europeans. Thus, the connection of the missionaries and their activities with the administration was very significant and intriguing as well. There was a covenant between the two and the “selfless” efforts of the missionaries can be aptly interpreted as attempts to attain both cultural and religious hegemony in order to achieve colonial hegemony. (2)

The tribes were led to believe themselves as subservient as contrast to the colonial rulers and missionaries. British and missionaries together ruled as their hegemon. In the context of North-East India the Marxist theory of Hegemony associated with Antonio Gramsci is useful for understanding the relationship between missionaries and the North-East people.

Christian missionary and government were there for their own respective intentions. Each found the other beneficial and derived strength from each other's presence in the region. Government found the missionaries work helpful in pacifying the hill tribes and the missionaries found the government useful in providing fund and security for their missions, for themselves and their converts. They supplemented the efforts of the British at imposing their rule and control. Christianity and education went hand in hand thus the British government knew that in sponsoring the mission schools it was also promoting Christian evangelism. On the one hand British government extended complete support to the missionaries work but on the other they controlled their freedom of actions and limited the areas of their mission. The missionaries in any case could not go against the government impositions; they quietly agreed whatever rules was set upon in front of them and carried out their missions. Their approaches differed while the British administered the entire region, the missionaries ministered the natives with the

awareness that they were benefitting each other in their mission and bringing difference in the lives of the people as well. One of the reasons the British officials did not interfere with the missionaries was that they were all Christians themselves and were equally interested in seeing the growth of followers of their faith.

With the arrival of colonial power in the North-East the whole strata of the region was transformed. The introduction of transport and communication, trade and commerce, western education facilitated the lives of the natives. The people of the North-East experienced rapid changeover after their arrival which was unsought for. The metamorphosis from hunting, food gathering, fishing and agricultural society to literate, modern society has occurred in a short time frame. At the outset the alteration brought by missionary among the tribes and their lives, was in such a sudden and unexpected way that they were unable to cope up with what was there in front of them. It took a while for them to accept the new possibilities offered by the mission.

Missionaries came to the North-East with a little understanding of the diverse background knowledge of the people, their culture, and faith. Thus, amidst the diversity of the people they failed to appreciate the rich culture of the people. They viewed the natives' religion through the lens of their own preconceived notion rather than real understanding. Initially, British labeled the tribes as heathens, barbarians and backward Hindus as they discerned that the tribes were under the domination of discriminative Hindu system. They did not understand that the tribes were animist and well educated in their own life setting and milieu which was considered best for them. They had their own folktales, cultures and traditions which they gave prime importance and celebrated with zest. Before the advent of Christian missionaries the various tribes were surviving in

isolation with major ethnic and cultural differences among them. Upon their arrival the first thing they learned was the language spoken by the natives and adopted it as a common language for the entire community which undoubtedly brought unification and development and harmony among them in the society. They felt that unless the hill tribes learnt basics of reading and writing they would not be able to know the gospel. Therefore, first and foremost, they were very particular about bringing education among the tribes. Education enabled the natives' to dispel ignorance, become more conscious about their rights, duties and privileges and motivated them to commit themselves to the transformation of society. Educational system and church mission went hand in hand. They opened schools and appointed some of the first converts as teachers and evangelist. Education brought them awareness about themselves as well as about others. While preaching gospel, they did not neglect secular education and subjects such as Mathematics, English, History and basic science. They took special interest in women's education; made them self reliant and brought a new awareness about the society they were residing in. Along with education, the Christian missionaries have also given them script which brought about development of tribal literature. Their medical missions to a certain extent reduced superstitious beliefs. In spite of slow growth in the beginning of their arrival they continued to work with profound commitment. The natives were superstitious in all their dealings and lived in constant fear but the gospel liberated them from it. With the tireless efforts and sacrifices Christianity has brought tremendous changes in the character and habit of the people with their emphasis on love, forgiveness, peace, tolerance, respect, compassion, and friendship. They rejected the age old tradition like sacrificial belief in spirits, totemism and ancestor worship and substituted by prayers,

sacraments, congregational life. With the missionaries efforts inter-tribal feuds, head hunting, polygamy have stopped and new social order was restored. They brought deeper changes by the spread of values, respect for the human being, abolition of slave trade, importance of volunteering, and the gospel. They condemned all forms of violence and injustice, brought social interaction between various tribes and helped them to get rid of prejudice towards other communities. Several superstitions and age-old hostilities among them have been cleared out. Christians of several denominations worked in their own way in different parts of the hills. This can be seen even today where different Missionaries are still contributing for the betterment of the society in various fields such as environment, education, biodiversity, youth culture, old age home, and orphanages. Undoubtedly, their presence has brought some negative impact on the traditional religious faiths and practices but their contribution in the introduction of written script, indigenous literature, a chain of educational institutions, medical services, doctrinal teachings and many more cannot be overlooked. Their contribution has helped the natives to broaden their horizon and widened their outlook towards life. Although, there were changes in tribal culture beliefs and practices but to give missionaries entire credit or blame for the changes may not be fully justified. Christianity brought a great transformation in the social and cultural life of the North-East people. For all these works and many more contributions rendered to the natives they will be forever remember in the annals of North-East India.

At present, the native people had been facing religious, economic, social, political pressures which led to the decline of many of their customs and values. Many of them are in dilemma now because in one way they want to strengthen their culture and on the other

they are coping with the day to day changes. Some view that the changes have been imposed upon them and now demanding to recognise and defend their cultural tradition and identity by way of tribal movements and associations like never before. In certain villages it is believed that Christianity was imposed but whether forced or otherwise the new religion has had tremendous impact on people. Today majority of hill tribes have embraced Christianity yet they continue to stick to their traditional beliefs.

Missionaries placed their culture as of supreme value and regarded everything non-Christian as of less value. They were intensely interested primarily in spreading Christianity. The introduction of other benefits like education, healthcare, sanitation was a part of evangelisation process. They were aware that simply preaching would not help so they started a number of schools in order to impart Christian education. They were not entirely successful in their mission but their effort had benefitted the natives in the long run. Udayon Misra in his “Naga Nationalism and the Role of the Middle Class” writes:

Christ and western education brought in new values based on individualism which posed a direct challenge to the collective life-pattern of the people. The socialism was replaced, “indeed nowhere else in India has the encounter between society and Christianity so deeply transferred and affected the people as in the society of North-East India, in many areas of their lives, such as religious, philosophy, marriage, family, education, economic, political structures, status of women and socio cultural life. (48)

The richness of the North-East lies in its various tribes, ethnic diversity, different languages, diverse culture, customs and rituals. However, rapid growth brought by

urbanisation, globalisation, politics, media, have challenged their culture, language and customs. These days due to migration the threat of tribes becoming minority in their own ancestral land looms large. The tribal solidarity is slowly weaning and individualism is making headway. Society is being modernised and changes in their food habits, dress, recreation and cultural ceremonies could be seen. Traditional dress and ritual has become a ceremonial occasion. A blend of old and new, tradition and modernity still exists and the call of the hour demands for preserving what is essential and good for the collective betterment and rejecting inessential values of the past which no longer serves any purpose.

The British once followed the policy of 'divide and rule' for their conveniences but the need of the hour demands friendship, cooperation and integration among the different ethnic tribes in the region to ensure peace and prosperity. At present, due to the growth in higher education people have become conscious about their various rights and privileges, exploitation and marginalisation to which they were subjected. They are becoming aware of their roots but at the same time they are also pulled away by waves of modern changes. There is a crucial need to revive, recreate and revitalise the fast fading traditions but the ongoing debate is what to revive and what not to as much damage has already been done. Further extensive research is required from the educated young people with the help of surviving older generation in order to preserve, revive and retain their cultural heritage.

Undeniably, Christianity has been seen as one of the major causes of the social change in North-East region. They promoted humanity, brought developments and spread the message of peace and love but they were misunderstood in many ways. At present,

Christianity is growing at a rapid rate; it is looked up to as a strong agent of modernisation, and a mark of tribal identity. Therefore, a sense of ethnic identity among different communities and the fear of losing it have contributed in the growth of various ethno- political movements in North-East India. Frederick S. Downs, a church historian of the region in *History of Christianity in India* writes, “We have seen how the church helped strengthen, indeed almost create a sense of tribal identity for the first time at a level higher than that of a village or relatively small cluster of villages. This new identity was to become the basis of modern political movements.” (123)

However, it is not only the Church that became the ground for various political movements; the fact as noted by Ringkhahao Horam, a noted scholar of Manipur, is that “the seeds of nationalism were already sown in the minds of Nagas during the British rule. The impact of Christianity and modern education strengthened the spirit of nationalism among the Nagas (Kanjamala 121). Also, Patricia Mukhim, a well-known columnist of the region mentions that “Nagas are overwhelmed by their own identity crisis. While being Indians by citizenship, they do not share the nationalistic fervor of the Indian mainstream. They are proud of their own constructed identity almost to the point of being obsessive about it” (Kanjamala 123). Despite the political unification the tribes do not feel at par with mainstream India due to their distinct history, origin, socio-cultural tradition background. Also, one of the reasons was that British had earlier introduced Inner Line Regulation reminding them that they are racially, culturally and historically segregated from the other parts of India.

The result of both the isolation of the tribal communities under the ‘excluded areas’ and evangelisation pursued by the Christian missionaries destroyed tribal lifestyles

and way of living. In one way the process of Christianisation had its intrinsic merits in other way it systematically destroyed and dismantled all that was considered indigenous, in the life of the tribal communities by infusing large scale Christian and Western values and beliefs. At present, Christianity is much more accommodative of local traditions and social values than it ever was in the past. Despite their best effort they are still accused of bringing mistrust and hatred between the hill men and plains men, destroying tribes culture, tradition and practices. There are those who argued that Christianity has completely displaced the traditional culture however, there are other who argued that tribal culture did not undergo significant change in spite of the influence of Christianity:

On the one hand are those who say that Christianity has been responsible for the destruction of the cultural values of the tribes; on the other hand are those who say that very little of fundamental importance has actually changed". Manekar says of the Christians in the North-Eastern hills in the late 1960s, that, psychologically, temperamentally and environmentally they have not changed much. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that in the process of Christianising the pagans, Christianity has been paganised among the tribals of the Assam hills. (Downs 166)

Therefore, it appears that Christianity has not ruined the tribal identity, instead a new community, a mixture of the old and new has emerged, which nevertheless maintained a distinct tribal identity. In fact, leaving the old religion and practices did not result in identity loss, it was through Christianity that the tribal identity was reinforced. It is indeed impossible to comprehend the Christian missions in the North-East of the bygone

years; it is merely their activities that speak the quality and change they have brought about in people lives and society that suggest their significant presence and importance.

In the North-East the advent of Christianity affected the people living in the region in a number of different ways. Given the great diversity of the region this is not surprising. For instance, in Arunachal Pradesh, British policy restricted Christian activity and it was only after independence that Christianity gained popularity that too with a lot of opposition and it was similar situation in the plains of Assam, Manipur and Tripura. In the hill areas of Meghalaya and Nagaland, Christianity has grown steadily. Christian conversion was slow initially but towards the end of the 19th century people accepted and adjusted to the new situation created by the advent of the British and the new value system of the missionaries. Whichever way one views it, the fact remains that the Christian faith has served in many fields in the North-East and this is why it is one of the reasons that the people embracing the faith is growing steadily every year. They provided humanitarian services to all without any discrimination among the people. They worked hard for bringing education and awareness of social justice to the people living in the rural areas of India and their selfless services such as running orphanages, undertaking relief work in times of natural calamities, village development programme, educational and medical relief work cannot be overlooked and misunderstood.

Earlier the missionaries rejected all forms of indigenous practices, however, many revivals took place which replaced and substituted many of the previous cultural traditions. Certainly, the discontinuity between Christianity and the old way of life has not been as radical as people have observed because many traditional practices which seem to have been abandoned by the people in fact continued more or less in new ways.

For example, the Christian hostel replaced the bachelors dormitory, the Christmas feast replaced the feasts of merit. Sunday is being observed as genna or taboo days.

To affirm that Christianity transformed and affected the lives of only the tribal communities of the North-East would be wrong. As a matter of fact, it affected more or less every one across the region. To a certain extent, it changed the very fabric of society, changed the thinking of the people and communities in the region. In short, Christianity became a harbinger of social change, progress, modernity and development. It became important because it broke many old concept and belief system that was irrelevant, devoid of significance and replaced with the reassurance of the presence of loving god.

At present Christian missionaries belonging to different denominations are rendering humanitarian services in various fields in the region. People have become independent and have no sway over church diktats. The freedom of choosing one's faith is there at present and people are not willy-nilly coerced into religion. However, the consequence of it is that many are turning atheist and many are happy without choosing any one. Things are changing at a rapid pace and these days many youngsters are opposed to anything that is traditional. After the Indian independence Missionaries were suspected of supporting the tribal leaders in demanding tribal states thus they were asked to leave from the regions. Nevertheless, they continued to financially support from abroad for further activities in the region. Christianity is indigenised and people have retained some of their traditional religious practices. There is of course the difference of opinions among the people. Although, very slowly but the scenario is definitely changing. Hence, keeping abreast with the prevailing scenarios, voices about their bygone era and the present dire need to recreate and build a better society have started

emanating from North-East in different capacities. The writers from the North-East are trying to understand the various aspects rather than blindly believing and following what actually is written about colonial period and the impact of missionaries in their society. They are aware of the stereotyping that the North-East has been subjected to so far. Therefore, shouldering the responsibility to revive whatever was lost, they are inducing the people of the region for a fresh search for ethnicity, identity, and their history. They have taken the onus to educate the public about their genuine reality seen from their perspective, observed through the lens of being a witness and finally to expose them to the various facets of reality. Their writings reflect the complex and pluralities of North-East rather than any distinct and fixed interpretation of it. Their writings will certainly enable the reader to ponder over the maze of complexities that the region has undergone and survived the horror under the false cover of heavenly peace. Writings on North-East are not merely about the people and their milieu but it is about their experience, hopes, fears, desolation. The writers have reinterpreted the events associated with their lives as perceived by them. They were unable to find a platform until recently to articulate their views and present their history. The emerging literature from the North-East, especially poetry is firmly rooted in this history of colonisers and various activities of the missionaries. Writers from the North-East not only lament their ancient values but also offer the solution in order to retrieve it. The following chapters will reveal how every aspect of modern day trials and tribulations and various changes are attributed partly to the activities of both colonisers and missionaries. There are many activities of colonisers that have led to depletion of natural resources in the region. Paramount among these had been exploitation of forest resources which is reflected in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

Poetry and Ecology: Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

This chapter examines the western versus eastern perspectives on nature and elaborates the approach of ecocriticism in literature which has brought considerable awareness among the people about the ecological degradation in the recent years. The chapter further probes into the relationship shared between nature and the human in both the eastern and western countries since ancient times, the advent of British in North-East India and how their reckless attitude towards the environment led to the depletion of the natural resources in the region. The chapter then goes on to introduce Khasi society and the role of Nature in their lives and the present day ecological degradation as reflected in the poems of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. The chapter also sees how the portrayal of the reality of Shillong by the poet may be seen as the contemporary ecological history of the place.

Since time immemorial human beings have slugged to derive sustenance from the nature's soil. They were preoccupied with their natural surroundings and revered wilderness as sacred. The relationship between man and nature can be traced back to the days when man lived by hunting wild animals and gathering roots of plants. Early man had a great rapport and reverence for the earth and its inhabitants. They were in tuned with their natural surroundings and considered the natural world as a sacred space created by divine. They hunted just to fulfil their bare necessities for their livelihood and lived in total harmony with nature. During ancient times, all creatures were given prime importance and treated with empathy and compassion. There was an acute sense of inter-

connectedness and acknowledgement of the presence of nature. With the advent of Christianity, man's outlook towards the world changed as it strengthened their authority and liberty over the natural world and in the universe. According to Christianity, God created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth, the plants, animals, birds and fishes for man's benefit. Eventually, He created Adam and Eve. In the King James Version of the Bible in the Book of Genesis human beings are given dominion over every creature that moves on the ground, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (1:28). Christianity permitted men to exploit nature to the fullest. In fact, no other major religion or any other indigenous religion for that matter in the world has this anthropocentric approach. John N Gray, professor of European Thought at the London school of Economics has stated in his book, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (2004) that:

Among the world's religions Christianity has always been one of the most radically anthropocentric. Christians believe humanity is separated from the natural world by an impassable gulf; other animals exist to serve us. This Christian idea that humans are separated from the animals by an unbridgeable gulf is not found in all or even in most religions. It is absent from Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Shinto. It is explicitly rejected in the primordial religion of the mankind-animism-in which other animals figure in terms of equality with humans, if not superiority to them. (27)

Christianity focused more on death and heavenly kingdom to be enjoyed afterwards rather than life that exists. They were blinded by the idea of existence of their only god who gave dominion over everything which made them disrespectful towards the tradition of many other indigenous inhabitants who lived closely with nature. It also points to the fact that Christians were indifferent to the natural world as they believed that everything in the universe has been created to delight mankind. This anthropocentric view of nature was predominant in the early society and the mischief done by it in the subsequent years is irreparable. The western cultural tradition has invariably been anthropocentric. In the 5th century BC, the Greek philosopher Protagoras stated that, “Man is the measure of all things.” Likewise, the anthropocentrism also finds expression in William Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* (1602):

What a piece of work is man!

How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties!

In form and moving, how express and admirable!

action, how like an angel,

In apprehension, how like a God!

The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! (Act II, Scene II).

In the same way, Alexander Pope proclaimed, “Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; / the proper study of mankind is Man” (“An Essay on Man” 1-2). All these are examples of belief system that placed human above everything else. Besides, with the invention and advancement of science and technology, anthropocentric attitude reigned supreme in mankind. During all these phases the rights of nature were neglected and rights of men were given a prime significance. Thus, Francis Bacon, the father of modern

science upholding the idea of dominion over nature advocated that “nature must be ‘bound into service’ and made a ‘slave’ and ‘put ‘in constraint’ and ‘molded’” (Merchant 46). Rene Descartes in *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* declared “that animal are no more than machines totally incapable of feeling pain or pleasure-a view that had gruesome results in many laboratories experiments in France” (Worster 40). These philosophy of dominion over nature advocated by man of science as Bacon was to an extent responsible for gradual destruction of environmental resources in the subsequent years.

Since long landscapes, seasons and natural phenomena have inspired the poets to write. The Japanese haiku a short composition on natural world is rife with everyday natural phenomenon. Hesoid’s *Works and Days* (700BC) takes special interest in agricultural practices. The Greek poet Theocritus *Idylls* honors the simplicities of rural life. Virgil’s *Eclogues* speaks about peaceful shepherd life. In the Renaissance poets like Sir Philip Sydney’s in *Arcadia* (1590), Edmund Spenser’s in *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1579) wrote about pastoral rural life. In 17th century John Denham’s wrote *Cooper’s Hill* (1642) describing the vivid landscape and his love for river Thames. James Thomson the first important 18th century nature poet wrote *The Seasons* (1730) honoring the splendor of nature as a part of the divine.

With the rise of romanticism, the romantic writers’ emotional affinity towards the natural world came into the limelight. They felt nature’s vibrant energy and highly valued and celebrated the non-human world. Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, Percy Byshe Shelley, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron appreciated and glorified the beauty of natural world and kept nature as their constant theme. For William

Wordsworth nature was, “The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being (“Tintern Abbey” 109-111). Nature for him was a divine teacher who offered him refuge from the “fretful stir / unprofitable and the fever of the world” (“Tintern Abbey” 52-53). By introducing nature as a lively entity and the nature’s humble companion who led a simple life in the poems like “Michael”, “Lucy”, “Excursion”, “Prelude” he represented the voice of the voiceless so far. In “Auguries of Innocence” William Blake saw the world through a different lens, “to see a world in a grain of sand / And a heaven in a wild flower / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour (1-4) through these lines Blake teaches to look at the world from different perspective so that the idea of interconnectedness among each and every lives on earth becomes clear.

Due to the growth of industry, the Romantic era observed a rapid increase in urban populations. As a result, environment issues became grave and apparent. Therefore, poets like PB Shelley lamented the contaminated water and “the putrid atmosphere of crowded cities” (“Queen Mab” 165). William Blake in *The Four Zoas* complained about the “ And building arches high and cities turrets and towers and domes / whose smoke destroyed the pleasant gardens and whose running kennels / choked the bright rivers” (167-69). Perhaps, it was the first time during the Romantic age poets adopted a shift in their vision towards the natural world and enlivened it. For the first time human were perceived as fragile and insignificant before the power of the natural world. Thus, Lord Byron portrayed man as helpless victim in his poem “Introductory the Ocean” (1812):

Roll on thou deep and dark blue Ocean, roll!

Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin; his control
Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When, for a moment like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depth with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown. (1-9)

Each Romantic writer had a particular perspective towards the natural world and their individual way of representing it in their poetry. In spite of these differences, they were collectively responsible for setting up nature consciousness, and paved a way for fresher approach of viewing the relationship between human and nature as interdependent and interconnected. They were indirectly instrumental in establishing proximity between literature and nature, in bringing eco consciousness among masses and providing a fertile ground for ecocritical approach in the later years. The presence of nature in the literary work was once marginalized and was given importance merely as a setting. It was represented in order to decorate the background of the earlier literary works but amazingly the same decoration served a tremendous purpose when ecocriticism established as a school. In other words, earlier literary work was a preview to what was to come and was instrumental in bringing marginalized representation of nature into the forefront. In a way, the earlier writings became a beacon of light to guide the later literary works. The theme of nature was certainly present even in earlier poetry but the ecological reflections were not as vivid as in romantic poetry. After the Romantic era many writers

influenced by romantic writings began shaping their work around nature writing which became a fertile ground for further growth in the ecological writing.

The Victorian poets such as Thomas Hardy, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold exhibited disappointment towards the destruction of environment due to growing industrialization. At the end of the 19th century Nietzsche on the *Genealogy of Morality* (1994) argued that “the modern world was characterized by hubris, and the despaired of our rape of nature with the help of machines and the completely unscrupulous inventiveness of technicians and engineers” (86). Cf Volney, “a French philosopher had warned European readers that their own civilization might one day fall as a result of human social and environmental folly, just as the Ottoman dominions and the civilizations of the Egypt and Syria had fallen in the past, leaving “rooted up trees, and ravaged...pastures”, as well as “villages deserted and cities in ruin” (Qtd. in Hutchings 5). Many earlier texts in America and England that represented nature were seen through a new light and were instrumental in making way for ecocriticism to be well established as a distinctive school of thought. Every tradition and age has varying perspectives on man’s relationship with nature. The repercussion of man’s egocentric approach in recent times has witnessed the devastation of nature. They have ravaged the environment by way of several ecological exploitations such as industrialization, urbanization, population growth, global warming, ozone layer depletion, climate change, pollution, deforestation, species extinction etc. The dire need for addressing the prevailing ecological crisis through the medium of literature led to the birth of ecocriticism. The term ‘eco’ comes from Greek word *oikos* which means “house” and ‘critic’ comes from *kritis* “judge”. To the Greeks, *oikos* is a place where the sacred, the

humans, natural and cultural phenomena are found in an integrated relationship. Ecocriticism has several sub-approaches namely, deep ecology, eco feminism, ecosphere, ecocide, oikopoetics etc. The term Ecocriticism was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (18). Although, Rueckert is credited for coining the term “Ecocriticism” it was Glotfelty who popularized the term. Glotfelty opines that most of the present day environmental problem is of human creation:

We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse. (xxi)

Since 1990s the study of environment through literature grew in leaps and bounds and became a full-fledged academic discipline. In 1992, Association for Study of Literature and Environment was formed to spread opinion related to literature and to support, “new nature writing, traditional and innovate scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research” (Glotfelty xviii). By 1993 ecocriticism became a well established critical school and many scholars, academicians came together to find solutions for the prevalent ecological issues.

The advance age of technology, human high intellect and modern civilization has not so far come up with the solution for reconciliation with the fellow creatures. Hence,

the way out lies in recognizing that current environmental problems are largely ramifications of mankind's callous attitude towards natural world. As historian Donald Worster elucidates in his *The Wealth of Nature: Environment History and the Ecological Imagination*:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding. (27)

Thus, Ecocriticism implores for a better understanding of nature by interpreting and representing the natural world in literary works. By doing so, it seeks to protect the ecological rights of nature. It helps analyze the hitherto literary works through the ecological lens and investigates for ecological themes in order to find solution for the contemporary environmental issues. Most ecocritical work shares a common idea that man has crossed their exploitation of environmental limits. An ecocritical reading is dealing with a text with a new ecocritical perspective which the text has always reflected but was not given enough attention. As Peter Barry puts it, "reading inside out", so that "what had seemed mere 'setting' is brought in from the critical margins to the critical centre" (Barry 250). The point repeatedly made by eco-critics is that for the first time in human history, no true wilderness any longer exists on the planet, for every region is affected by global warming, and other 'anthropocentric' problems, such as toxic waste and nuclear fall-out (Barry 248).

Ecocriticism probes into the human action that has led to ecological crisis and helps find solution to the current environmental challenges. It believes in the power of literature in influencing human orientation towards the natural environment. Hence, by demonstrating nature's presence in literature it strives to eliminate human attitudes and practices that have contributed to modern-day ecological problems. It began in the United States of America in the late 1980s inspired by the works of the major 19th century American writers collectively known as transcendentalist. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) could be seen as a prototype text for green writing, green reading and green thinking. Another landmark and foundational work of American non-fiction writing about nature is Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) and Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844). These three books are considered as the foundational works of American eco-centric writing. In Britain, James Fenimore, Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, William Bryant are the other American nature writers of the 19th century. Ecocriticism or Green Studies got influenced from the British Romanticism and the founder is Jonathan Bate whereas in the United States of America Cheryll Glotfelty is recognized as the founder of ecocriticism. Thus, it is seen that the aims and approaches of these two are similar but different in origination and influence. According to Peter Barry, "The difference between American writing and British writing is that American writing is celebratory in tone whereas British writing seeks to warn of environmental threats (242). Ecocriticism is officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) edited by Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) by Lawrence Buell.

Different thinkers and critics have defined the term ecocriticism in various ways but their concerns are similar. According to Lawrence Buell ecocriticism is “the study of the relation between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell 20). Lawrence Coupe in the introductory essay of his book, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (2000), regards Ecocriticism as a tool for rejecting the legacy of western man (Coupe 2). In the last few decades, the ecological concern has brought together and has garnered considerable attentions from intellectuals, academicians, writers, and scientists in order to find solutions to this grave issue of man-nature relationships. Perhaps the ecological vision as propounded by Rueckert also may be a help to an extent, “The idea that nature should also be protected by human laws, that trees (dolphins and whales, hawks and whooping cranes) should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the most marvelous and characteristic parts of ecological vision” (108). Environmental ethics states that nature and her beings should not be exploited and dictated by man instead should be treated with love, care and respect that they deserve. Deep ecology emerged as a reaction to fight anthropocentrism; it attributes intrinsic value to nature and teaches to question the assumptions of society and analyse rather than blindly follow anthropocentrism and its dicta. It shows concern, love and reverence for nature and probes into the causes responsible for earth’s environmental crisis and prescribes method which may help enrich quality of life on earth. In 1973, Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer Arne Naess introduced the phrase “deep ecology” to environmental literature. He suggested that reflecting on the way human live their life that is good both for them, for others as well as the natural world around may help to an extent to bring

changes. To deep ecologist human beings have no greater value than the other creatures. Judi Bari states that “nature does not exist to serve humans. Rather, humans are a part of nature, one species among many. All species have the right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans.” (Bari 22)

Despite the advanced research in the field of environment, science and technology it is seen that in the present day environment related problems like, population explosion, mindless urbanization, reckless littering of sewage and garbage problem have continued to rise. The emissions of gases from automobiles and factories have caused considerable damage to the atmosphere. Global warming and climate change have resulted in the melting of the glaciers and rising up of sea levels. Dumping of industrial wastes and toxic chemicals into the ocean has led to the death of many marine creatures. The excessive use of chemical fertilizers in agricultural lands has killed thousands of birds as well as poisoned man’s food. Mankind actions have jeopardized his life as well as the lives of the other creatures residing in the planet. The world shall continue to have ecological crisis until human reject the idea that nature’s existence is solely for serving man.

It appears that during the early times in the field of ecocriticism more attention comparatively was given to American or British writings rather than the Indian writings. Since ancient times, ecological concern has always been a priority of the Indian culture as well as literature before it was established in the west. However, the fertile ground of ecological ideas as embedded in the practice of Indian culture was overlooked. The practice of environment conservation and proto ecological consciousness well predates its western theorization. The concept of forest conservation, sacredness and bio centric egalitarianism formed an essential part of the early tradition of India. Many customary

and community practices developed by the early Indian society to protect and preserve the environmental resources were noteworthy. The ancient India was the quintessence of worshipping nature as a manifestation of divinity. The people lived in forests and regarded everything around them as pervaded by a divine presence. The flora and fauna, hills, mountains, lakes, rivers, various plants like *Tulsi*, *Peepal*, *Bur*, and *Neem* were considered sacred and venerated. Animals and birds were honored and were equated with gods and goddesses. Although, early men depended on nature for everything and to an extent exploited it but then the damage caused was minimal and negligible for fulfilling their basic needs.

An eastern man relationship with nature differed to a great degree than that of a western man. In the west, man has distinguished himself from nature and exploited it as much as he can whereas in the east the relationship is that of harmony, veneration, interconnections and coexistence. No country perhaps laid as much emphasis on environmental ethics such as non-violence, cosmocentrism and pro environment as ancient India. Many earlier religious scriptures promoted the message for preservation of environment and ecological balance. According to BV Tripurari in his book *Ancient Wisdom for Modern Ignorance* (1994):

Our present environmental crisis is in essence a spiritual crisis. We need only to look back to medieval Europe and the psychic revolution that vaulted Christianity to victory over paganism to find the spirit of the environmental crisis. Inhibitions to the exploitations of nature vanished as the Church took the “spirits” out of the trees, mountains and seas. Christianity’s ghost- busting theology made it possible for man to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural

objects. It made nature man's monopoly. This materialistic paradigm has dominated the modern world for last few centuries. The current deplorable environment crisis demands a spiritual response. A fundamental reorientation of human consciousness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner commitment, is very much needed. (123-24)

At present, even in India the concept of associating natural world with divine exist more in theory rather than in practice. In other words, eco-theology seems to be little in evidence. Once the principle of non-violence dominated the collective Indian mindset but at present the scenario appears to be different as environment degradation is proceeding at an unprecedented scale all in the name of the development. India's exploding population, air and water pollution is overwhelming. Spiritual and cultural belief that once served as the basis of Indians existence appears to be dwindling. In spite of all these, the hope lies in the fact that everything is not lost as cultures and traditions filled with reverence for nature could be still found in some rural villages and it is from here environment movement frequently stems forth. The recent movement like Chipko Movement, Save Silent Valley Movement, Jungle Bachao Andolan, Appiko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, etc adds to the fact that people are concerned about the protection of environment and it is these sorts of movements that brought awareness and attention among the people regarding the environmental issues. Non-profit organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) campaigns for a vegan life and against harming animals and environmental non-government organization (ENGO) like World Wide Fund, Greenpeace, Conservation International, Friends of the Earth etc offers assistance in conservation of natural resources, plans environmental solutions.

In ancient Indian society forests were inseparable part of human and were considered as their abode. Many different communities inhabited, subsisted on the forest for their living; they hunted, gathered woods and fruits, grazed their cattle and lived in unison with their surroundings. Forests then served as a boundary between two kingdoms and many territories, localities were named after them. People lived a humble life and the forests were free for open exploitation with the exception of some royal trees which belonged to the ruler of the land. Most of the lands were under the dominion of kings and those lands were given to the British in exchange of several services. The perception of British about forest resources varied from that of Indians perception of conservation. The British exploited huge quantities of natural resources in the name of growth and development thereby creating enormous change in the forest resources of India. They were aware of the timber demand in international market hence gave preferential treatment to timber and other trees with commercial viability. This massively affected the diversity of the forests and the irrevocable damage they caused is yet to recover. Ramachandra Guha in *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Present Resistance in the Himalayas* opines that:

Prior to the advent of colonialism, most of the third world societies consisted of a mosaic of long settled and sophisticated agrarian cultures, which had a finely tuned, but delicately balanced relationship with their natural environment. Colonial and Post-Colonial capitalism had disrupted this relationship in many ways. While social disruptions of this disruption are widely documented, what is less observed are the devastating ecological consequences? (195-96)

They extracted the forest resources as much as possible. Many people believed that the British were mainly responsible for the beginning of forest resources depletion in India. In such case, Jonathan Bate was right when he said in his book *The Song of the Earth* 2000 “ that colonialism and deforestation have frequently gone together.”

The British marked their entry into North-East India with the signing of treaty of Yandabo in 1826. Immediately, they found the region fertile for tea, rubber juice, honey, timber, bamboo. They framed new policies which debarred the natives from grazing, hunting, fishing and collecting fuel, fruits for their survival. As per their rule all these activities such as hunting, grazing, encroaching and unauthorized entry were termed as crimes. In some or the other pretext they expropriated the forests for tea plantations and usurp the hill communities lands and declared it as national parks and wildlife forest sanctuaries thus jeopardizing the livelihood of communities who subsisted on forests. They controlled the forest resources and exported the forest products worldwide. Gradually, natural environment began shrinking, wild animals, birds, fishes, reptiles began disappearing fast. Construction of hydro electric projects and mining in the hills displaced the communities from their habitats. The natives protested against this but their voices were suppressed as tribal revolts and often compensated and resolved the matter then and there. The British believed that vegetation grew rapidly in Assam and the forests were inexhaustible and could be fell as much as possible. The land was sparsely populated then and there was no labour force for work. Hence, they encouraged migration leading to human displacement and ecological imbalance. The migrants and imported laborers and illegal human settlers accommodated themselves according to their conveniences in the forest thereby leading to the over exploitation of the natural

resources, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion, ethnic and state conflicts, social unrest and depletion of forests resources over the times and no efforts were made to conserve and protect forest.

The North-East India is well known for its hills, valleys, mountains, dense ever green forest, rivers, and numerous tribal communities. Cherrapunji in Meghalaya still records the highest rainfall and is considered as a wettest zone in the world. Since long the regional communities had been surviving through these forests. In pre-colonial days, forest played a pivotal role in the lives of the tribal communities but after the British arrival the natives' previous life was drastically changed and the accesses to their forest were restricted. The colonial ruler grabbed the unoccupied land and termed it as wasteland and allotted it to the European tea planters. They created forest reserve in order to supply their industries with timber and other useful natural resources. Today, the famed vegetation of North-East is under threat. Everything that is wrong with the regional environment at present is believed to have begun with the British forest administration and their activities towards short term benefit at the cost of environmental degradation. The status of evergreen forest of the North-East is not in the same state anymore. Moreover, the construction and expansion of roads, railways, industries, trade led to the exhaustion of the natural resources. AC Sinha in his book *Colonial Legacy and Environmental Crisis in North-East India* (2012) mentions:

The North-East region has one of the largest reserves of the tropical forests in India, one-seventh of the total forest cover. The regional forests plays host to a variety of birds and wild animals and rare species of plants. But the forest wealth of the region is disappearing on an alarming rate. Before the advent of the roads,

railway lines and the planned 'development', the region was covered with lush-green forests. And the hill communities lived in harmony with the forests around them.... but a disharmony between the man and nature has emerged in the region for anybody to see. The forest areas are decreasing, the quality of the forest is deteriorating, wildlife is being threatened, thin top soil is eroding alarmingly, and fertility of the forest land diminishing at an alarming rate. On the other hand, human habitation in and around the forest is on increase. In such a situation, once 'paradise of plentiful forests' are no more sustainable. (187-188)

The above lines explicitly reveal the contemporary general condition of the forest in the North-East. During the Second World War timber was in great demand therefore, a large number of trees were felled indiscriminately for making airfield space, for camps and for many other war purposes contributing havoc to the forests of North-East region. By the time the War ended, the British left the regions in disorder and uncertainty for the future of the various communities. After their departure it became difficult for post independence government to manage the mess left by the British. The entire state fell into the hands of inexperienced leaders; more so they did not try to rectify the already worsened environmental situation rather they saw environment as a raw material for the industries and for developing new society. To the dismay of the region the natives themselves engaged in exporting their natural resources. They were either manipulated or blinded by greed into smuggling their trees into the industries located outside the region. So much so, the situation became so distressing by 1990s that the Supreme Court of India had to mediate with a law to stop the deforestation.

Addressing the plight of environmental degradation is the need of the hour but unfortunately this has not been addressed sufficiently and on top of that various rebels and groups have sheltered in the forest and ethnic dwellers nearby are affected the most for their survival. At present, the tribes have changed their attitudes towards the natural resources because of various factors such as modern education, Christian faith, mass communication, modernization:

For example, as per the tribal traditions, the forests were inseparable part of natural environment, in which the communities thrived and lived in contentment. For the tribal neo-elite in the changed circumstances, the forests are nothing, but store of trees bearing commercial timber for marketing on a price. That explains the wanton/rampant cutting of the trees for marketable timber from the community forests with or without community consent. (Sinha 194)

The state of Meghalaya was formed by carving out two districts from the state of Assam- the Khasi and Jaintia hills, and the Garo hills. It became a part of the Indian Union on January 21, 1972. The Khasis are the largest ethnic group followed by the Garos and the Jaintias. There are many interpretations of the word “Khasi”. Hamlet Bareh suggests that the term “Khasi” means “born of the mother”, thus bringing out the matrilineal character of the Khasis who trace their descent from the mother. The origin of the Khasis as a race is shrouded in mystery, which has led historians to trace the roots of history in order to understand, “who is a Khasi? (1).

Khasis are one of the tribal communities of the North-East who had once lived in close proximity and shared a strong bond with nature. Nature was the centre around

which their every day to day activities revolved and from where they derived their basic essentials needed to sustain their life. Rekha M. Shangpliang in, “Ecological Basis of Khasi Ethno-Cultural Traits” mentions that “For a Khasi the forest is a well-loved home, a game sanctuary and also an abode of worship, all rolled in one, around which his social, cultural, and religious activities revolve” (221). Their folktales are an important source of information about their relationship with nature. In the introduction to his book *The Khasi Milieu* (1981), H.O Mawrie writes:

A Khasi lives with nature and nature lives with him” (intro, xiii) this summarizes the close affinity between the Khasi and nature “this strong bond created between the Khasi and the environment also leads one to believe that the forest, which is a vital component of the environment, is the very source of life. It is in the Khasi custom to believe that the earth with all its bounty is referred to as *Meiramew* which means “*mother earth*”, being a combination of land, forest, rivers and streams, the khasis do not separate these elements of the mother and the earth as separate entities. (xiii)

Forest played a significant role in the lives of the Khasis. They revered and worshipped the forest deity. Every village kept aside an area of land for preserving community forest called sacred grove. The sacred groves can be considered as an ancient way of forest conservation which is more or less still continuing. It was and still is a taboo to cut a tree or pick up a flower or fruit from the sacred groves. They consign cultural significance to the sacred groves which is seen in their rituals and ceremonies being performed inside the groves.

The nature of beliefs and rituals associated with sacred groves have made the Khasis to view their forests as 'sacrosanct'. Not a tree shall be cut, nor a stone or leaf removed from these forests. Whoever causes sacrilege, will fall under the curse of the forest deity. This reverential attitude on entering the forest is strictly followed by the Khasis even today. (Shangpliang 30)

Every aspect of Khasi culture be it folklore, dance, music, food, religious activities, myths and legends have played an important role in enriching the ecological history of Khasi society. Much of the forest knowledge of the Khasis has declined today due to the advancement of science and technology and the impact of modern western education. Besides, the advent of missionaries played an important part in changing the Khasi environment religious belief system and practices. One of the reasons of the ecological crisis of the modern day in the region could be attributed to moving away from their customary law of preserving forest. With the change of time the age old relationship between man and environment has vastly changed. There are a number of factors that are responsible for this eco cultural transformation of which the primary had been believed to be the advent of British rule, spread of modern education, conversion into Christianity, economic and industrial development, increase in population and interaction with other cultures. Even their myth has ecological significance attached to it. According to Khasi creation myth, in the beginning god is said to have created mother earth and her husband U Basa, they lived happily for many years. However, they did not have children so they prayed and was granted the boon of five children namely sun, moon, water, air, and fire. With their arrival everything began to prosper and multiply on earth. There are many versions of the same myth. It is unfortunate that the great reverence once the Khasi had

towards nature seems to be diminishing. Forests in the region are fast depleting due to consumerism, urbanization, greed, and growing materialism. Hence, there is an urgent need on the part of Khasis' to revive their ancestral traditions. There are a number of conservative forces like the Seng Khasi, Seinraj and many other NGOs working for protection and preservation of Khasi cultural heritage. Among the modern generation of Khasis there is a growing insensitivity towards nature and a rapport with environment no longer exists. It is deplorable to see that the Khasis who once were staunch guardians of nature have turned to disregard her existence. This danger of depletion of natural resources has finally brought about awareness among mankind. Literary artists through their works are now playing a major role in dealing with these environmental issues. According to Chandra and Das in *Ecology Myth and Mystery: Contemporary Poetry in English from North-East India* (2007):

Contemporary poetry in English from North-East India, Indian English poetry from North-East 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 acts 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. (35)

Writers and artist from the North-East now are trying within their capacity to restore environment. Kynpham in his essay, "The Poet as Chronicler: An Overview of Contemporary Poetry in North-East India" states, "These poets are bound together by

their great love for the land and everything that it signifies could be seen in the overwhelming presence of nature in many of their poems as they carefully, and imaginatively, and often romantically, try to chronicle its peculiar sights and sounds” (2). They have objected to this mindless exploitation and have tried to bring nature into serious consideration. One among such writers is Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (b.1964) who belongs to Khasi tribe and writes both in Khasi and English. Kynpham a poet from Shillong has been attentive towards the happenings of his time and has voiced his ecological awareness in his poetry. He is a witness to the ecological degradation of his place therefore, through his poetry he is trying to bring man closer to nature. His poetry hints at modern man’s notion of individualism, his sense of greed and accumulation of wealth and his corresponding alienation from nature. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is one of the most reputed poets from Shillong, North-East India. He is currently serving as a Professor in the Department of English, North Eastern Hill University. Many of his poems are taught in several Universities including Sikkim University, Nagaland University and IGNOU, Delhi. His published works include *Moments* (1992), *The Sieve* (1992), *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends* (2007), *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011), *Time’s Barter: Haiku and Senryu* (2015), co-edited *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the North-East* (2003) and *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from India* (2009). He is the recipient of First Veer Shah-Raghunath Shah National Award for Literature, and the First Poetry Award. In the year 2000 he also received a Fellowship for Outstanding Artists from the Government of India. He is a poet who firmly believes that the function of poetry is to cater to the demands of time, place and situation. He draws a wide range of literary and cultural references in his works. Some of his poems have a number of

allusions that demand a well read audience in order to understand them. He addresses a number of themes that are common and applicable to all. His poems are rich in visual imagery and capture even the attention of an insensitive poetry reader. Inspired by the current reality of his native land his poems are emotionally evocative, thought provoking and uplifting. Among his several works his *Time's Barter: Haiku and Senryu* reveals his intense bonding and profound concern for the people and land. Haiku is one of the oldest, short and descriptive forms of poetry first made popular in Japan. Known for its simplicity and depth the poem consist of three lines and seventeen syllables in total, with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second and five in the third. Originally the subject matter of haiku was nature and natural phenomenon, it was also called nature poems but these days in modern haikus many variations, themes and different styles have been introduced. Reality is the major aspect of this form of poetry. In the introduction to *Time's Barter* Nigel Jenkins writes, "of all the forms of poetry, haiku perhaps is the most demanding of the reader. It demands the reader's participation because haiku merely suggests something in the hopes that the reader will find "a glimpse of hitherto unrecognized depths in the self" (xii). It demands a sensitive audience to comprehend its depth of meaning. Haiku became popular as tanka poems in Japan during the 9th and 12th centuries, initially it was called "hokku" and Matsuo Basho, Yosa Buson and Kobayashi Issa and Masaoka Shiki were the four popular masters of the haiku genre. It is based on objective and realistic experiences of the poet. Rabindranath Tagore wrote haiku in Bengali and also translated some from the original Japanese. In the United States beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder made it popular. In modern times, it is practiced worldwide. Haikus are illustrative, visual and brief, in just mere three lines it

bears the capacity to awaken man. The reader here has a greater role to play as an objective observer receiving subjective experience of the poet. It is pictorial and visual which takes the reader away to the poet's world. Haiku is an objective art and the poet's :

depth of feeling can be gauged. It gives no hint at all to the poet's feeling, it is absolutely a stated fact and one we have to interpret for ourselves. His intensity of feeling and the images he has used are completely natural and spontaneous. There are still many parts of the world where haiku is either misunderstood or disdained and dismissed as an alien and pointless fey trifle of a thing. (x)

Haiku makes the reader realize that everything under the sky is interconnected. Kynpham in his *Time's Barter*, exhibits deep bonding between man and nature. His poem philosophises and ruminates on day to day activities of mankind and lashes out at their mindless acts that impair nature. In spite of man's ruthless action, nature appears to be ever loving and ever giving. In the following lines the poet laments at the threat posed by human beings to nature:

deep forest-
 columns of charcoal smoke
 hazing the sky. (15)
 land clouds rising-
 certainly, smoke
 without fire. (20)
 sunset behind a tree-
 the mystery
 of the burning bush. (30)

In the above lines the poet has used elemental images of fire and earth which are also sensory. The visual image of smoke rising from the forest, emission of vehicle fumes represent environmental pollution caused by wanton destruction of forest and increasing vehicles plying on the road. The meaning in the lines may be hazy but the depth of the haiku poem reveals often matter which are so real but escape our notice.

In Robert Frost's view 'something there is' in nature that does not accept this division between man and man, as it imposes 'divisions' or 'walls'. He bemoans this tendency to divide one human being from another, in his poem "Mending Wall". Separation is simply negating the law of nature as in this law there is no separateness there is only interconnectedness. Had nature treated humans as separate, life would have seemed impossible for them but nature is impartial. He has depicted human nature by comparing and contrasting it with natural world. By observing the natural world around the poet says that nature with all its bounty shares a harmonious relationship with the people:

bad neighbour's squash,
 their tentacles over the wall
 reach out for a handshake. (22)

Through the above three lines, the poet suggests that human beings could derive lessons through examining the natural world. Highlighting what nature can offer us, the poet like William Wordsworth in his poem "The Tables Turned" wrote:

One impulse from a vernal wood
 May teach you more of man,
 Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can. (21-24)

Taking a clue from the poem such as this, can make a reader wise enough to see what nature can impart if only one observe it closely. In the introduction to *Time's Barter*, Nigel Jenkins states:

The haiku encourages us to make distinctions and enjoy contrasts: to appreciate the little, neglected, 'irrelevant' things we routinely edit out of our busy lives as unimportant-what Wordsworth called 'seeing into the life of things'-as well as directing us towards the ineffable sweep of the night sky and the awesome interior spaces of the atom. (xxiii)

Kynpham observes that people are only interested in the fruit and the effort and time flowering process fruit takes is never considered. The simple lines below reveal human hunger and impatience for the fruits to grow while ignoring the beauty that the flower has to offer. Until and unless humans enjoy the blooming process he will not appreciate, only when he is aware of the effort flower takes to blossom then he realizes its value. His three line verses although seem simple yet contain deep meaning. It suggests that the beauty of the nature is not valued and only destroyed motivated by greed and human ambition. Hungrily and impatiently human inspect the fruit while not seeing into the magnificence of flowering process nature has to offer:

squash

growing overnight-

greedy eyes inspecting. (21)

farmer engrossed with

cauliflowers; couldn't even

see blooming cherries. (65)

potato flowers!

no one sees, only thinking

of the fat root within. (81)

Here, the poet has exhibited how human economic needs gain precedence over aesthetic considerations and are driven by utilitarian concerns. Poverty dampens the aesthetic and artistic inclinations. Marx believed that art has a social function in bringing awareness and transformation in the society but capitalism destroyed the beauty of arts by ascribing monetary value to art. The viewers have become consumers and have destroyed the desire for experiencing the beauty of art. Marx said how literature is luxury and men's economic needs are primary. Here, the poet suggests that the farmers are not charmed by the flowers; they wait for the fruit so that they can sell and fulfil their economic needs. To the poet it may be the root but the farmer it is the ultimate object of desire. He looks at it every day waiting and the change of perspective between a farmer and a poet lies here.

Vehicles undoubtedly are a great boon to the modern life which has facilitated the lives of people in commuting hassle free. But, owing to the ever increasing rapacity to possess more than required has led to increase in the number of cars. The vehicular traffic has led to road congestion and environmental pollution. The city of Shillong has seen unprecedented growth in the number of automobiles. Vehicle and noise pollution have become more severe with the rapid growth of industries, modernization ensuing on environment and human health issues. In the pursuit for comfort lifestyle and development environment protection was given less priority:

rule-the-roost gridlock-

cars don't have a death rate,
only birth. (25)

Everyday cars are multiplying in numbers, one of the reasons being that people do not discard their old cars, and buy new one with the result being additional pressure on the traffic. Cars indeed have no death rate as the car manufacturing company competing with each others in the market, manufacture car and does not least bother about the environment destruction their very effort is leading to. He further goes on to highlight the burgeoning human population. Due to rapidly increasing human population natural resources are over utilized and on the verge of depletion. Despite several attempts to conserve the natural resources other forms of natural disasters are still a challenge for human survival. At present human and nature no longer exist in harmony and natural resources are depleting on a large scale. It is important to review the way humans have negatively affected the environment in order to find some solution, to further avoid destruction and promote harmony between man and nature. Humans are out of sync with nature mistreating the only planet that hosts them:

fiery pomegranate
bursting with ripe seeds-earth
bursting with humans. (32)

Using nature analogy as a poetic device, the poet draws parallel between pomegranate bursting with ripe seeds and earth exploding with rising human population. In other words, here the poet by employing visual imagery tries to foreground population explosion. Likewise he shares similar concern in his another poem "The Influx". The

unprecedented rise in Shillong's population is said to be chiefly due to migration. He says:

And so they come
 these desperate men
 from mountains and plains
 like little drops of rain. (6-9)

These migrants are driven by the quest for livelihood and shelter; they come in search of employment and income. Their driving force behind migration is consumerism and material needs. The poet here equates their motive with dropping of rain:

and when these hills can hold no more
 so shall other lands and races
 lose to their earth-consuming craze. (10-12)

By raising the issue of population explosion in Shillong, Kynpham depicts his concern with the influx of population from different neighboring places into Shillong. He opines that the day may come soon when the hill may not be able to hold the mushrooming population. He has witnessed and observed the issue of population growth and he chronicles the realities wishing for change to happen. In his "The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity" he articulates:

I too wish to address my people directly, I would like to tell them of the colossal threat to our land posed by the careless flood of humanity and the growing aggressiveness of migrants. I would like to speak to them of the perils of terrorism and the greater peril of human turning terrorists. I would like to tell them of the absurdity of trying to deny their own roots and the anarchy that follows in

forgetting their own identity. I would like to talk of our great festivals, of Weiking, and the vitality of their part in our social life. (ii)

Only a poet like him who is awake to the prevalent issues around can point out the follies and frailties of human so to improve the situation. He questions the discrimination and distinction among mankind and wishes that they learn from the harmony in the forest:

such exquisite greens
in the forest, such ugly
distinctions among us. (47)

As a commentator of the degrading human relationship with nature, he is showing a contrast between natural world and human world. Using antithesis he points out the shameful human situation as opposite to nature's bounty. He appears to be wearied with man's attitude towards nature and the present predicament of his place:

forest fire watched
by millions; fire in my heart
witnessed by no one. (48)

The reality of environmental degradation is perceived by everyone but very less action has been initiated. Making use of elemental and sensory imagery the poet shares his personal grief that he is going through which is beyond the reach of others, hence witnessed by no one. He is contrasting between the external world and the internal reality, between one and many, private and public. Lonely and alienated the poet is left with his private pains with no one to share his grief.

His poems while enlightening not only bring out the issues of present day environmental crisis of his place but also leave an indelible impression on the minds of

the reader and teach that knowledge can be gathered even from an insignificant and a simple object. What is interesting about Kynpham's haiku is that he has represented his land while being very much a part of it. Through this he is representing the events of his present day world while simultaneously enjoying what nature has to offer for free:

why shouldn't I love these
bulbuls on the plums? Their songs
are for free. (59)

Globalization has heightened the awareness, skills and ideas of people. It has made lifestyle better and easier. It has also created a mass market thereby increasing business opportunities and expansion. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are found throughout the year these days which is quite unnatural and thus the poet weighing the pros and cons of globalization appears not to be much in favor of it. Globalization has led to increase in the consumption of products, which has further led to over production of goods which in turn is affecting the environment. He says:

cherries in winter!
not everyone likes
globalization. (60)

According to the concept called uniformity in nature; seasonal fruits and veggies are available but here the poet says that man has tempered with the uniformity of nature. Hence, fruits and veggies are available around the year which is quietly snacking on human health.

Over the last few decades a tremendous change such as increased population, industrial growth, urbanization, man's economic pursuit has led to axing of trees in large

numbers and denudation of forests all in the name of development. Exploitation of forest resources in the state is rampant. The poet appears to be perturbed seeing the rampant deforestation in the region which is leading towards the bareness and barren:

tree stumps on a hill,
 opposite, in a ditch,
 a laden timber truck. (70)
 deep forest-
 by the highway,
 neat stacks of timber. (96)

Timber is being felled unabated despite various regulations on felling of the trees in the region and uninterruptedly being supplied it to the neighboring states. The commercialization of the natural resources and illegal timber trade by timber smugglers is still rampant. Echoing similar concerns, Tamsula Ao, another poet from Nagaland, in her poem “The Bald Giant” says:

I can see a bald giant
 Looming in my horizon
 Sitting glum and shorn
 And I do not know
 Whether to cry or laugh
 At this sorry sight. (1-6)

The poet sees huge stump of tree and worries that more such will emerge because monstrosity of cutting down of trees is continuing. She is indicating what is impending; the giant tree has lost its best part leaves, charm, greenery all that made it beautiful and

now it is deprived of branches; leaves plundered, giant is robbed of its lovely properties. It is a powerful visual and graphic representation again of violence done to forest, of deforestation that the poet is bemoaning. This throws the poet at the state of utter confusion and she does not know whether to cry or laugh.

She further says that she remembers the time when the forest used to be green and in plenty, “I remember a time / When he was not so / He looked gorgeous then. / His green cloak of summer / Shimmered in the sun” (7-11). She mourns that “All that is now gone / All of him is brown / From base to crown” (19-21). This poem is evident of the effect of deforestation. There is no end to man’s vanity arrogance and greed. He is a part of the earth just like other living species. In the words of Ellen Churchill Semple in *Influences of Geographic Environment* (1911):

Man is the product of earth’s surface. The earth has mothered him, fed him, set him to tasks, directed his thoughts, confronted him with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his wits, man can no more be scientifically studied apart from the ground which he tills, or the land over which he travels or the seas over which he trades. (Semple)

Man and nature relationship has always been ambiguous as nature has been seen as a provider and man as benefactor. This tradition of nature as provider is declining, thus the role has to be reversed now. The idea of subverting nature has to be discarded and nature should be considered as an integral part of human. Humans tend to assume that the world was made for their use. The human ego, Eiseley in “Literature and Environment” says:

can hardly grasp the idea that for many eons the world existed very nicely without the species and that the universe might be entirely indifferent to its coming and going. Thus, it is crucial that we understand and realize that it is high time we resist our egotism, stop continue to satisfy our human needs at the expense of all other life on the planet. The self-centredness of humanity has made us not only lonely but also dangerous. (59)

Therefore, here the poet is appealing for modification by imploring and inviting people to re-think and analyse their actions by exposing the modern day reality of the place. All these can be done by a perpetually alert and an observant mind. Situations like these are happening in day to day basis but people have deliberately chosen to ignore it. The magnanimity of nature as opposed to cruelty perpetrated by certain thoughtless section of people is what Kynpham is highlighting here. Nature did not exist for its own purpose but to enrich and nourish human life. Men the best creation of god who can communicate and have reasoning power acts as the most irrational of all other beings:

ripe star fruits
 on drooping branches-
 our greed knows no bounds. (76)

William Wordsworth once lamented in his poem, "Lines written in Early Spring", "And much it grieved my heart to think / What man has made of man" (7-8). Now, Kynpham mourns at human beings insensitivity towards the fruit tree. Nature naturally offers fruit yet people either catapult or stone it thereby purposely being inconsiderate towards it. The poet seems to wonder when man is going to be humble and learn to be kind towards

nature. If they are unkind to such a small fruit tree how will they be kind to such a vast cosmos that he has inhabited.

Manifesting profound ecological awareness, he says that the waste being dumped does not disappear, it comes back in gigantic proportions in various forms of ailments to harm humans. Mary Austin in her book *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) observes, “There is no scavenger that eats tin cans, and no wild thing leaves a like disfigurement on the forest flower” (40). The poet shares:

annual cleaning drive-
garbage from the drains
piled onto roadsides. (95)

In a way, the poet is a bit sarcastic because cleaning drives should be regular, but here it is done once in a year as just a mechanical exercise to earn money. Huge budget is sanctioned for the cleaning drive and the garbage is being dumped from one side to the other. These lines speak of the zenith of human irresponsibility and insincerity. Hence, this cleanliness drive has just become a farce. In order to motivate people to keep their surroundings clean government of India have come up with several cleanliness campaigns but Kynpham perceives that after garbage is just cleared from one side, it is dumped onto the other side. Genuine concern for the environment is indeed shown nowhere. Thus, his poem calls for reassessing their unbecoming actions. Unless positive actions comes from human nothing outside is ever going to change. This situation is well expressed by Harold Fromm in his book *The Nature of Being Human: From Environmentalism to Consciousness* (2009):

Suddenly the human race has been put into the position of affluent teenagers who dump beer cans from their moving sports car and then drive off. The can appears to have vanished, but no, there they are, astoundingly enough rolling around the neighborhood where they have been dumped. And when the teenagers arrive home, they find other beer cans dumped by other teenagers. The neighborhood is a place of beer cans; the ocean and place of toxic effluents, the sky is vaporized garbage. And to add insult to injury, man's unconquerable mind turns out to have a mouth through which it is fed; and worse still, it is being fed garbage, its own!
(43)

In such a time of environmental crisis Kynpham finds hard to distinguish whether the bird is singing out of joy or wailing out of utter agony:

incessant downpour-
the noise of bulbuls: are they
singing or wailing? (103)

Whether nature is joining in destroying habitat of birds the poet cannot distinguish; perhaps greater possibility of their wailing because downpour may disturb their habitat.

Similarly, in his other poem, "Rain Song 2000" the poet questions:

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)

Here, once again the poet gives anthropomorphic representation to nature. Ruskin had called it pathetic fallacy the poet is attributing human qualities to nature; and can be seen

as an instance of pathetic fallacy. The poet can actually feel the agonies of the natural world and is protesting against mindless activities of mankind and his irresponsible behaviour. Therefore, what he has felt he has written down reminding people to give regard to the emotions of nature as he has done; so that further destruction could be prevented.

Similarly, Temsula Ao in her poem “My Hills” presents a dismal picture of landscape ravaged by excessive human interference. The following lines make the degeneration evident. “The sounds and sights / Have altered / In my hills” (1-3). “The rivers are running red / The hillsides are bare / and seasons / Have lost their magic” (24-27). She depicts violence by the human to the natural world; when rivers are incarnadined; when nature is disturbed because the charms of different seasons have vanished.

Kynpham describes how popular Umiam Lake is highly polluted due to toxic waste being dumped into it and have become unsuitable for human consumption. He says:

Umiam Viewpoint-
 heaps of rubbish
 at my feet. (104)

Over the last few decades a tremendous change such as increased population, industrial growth, urbanization, economic pursuit has led to felling of trees in large numbers and denudation of forests all in the name of development, exploitation of forest resources in the state is rampant. Due to ecological imbalance and climate change, rainfall has decreased. Thus, less volume of water accumulated in the Umiam Reservoir is

threatening the sustainability of the hydro electric project. The level of water in Umiam Reservoir has dangerously dropped below the required level of water.

Robin Ngangom, another poet from Manipur equally laments the state Umiam has gotten into, he says: “Red water, weeping water, / tell me the story of your tears”. (“Umiam” 1-2). He further says, “You weep sterile tears, / your eyes drying / as the city fills your mouths / with sewage and venom / and declares its love for you” (“Umiam” 31-35). The lines are clear enough to relate how the condition of once famed Umiam has gotten into by the mindless actions of human. The poet using personification, repetition, and providing anthropomorphic details says that the tears of nature is unproductive and will go unheeded, because it is of no use as human reckless attitude appears to be unstoppable. The poet with his fair sarcasm, has painted a dismal picture of toxicity around. Human being live in the realm of nature, they are constantly surrounded by it but in their sense of materialism, and consumerism they have over exploited natural resources, disregarded the environment, polluted the oceans, made the air unbreathable. The poet John Drinkwater said:

When you defile the pleasant streams,
And the wild bird’s abiding place,
You massacre a million dreams
And cast your spittle in God’s face.

Human have largely ignored the creators and his creations around. Initially, they lived in dependence and in awe of nature’s menacing and destructive forces but now they have subdued it to serve their interest. The poet says that the time has come now to revise their attitudes and discard ideas of attacking the forest, the rivers and conquering the

mountains. Displaying profound concern for the health of environment of his place, Kynpham observes the deep contradiction in human behavior, what he advocates for and what he does in reality:

morning drive:

a man peeing on a wall,

a dog on a post. (108)

Fisheries' Office-

the fishponds by its side,

completely dry. (111)

Through the above lines, the poet shows no difference between the behavior of a man and the behavior of dog. The fish ponds should be replete with fish and overflowing with water, but the poet says its empty, which in a way also reveals the neglect of job. The poet seems to question, what humans are actually doing, who is after all responsible for destroying nature are we not? And now who is going to bring changes? It is an ultimatum to human for their action, in spite of so many laws and regulations against open defecation nothing really has happened because people are not responsible enough. In describing the new world contaminated by progress, the speaker expresses a deep anxiety for the future. City continues to expand at an alarming rate with its unending development and the challenges posed by rapid urbanization are already disastrous. His poems explicitly call attention to previously overlooked phenomenon. Due to population growth, influx of migrants and inflow of visiting tourist the empty space has been filled up. In order to make the region tourist destination and to generate income for the region, construction development activity has significantly increased in the hill region. In the

name of growth and development construction of buildings are mushrooming on a rampant scale. The vacant or empty space can rarely be seen. The poet appears to be concerned about these sprawling buildings:

progress-

the hills will flatten

because of you. (115)

pastoral landscape-

above a dense sacred grove,

huge sprawling buildings. (114)

long line of houses

up the woods of Shillong Peak-

a spear thrust through the heart. (52)

pears, plums, black cherries:

for how long, when iron rods

are pointing at the sky? (17)

It is an ongoing process of decaying urbanization where buildings are thrust through the heart of nature and mindless development is pitted against environmental conservation. The indiscriminate construction is a threat to environment conservation. Whatever the poet has presented in his poems are being noticed by everyone everyday but is generally ignored. Forests are being destroyed and apartments being constructed in their place, animals and birds have lost their home and his poem compels us to think about our relationship with nature.

Hill areas are known as seismically vulnerable and environment sensitive zones. Therefore, building height is restricted to five storeys but despite the height restrictions the poet says that the buildings are pointing to touch the sky. Regulations are enforced in hilly towns to regulate from misfortunes of any kind of natural disaster. Inappropriate and unplanned buildings have cluttered the space and threatened the lives of people as hilly areas are prone to earthquake, landslides and other such natural calamities. In case of occurrence of any natural disaster people have no room to escape. Although, Kynpham hails from Shillong he does not shy away from portraying the fact of his town according to the way he has observed it. The poet here is not projecting Shillong, also sobriquet as the “Scotland of the East” in a bad light but he is trying to say that every space on earth has its reality of environmental degradation which as a poet he is trying to bring forth. An outsider’s assumption of Shillong about its beauty and serenity is brought to stark contrast to glaring deficiencies, shortcomings and social ills of the place. This ever widening gap between the outsider perception and the underlying reality is effectively brought out by Kynpham in his *Times Barter*. The hill which is usually labeled as beautiful, serene, verdant trees, with its self sufficient entity but Kynpham highlights the veritable fact of underdevelopment, irresponsibility, greed and destruction. He is definitely pained at the sight but maintains equanimity and continues to observe. Civilized beings are more ruthless and cruel as in the name of sanitation they poisoned the lake by dumping sewage water into it. Materialism and consumerism has led to mass production of commodities and has resulted in growth of toxic waste and dumping ground all over the place:

Scotland of the East-

teeming, disorderly streets

fragrant with garbage. (124)

Iew Mawlong Market-

vehicles plough through mud fields,

crowd scales rubbish heaps. (125)

Popular notion of beautiful smooth and lovely streets of Scotland of the East is contrasted with disorder, garbage and rubbish heaps. This kind of use of bathos is quite characteristic of Kynpham poetry. His haiku becomes a sort of social critique by drawing contrast between popular conception and reality.

He goes on to highlight the plight of once popular Umkhrah River, now polluted due to proliferation of human settlement on its banks and filled with garbage. Once in the name of river, poetry was composed and song was sung and now it is difficult to behold its structure. Garbage has disfigured the face of the river and marred its beauty. He is perpetually aware and alert of the various issues and challenges of the region and hence chooses to project as it is. It is also his profound love for Shillong and concerned for its ecological devastation that makes him pinpoint the shortcomings of his land. Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyrpi are the two main rivers that flow through Shillong eventually draining their waters into the Umiam lake. Umiam Lake is the first hydel power project of North-East India. These two rivers have for ages been a means for sustenance for the people of Shillong and neighboring areas and are solely responsible for providing electricity to the entire city. The rivers have been the source of identity for Shillong whose many localities are named after the river. 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. However down the years due to increasing population, industrialization and urbanization have taken their toll on the health of the river. It has been reduced to an open drain with all the sewage garbage and industrial waste being dumped into it. If the people don't respond to this warning sign now they might lose their precious lifeline forever. He observes:

famed Umkhrah River-
 reeking serpent of sewage,
 bodies and drowned gods. (126)

The popular impression of once famous river is deconstructed by presenting the contamination of river by inhabitants. The poet presents ugly reality, disturbing and dismal picture of contaminated Umkhrah river. The poet is saddened by the mindless pursuits of humankind "who cannot think beyond possessions". In the poem "Kynshi" the poet expresses his heartfelt anxiety and concern about the deteriorating state of the environment of the river Kynshi and its surroundings. Reverberating through the poem is the poet's voice of intervention and an urgent appeal for making genuine efforts to salvage the River Kynshi from the impending doom. The river in the words of the poet:

This sovereign river, Kynshi,
 rolling from the hills of Raishan
 with a flat sweeping flow.....
 need to be preserved
 in more than memories,
 or the words of a backwater poet

ploughing clumsily through a foreign tongue. (5-11)

The Kynshi River in the words of the poet has to be preserved in reality, in history, rather than in memory. It has to be preserved because its sovereignty is facing threat, he is forewarning of dire consequences if continued to pollute the river in the same way then the memory of the river may just survive in the poem of the poet. The “sovereign river” lies in a deplorable state today as a result of human excessive greed for natural resources. Coal mining near the river area has led to the death of marine creatures and the change of color of the river water reveals the fact that the water in the river is contaminated. 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.
 This is the sadness with us all
 who cannot think beyond possessions
 and live but for a single season. (36-46)

The mark of a good poet lies in being able to construct innovative and fresh and unconventional similes “pines like filth”, denudation in the hills by blasting it using dynamites. Just as they carry tree they also carry pebble thereby completely plundering nature. This is the wound of time and the poet deplors the wanton commodification of nature and man's acquisitive character. Man is so shortsighted that he is lacking in future foresight and waiting deadly time that is going to come about sooner or later resulting from his senseless acts.

At the same time the poet portrays the river as a benevolent and a persevering force of nature which despite all the damages 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). The river knows to survive despite being tortured by nefarious activities of mankind but they should realize that their action will soon boomerang on them and the consequence would be then beyond recovery. Nature has its own silent way to avenge. The poet has given expression to both the beautiful landscape as well as the troubling environment issues of the present day.

In the poem “Hiraeth” 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 much 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 birds made his life blissful. But at present he articulates, “No more do I hear the morning sounds of home: / birds warbling, cicadas whining, crows cawing, / chickens yapping about the yard” (4-6). In an interview with Anirag Rudra, he expresses his hiraeth to relive those young days at Sohra:

I was born and brought up in Sohra or Cherrapunjee, famed worldwide for the rain and the breath-taking beauty of its landscape. Growing up among the sacred woods, the panoramic hills and clear rivers of Sohra; among warm and compassionate neighbours, that remains the best part of my life, and I find myself hankering back to that time again and again. This is why my only *hiraeth* (welsh, sense of longing) now is for Sohra, for I still consider myself a true son of the wettest place on earth, baptized by its wind-driven rain and its impregnating fog.
(Rudra)

Correspondingly, Temsula Ao also harks back to the past desiring for those days in her poem, “Lament For Earth” “Once upon an earth / there was a forest, / Verdant, virgin, vibrant” (1-3) but now the poet laments in the following lines: “Alas for the forest / Which now lies silent / Stunned and stumped” (21-25). The poet recalls the time of yesteryears when the green and grassy forests prevailed but now she is saddened to see it all stumped. Using alliteration she tries to grasp the reader’s attention to convey what she has witnessed. She laments the environmental degradation. Once the nature frightened human with its vastness and now it scares them with its limitation and fragility. Comparing the past when earth was green, with the present when just the remains of the green remains. The poet calls for a collective action to revive the green glory of the past.

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih with the help of his poems has exquisitely treated and documented the current environmental predicament of the people and his place. It is Kynpham’s personal experience and a rendition of his acute observation. Reading his verses equals to discovering a lot about ecological degradation in Shillong. He is a visionary, ecological historian and a poet whose aim is to spread environmental

awareness through his poems. Therefore, he is playing his part to save the environment because in his words, “I want trees on the hills, / birds in the woods, fishes in the streams.” (“Self-actualization” 41-42) and therefore, he is determined to preserve it through his poetry as he believes that “May be, after all, someone has to save your / streams and pine groves, Despite the cold / wind, there are times when I feel determined / to liberate your hills” (“Lawsotun” 50-53).

Nature has been a silent observer and a witnesser of human activities since the beginning. It was magnanimous to house the planet but its capacity to bear man’s ingrate and callousness is decreasing. Only the latest dire environmental exigency is waking up man. Anthropocentric attitude that was predominant in the early society taught men its implications nevertheless, the present environmental disasters reveals that men appears to continue being anthropocentric. Hence, the poet is stressing on conserving natural environment on priority basis because contemporary issue of global environment crisis cannot be ignored anymore. Man’s folly of heedless pursuit and anthropocentric behavior has already jeopardized the natural world. The realizations that, human are absolutely dependent on natural resources for their sustenance may be of help to some extent. In an essay “Speaking a Word for Nature” Scott Russell Sanders says:

No matter how urban our experience, no matter how oblivious we may be toward nature, we are nonetheless animals, two-legged sacks of meat and blood and bone dependent on the whole living planet for our survival. Our breathings still flow through the pores of trees, our food still grows in dirt, our bodies decay. Of course, of course: we all nod our heads in agreement. The gospel of ecology has become an intellectual common place. But it is not yet an emotional one. For most

of us, most of the time, nature appears framed in a window or a video screen or inside the borders of a photograph. We do not feel the organic web passing through our guts, as it truly does. While our theories of nature have become wiser, our experience of nature has become shallower. (226)

The poet observes that humans do care about natural environment more in theory rather than in action. He feels that unless and until each and every individual is committed to minimize the damage and shoulder responsibility to protect the planet nothing is really going to change. Re-examining ancient classical wisdom and deep ecology amidst the present day ecological crisis may prove beneficial. Khasis' traditional practices, folklore, and belief system are deeply embedded in nature, therefore committing to adhere to these practices can play a vital role in conservation of environment.

North-East forest is known for its rich bio diversity and has been identified as one of the eighteen biodiversity hotspots of the world. Reckless and rampant chopping off trees is still being continued even after the several laws have banned it. Thus, the poet is emphasizing here a need for the large scale afforestation programme and awareness in the state. Shillong which was once known for its ever green forest is incessantly witnessing deforestation at a rapid rate due to mindless urbanization, industrialization. Mentioned may be made that most of the forest land in Meghalaya belongs to the clan or community. But at present most of the area exudes a bare look. The anthropogenic attitude of human seemed to further aggravate the problems. Water pollution, population growth, deforestation, urbanization, soil erosion, biodiversity loss are some of the problems region is facing today.

Apart from a popular tourist destination Meghalaya is rich in limestone deposits and coal. However, unmethodical and illegal coal mining in the region have had detrimental effect on the environment and has led to land, water and forest degradation as well as health concern for the miners and the local residents. The issue of environment degradation in the North-East is not sufficiently highlighted due to the fact that people still have the image of the region replete with lush, verdant green forest and pristine beauty all around. North east region suffers the most devastating landslide, floods, causing damage to ecology and human alike. The belief that hill regions are covered with dense forest no more holds true. The North-East India although seems to lack ecological threat, a close look would reveal that the region too has not been spared the experience of environmental problems. Undoubtedly, the percentage of forest in North-East region is far better than in any other parts of India, yet the same situation cannot be guarantee forever. Growing population, space constrained, rampant deforestation is leading towards the climate change. A sense of identification, belongingness, giving human quality to nature as the poet has rendered is the call of the hour. According to Naess, "In order to avoid tyrannizing over the non-human realm, human beings must adopt an ethic of "identification" with all the things a mode of relationship involving "an extension of sympathy that reaches so far and becomes so constant that the self loses any desire to differentiate between itself and the world. (qtd. in Hutchins 182)

The most pressing need of the present day is to address the environmental issue but the challenge is to find out how to redress it when people have already damaged the nature leaving their own future at risk. Some serious environmental threats such as global warming, melting of glaciers, floods, landslides and many other disasters taking place in

the world today are the result of man's pursuit for heedless material progress. The poet feels that mankind should realize that the current environmental problems are largely of their making hence finding solutions to this problem should be their own making as well.

Poets like Kynpham can only bring awareness about the deplorable environmental condition of the present day so that men may awaken from their unconscious action and rectify them. At present scientist, scholars, writers and activist are engaged in searching for ways to protect and limit the environmental degradation. The ecocritical approach is also helping in bringing changes in the mindset and outlook of the people.

The material greed of man has led to the emergence of green movements all over the globe. Kynpham's poetry provides wide ranging themes of which eco consciousness is one among them. His poetry springs from his observation of contemporary daily ecological realities and social concern which is deeply personal yet he presents it in a detached way. He has dismantled the glorifying view of his beloved native place in an attempt to provide a realistic picture of Shillong. Poetry carries diverse voices of a society therefore poetry could help to generate some sort of solution in the present day of ecological degradation. According to Francis Ponge in his book *The Voice of Things* (1972):

The function of poetry is to nourish the spirit of man by giving him the cosmos to suckle. We have only to lower our standard of dominating nature and to raise our standard of participating in it in order to make the reconciliation take place. When man becomes proud to be not just the site where ideas and feelings are produced, but also the crossroad where they divide and mingle, he will be ready to be saved.

Hope therefore lies in a poetry through which the world so invades the spirit of man that he becomes almost speechless, and later reinvents language. (105)

The natural world has been one of the recurring subjects of poetry since the dawn of literary writings hence, it can be further used as resources for eco-education. The description of the natural world, landscape, season, and environment has been a constant part of poetry writing. But all these and “The tonic of wildness” (chapter 17 *Walden*) as Thoreau called it are soon going to remain in print and not in reality. It is high time to revalue, review and reform human ways and redirect their attitude from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness. As Arthur Boughey points out, “There is no population, community or ecosystem left on earth completely independent of the effects of human cultural behavior. Now (this human) influence has begun to spread beyond the globe to the rest of our planetary system and even to the universe itself” (Glotfelty and Fromm 114). It is important to understand that the survival of human race on this planet is dependent on the environment to such a large extent that they cannot afford to ignore the consequence of their actions. Thus, a widening focus to understand the interconnectedness between human and the natural world around is much needed.

Apart from dealing with some of the core issues of the region, eco-consciousness is significant feature of Kynpham’s writing. The rampant industrialization and urbanization, proliferation of population, air pollution, water pollution, deforestation and race for development have led to declining of the harmonious relationship that the inhabitants of this region once shared with nature. Hence, Kynpham’s poetry reacts against ruthless act of ravaging the environment. By writing about the engendered environment he is trying to raise concern as well as sensitise the reader about the

ecological damage that has been going around. His poetry bears testimony to the adverse changes wrought by a rapid rise in urbanization and industrialization in the last few decades on the environment of Shillong.

His poetry should suffice to serve as an urgent reminder of the ecological degradation of the contemporary Shillong in particular and the world in general. By lending the voice to the silence of nature can counter the exploitation and abuse of nature. By bearing testimony to the environmental plight of the region he reveals the present ecological history of the region which demands considerable attention from the public. Kynpham has used poetry as a vehicle for expressing his concern for the prevalent issues of contemporary times. The best features of North-East poets are that they are witnesses and shares what they have personally went through thus adding extra finesse to the poetry. Since witness poetry began writers are conscious about what exactly they are writing and whom they are addressing. This is because their main agenda is bringing awareness among the people and reform the society through the medium of their writings. He often goes back and forth reminiscing and comparing it to the present in order to let people know what he had witnessed in the past and what he is witnessing in the present. Often comparison helps to know the reality or truth of the present time, it is only through comparison the best is brought out. The poet in “The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity” says:

I believe in a poet who is a witness, one with the seeing eye, a retentive memory and the innate instinct to catch the soul of his generation. My own poetry is deeply rooted and I see my role as a poet as that of a chronicler of subjective realities. I have talked, in my poems, of leaders lording “like the wind” and fickle

“like Hindi film stars changing dresses in a song.” I have talked of my impoverished land, and with sardonic humour, of real people who are at once individuals and types. I have tried to capture the changing times, aspects of my culture and issues on the fringe. (i)

Apart from Kynpham there are many other regional writers who have explored nature into their poetry but their works have been going unnoticed. The reading public instead of reading and re reading the same popular text touched by many may explore the unexplored terrain in order to find probable solution lurking in it. Kynpham works are mostly translated into English and has gained a wider readership; and is not confined within limited public readers. By personally witnessing and comprehending the seriousness of the situation he has composed his verses consciously. There are many writers from the North-East whose work still has not seen the light of the day as yet because of lack of translation. Hence, regional scholars and educated public may take this pain to translate the works of their regional writers and share with the world the insight it contains for the betterment of the earth and its inhabitants.

Ecocriticism an approach has indeed become a boon to the literary studies. Since its inception a certain sort of responsibility, commitment among the research scholars, academicians, writers in order to project the recent catastrophe and to find a possible solution could be seen. Although, it cannot be said that deforestation has stopped, ravaging the environment has ceased, pollution has stopped, in fact it is increasing, but gradual change among people is happening mass awareness through the medium of literature, is reaching far and wide. Many emergent activists, NGO's, scientist are engaged now to find a solution. The contemporary time demands that man should revise

review re consider their exploitative attitude towards nature. The warning from nature in the form of several calamities should awaken men. Veneration for the concept of sacred grove has to be intensely revived. Poets like Kynpham should be acknowledged for trying their best to bring eco-consciousness among the masses through the medium of their poetry. Apart from Environmental degradation, North-Eastern states such as Manipur are facing threat due to corruption, internal politics, large number of migration and ethnic violence which have disturbed the serenity of the place. Thus, a poet like Robin Ngangom has represented and resisted these issues in his poems which will be dealt in the next chapters.

CHAPTER IV

Voices of Resistance: Robin S Ngangom

This chapter briefly introduces the political history of Manipur in order to trace the root cause of contemporary ethnic conflicts and violence in the region. The chapter also looks into the early literature of the region to discover the birth of witness and resistance poetry. The chapter further probes into the poems of Robin S Ngangom in order to understand how his poetry act as a diatribe against the contemporary issues of Manipur.

Manipur, the sixteenth state of India was once one of the Indian princely states. After the Indian independence in 1947 it merged with the Indian union in 1949; from 1962 it was a Union territory until it achieved statehood on January 21, 1972. It is one of the eight North-Eastern states of India with Imphal as its capital. The name Manipur literally means the 'land of gems'. It borders with Myanmar in the east, Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west and Mizoram in the south. Among many ethnic groups in Manipur the three major ethnic groups are Nagas, Kukis, and Meiteis. There were several invasions from Myanmar from 1819-1826 which brought chaos and devastated Manipur. Hence, this period in the history of Manipur is also known as 'Seven Years Devastation'. In 1824 Anglo-Burmese War broke out and ended in 1826 with the signing of the treaty of Yandabo. This treaty ended the status of Manipur as an independent country and marked the beginning of British administration. During the Second World War Japanese forces occupied Imphal. The Battle of Imphal is not forgotten in Japan but rather ironically forgotten in India. According to Robert Lyman, author of *Japan's Last Bid for Victory: The Invasion of India 1944* "The Japanese regard the battle of Imphal to be their

greatest defeat ever” (Gardner Harris). Dr N Lokendra Singh in a 1993 paper for the Manipuri State Archives explains how Manipur had changed in many aspects after the Second World War:

Manipur’s experience of the Second World War brought rapid but profound changes in the consciousness as well as socio-economic life of the people. These changes not only paved the way for the emergence of new social forces, but also prepared the necessary pre-condition for a strong popular movement for bringing about broad economic and political changes in Manipur during the immediate post Second World War period. Manipur had changed forever. (31)

Similarly, Robin S. Ngangom in “Contemporary Manipuri Poetry: An Overview” describes how Manipur underwent transformations:

A one-time princely kingdom with visions of grandeur, which fell into the clutches of the British colonial regime and ultimately freed, only to become a part of the Indian Union under dubious circumstances, Manipur became just another corrupt and disillusioned state under the new dispensation. After the trauma of World War II, there were distinct transformations in the political and social life of this erstwhile feudal state. Shared areas of experience for many would include loss of traditional values in human affairs, the tyranny of those who wield economic and political power, rootlessness, dispossession, fragmentation of home and family, urbanisation, and interestingly, the disturbing consequence of the struggles of those who cherish freedom in a perceived neo-colonial regime, and

the misgivings of those who felt that they were losing their identity and culture.
(297-298)

Once in Manipur it is said that the concept of unity in diversity was prevalent and people lived together in harmony. In the history of Manipur, despite being a home to various communities there appears to be not even a single instance of communal or ethnic dispute. But in recent times Manipur has experienced bitter ethnic hostility, intra and inter ethnic clashes, insurgency and various other forms of violence which has rendered casualties and considerably affected the day to day activities in the region. Brigadier Sushil Kumar Sharma in “The Complexities of Tribal Land Rights and Conflict in Manipur: Issues and Recommendations” gives the details of the mutual harmony that once existed among the three major ethnic groups of Manipur. He writes:

After India’s independence, these communities continued to coexist peacefully, however, owing to separate aspirations and perceived insecurity regarding overlapping claim over natural resources, gradually they moved apart. Certain post independence developments deepened these prejudices leading to inter-community ethnic clashes. These clashes also hastened the formation of various armed groups affiliated to respective ethnic communities. The insurgent outfits, therefore, were not only waging struggle against the establishment but were now seen more as a necessity against the hegemony and violence perpetrated by rival communities. (4)

These communities coexisted in harmony for centuries but the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the colonial administration as well as the inroads of Christianity into the hills destroyed the unity leading to tension and conflict. In 1891, The Anglo-Manipuri War was fought

between Manipuris and British force on account of the murder of several British officers. Manipuri lost the war at the hands of the superior British force equipped with modern weaponry. Prior to this war Manipur was an independent state but in 1891 it came under the British rule followed by the arrival of missionaries which led to the spread of Christianity in the hills. At present, a large number of people are Christians amounting to total of 41.29% according to 2011 census. The British saw their period of occupation in Manipur as a time of serenity and peace although this moment of perceived tranquility did not last long. The British with their 'divide and rule' policy encouraged the ethnic groups to assert their separate identity and since then they have asserted their rights in every social, political or economic sphere. Naga and Kuki groups were formed during the colonial period but these groups remained as they were even after the colonial period. In fact, after the Indian independence they became more aggressive in asserting their demand of ethnic identity in politics. At present people are angry and disillusioned with the unending ethnic conflicts as well as with the law and governance. Several insurgent group activities are hampering the growth and development of the region. Group fights are common among the ethnic tribes which are largely ignored by the politicians who brush it aside as a problem of the central government. The rule of law is hardly or never allowed to prevail. Plethora of political parties and splinter groups has mushroomed, corruption is high, antisocial activities are rampant, general strikes and road blockades are the order of the day. People and organisations are illegally taxed in order to support the rebel groups. The elected leaders keep doling out false promises to the public. In the hill areas priority was given to the protection of each community's identities, culture, economic and political power. Consequently, many insurgent groups have been formed in

order to protect their respective identities. A few of Meitei insurgent groups are fighting for sovereignty and other Meitei groups are demanding for exclusive ethnic state. Naga and Kuki insurgent groups are fighting for separate state or greater autonomy within the state. Subsequently, internal conflict has increased significantly. A number of the Indian paramilitary forces such as the Assam Rifles, The Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police Force are deployed in Manipur for fighting against many armed rebels operating in the region. With the emergence of several separatist movements Manipur was declared disturbed area in 1980 and eventually the Armed Force Special Power Act 1958 (AFSPA) was imposed. AFSPA act has violated human rights in the region; due to its enforcement many inhuman activities have been taking place thus people and activists have been protesting for its repeal for the past few decades. Writers also have begun representing it in their works.

The conflict which occurred between the Naga and Kuki tribes between 1992 and 1997 resulted in loss of many lives including innocent women and children. Hundreds of villages were decimated which led to displacement of the unguarded inhabitants. The conflict began when the National Socialist Council of Nagaland NSCN (IM) demanded land tax from Kukis on the ground that they were immigrants from Burma residing in Naga territory. When the Kukis refused to pay taxes for living in their ancestral lands, Kuki civilians were killed mercilessly and their villages were burnt down. In retaliation, Kuki tribes formed their own armed groups to protect their settlement and identity. Meitei-Pangal ethnic clash began in 1993 fuelled by rumour-mongers. The NSCN (IM) influenced another tribe Paite-Zaoumi which led to another ethnic clash between the Kukis and the Paite-Zaoumi in 1997-98 resulting in arson and civilian casualties. NSCN

(IM) claimed Manipur as exclusive Naga territory and wanted to form an independent Nagalim. They are still pursuing this demand with the government of India. Nagas want Nagalim, Kukis want Kukiland and Meiteis claim exclusive Meiteis ethnic state. Meiteis, Nagas and Kukis are at loggerheads over their territorial claims. The conflicts between several ethnic groups are over the demand for the creation of new states within India or independence from India. These conflicts have gained both domestic and global attention. The animosity between them is so strong that even a small incident can spark a big furore. Ethnic violence between them has hampered the overall development and economy in the region. It has also resulted in the loss of numerous lives, damages of both private and public properties and displacement of people. The Nagas and Kukis imposed frequent indefinite curfews along the highways to seek the redressal of their grievances. It affected the livelihoods of people due to the acute shortages of essential commodities. The conflicts among the ethnic groups are felt to be based on issues of exclusivity, domination, integration and fear of loss of identity. Bhagat Oinam, in “Patterns of Ethnic Conflict in the North-East” says, “in recent decades as the Naga-Kuki conflicts and also between the Kukis and Paites demonstrate identity conflicts have been waged not merely on questions of land, immigration and settlements but also on the overweening fear of loss of identity itself (2031). Whereas, freelance writer Lieutenant Colonel AK Sharma believes the cause of insurgency problem in the North-East as isolation and alienation the natives were subjected to for so many years in the earlier period and believes that a proper communication may help in solving the differences among the tribes in the region:

One of the root causes of insurgency problem in North-East India is physical isolation and psychological alienation from years. The political, social and

demographic imbalances have led to the revival and survival of insurgency in North-Eastern states of India. The leading problem here is of social, ethnic, economic and political deprivation. The series of ethnic conflicts in the state will not be solved until meaningful political dialogue is made and instead of dominating each other a sincere effort is to be made towards ending the dominance, hegemony, conflict and violence. (27)

Since the merger of Manipur to the Indian union the state has been witnessing various kinds of turmoil and violence. Many lives were sacrificed in armed violence between the armed forces and the insurgents. Innocent women and children have borne the impact of violence and had to pass through these distressing times. Many were killed, tortured, kidnapped, injured and raped by both the military forces and the militant groups. They are disturbed by the death of their kith and kin and have massively fallen prey to the impact of the armed violence. Stories of menace and torture at the hands of both the armed forces and the insurgent groups still continue. For several decades, the state has been lurching under violence and conflict. The news of death in encounters including fake encounters, bandhs and curfews are common. The ordinary people are cornered in the skirmishes; they are intimidated by the militants if they fail to pay the ransom. This situation quite evidently has adversely disturbed the peaceful life of the civilians. Another threat is taking shelter by militants in civilian houses and the shelter givers are caught by the security forces as sympathisers of the militants. The constant conflict between the security forces and the extremists disrupt the daily life of the people thereby making the region perennially violence prone. There is also a perception of the security forces as deviating from their duty of maintaining law and order, peace and security in

the state and often indulge in unlawful activities. The situation in Manipur is unpredictable and in a more complicated condition as compared to the other conflict zone states of India. All kinds of violence, fear, insecurity, armed conflicts, ethnic clashes are prevailing in the state which can be perceived as the greatest hindrances to development processes of present day Manipur.

Contemporary literature from the region has been representing all these turmoil and turbulences. Manipuri literature of the early period was based on mythical legend, ritual songs, and hymn. Anonymous writers of early period dealt with the theme of heroism, bravery, romance and love. In 1709, Maharaja Gharib Nawaz issued an order promulgating Hinduism as the new religion of Manipur in order to subdue the traditional faith and culture of the natives. The king with the help of his Bengali mentor Shanti Das Goswami did his best to obliterate indigenous faith. Hinduism was imposed, Bengali script was introduced, places of indigenous worship were demolished, local rituals were prohibited, burial was replaced by cremation, which was his deliberate effort to erase the history of the natives. Shantidas Goswami wrote a different history in Bengali called *Vijay Panchali* which “projected the land as Manipur of the Hindu epic Mahabharata and traced the lineage of the first king of Manipur to Chandrabhanu whose daughter Chitrangada was married to Arjuna” (Singh 513). The *Ramayana and Mahabharata* were translated into Manipuri. During this time some writers surreptitiously and anonymously made an effort to retain the traditional indigenous faith and culture of the pre-Hindu period in their writings.

The end of 19th century was an important point in the history of Manipur as British conquest in the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 brought the land under their control.

They introduced a new administration, judicial, system, and schools based on western model. Moreover, the arrival of Christian missionaries in the region played a pivotal role in proselytizing the tribal people residing in the hills. During this period there was a pause in creative writing.

The advent of modern Manipuri literature began with the poetry of Khwairakpam Chaoba, Lamabam Kamal, Hijam Irabot, Rajkumar Shitaljit and Hijam Anganghal. Commonly known as the founding fathers of modern Manipuri literature they with their modern approach changed the literary landscape of the early part of the 20th century. Their literary work not only celebrated the richness of their culture, language and history but also questioned many prevailing belief system of the time thereby made an enduring impact on the minds of Manipuri.

After the Second World War a new trend began in Manipuri literature with the appearance of playwrights such as Maobam Tomba and Sarangtham Bormani who made use of their rich ballads and legends. Poets like Nilakanta and Somorendra experienced the trauma of Second World War and protested in their verse against the social system, religious practice, political rule and the degraded morality of their time. They began responding to the changing time and circumstances and became more isolated, dissatisfied, and skeptical in tone. Elangbam Nilakanta Singh's poem "Manipur" depicts the changing realities of war torn Manipuri society, loss of moral values and frustration and fragmentation among the people. Post independence Manipuri poetry marked the beginning of new techniques and sensibilities.

After Manipur's union with India in 1949 literature began articulating conflict and resistance thereby making a profound impact on contemporary literary scene. Popular poets like Laishram Samarendra, Yumlembam Ibomcha, Thangjam Ibopishak and Shri Biren has explored the dark reality of the conflicts. Ibopishak's collection of poems *Apaiba Thawai* (1969) (The Wandering Soul) expresses resentment at the pace society was degrading. Shri Biren's *Asibagi Lamdamda* (In the Land of Death) represents the decline of societal values. In the same manner, Yumlembam Ibomcha's *Shingnaba* (1974) (The Challenge), records indignation and disillusionment in the society. Also, RK Bhubhansana's *Marup Ani* (Two Friends) shows grim reality of life under the laws of AFSPA. Drama novel and short story of the period shared related concerns as well.

In the early seventies the poetic works of poets like Shri Biren and Madhubir jeered all that was termed as sacrosanct and surprised the readers with their unconventional attitude. Naming themselves as 'angry young poets', in 1974, Ranjit W, Thangjam Ibopishak and Y Ibomcha published an anthology titled *Challenge* in two volumes. These poets have been appreciated for their boldness of expression by critic. Poets like Bhubonsana, M. Barkanya, Chetan Thongam, Hemchandra who emerged in late 1970s made use of precise imagery and symbols and kept themselves away from superfluity of the angry young poets. The decades 1980s and 1990s produced new voices; women's issues were also considered. There were many poets of this generation like Memchoubi, Lanchenba Meitei, Birendrajit Naorem, Saratchand Thiyam, Raghu Leishangthem Thoudam Netrajit, Doneshwar Konsam and Robin Ngangom whose first volume of poetry titled *Words and the Silence* was published in 1988.

The contemporary poetry of North-East India delves deeper into the fear, struggle and sufferings of the people due to factors such as ethnic clashes and insurgency. It is replete with images of ethnic violence, politics, corruption, oppression extortion, migration, displacement etc. Robin by sharing the contemporary issues of his homeland Manipur hopes to make a difference in society as well as in people's attitude through his poetry. According to Robin Ngangom:

Manipuri poets seem to be preoccupied with insistent realities such as ethnic violence, corruption, extortion, terrorism, oppression and drug addiction. While it may not make him or her a better writer, living with the menace of the gun does not permit the Manipuri poet to indulge in verbal wizardry or wooly aesthetics, but is a constant reminder that the poet must perforce master 'the art of witness'. This is an extremely difficult task reminiscent of Camus's mission reserved for the writer: 'whatever our personal weaknesses may be, the nobility of our craft will always be rooted in two commitments, difficult to maintain: the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression.' (Misra 299)

Poets in general from the North-East regions are witnesses to several gruesome events taking place in their land, hence, they are committed to speak on what they know and resist the oppression they have been experiencing since several decades. North-East poetry speaks about the prevailing tension, apprehension, clashes, uncertainty, violence and people in search for peace and harmony. For instance, "Chandrakanta Murasingh, a poet from Tripura speaks of agonies of life in contemporary Tripura, a land where the ugly thud of boots of both extremists and the Indian Army is fast replacing the cadence of "rivulet and birdsong". (PoetryIntweb) He tells that how common people are caught in

the crossfire between the two and feels that guns will not bring any solution. In the same vein, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih a poet from Shillong in his essay entitled “The Poet as Chronicler : An Overview of Contemporary Poetry in North-East India” describes “the tremendous regional challenges from insurgency to state sponsored terrorism and negligence, from ethnic cleansing to corruption to which the North-Easterners writer is compelled to respond. Instead of the expected radical break with the near past, North-East poetry written in English suggests continuity with the past.” (xi)

Poetry from the North-East is not only the voice of the poet but also of the people of their respective region and each of their poems seeks for justice and peace. Writing as a witness to the violence of the region in such an unstable time of history certainly is filled with risk and yet the poets write anyway so that their voice could be heard. Robin comments upon everything within his experience and observation. While narrating his experiences through poetry he also acquaints the reader with the real incident once occurred in the region. Robin’s poetry bears testimony of a trying period he had personally witnessed and expresses his anxiety and fear about his people and land.

Robin S. Ngangom describes his poetry as “mostly autobiographical, written with the hope of enthusing readers with my communal or carnal life-the life of a politically-discriminated-against, historically-overlooked individual from the nook of a third world country.”(Poetryintweb) His poems are the accounts of his personal observation which equally act as a resistance against the political turmoil of the region.

In the recent times, resistance poetry has become a necessary tool in opposing the injustice of any form. It is non-aggressive campaign to eliminating the domination and

biases that silenced and obstructed the voice of the weaker section of the society. It attempts to change the consciousness of the reader and incites the possibility for a shift in perspective and an urge toward action. It also stresses on hearing voices of the voiceless, suppressed, subjugated, ignored, scorned, exploited and powerless. Poetry of Resistance articulates the dire need for a change in the society and demands for rights which every human are entitled to. It is a poetic call for a response, reflection, reconciliation and healing through verse to the current political, social, and economic situations. Poetry of resistance does not offer reassurance as giving solace is not its business; laying bare the stark truth is the essence of it. It is against being submissive and an answer to the atrocious forces that threaten the lives of the innocent and subjugated people. In a simple term to resist means to disagree, disapprove, refuse and reject openly all that appears to be inconsiderable, unreasonable and unfair, to fight back when subdued and not simply be a passive victim. The purpose of resisting a situation is to further prevent it from occurrence. Resistance is often carried out as a peaceful, persuasive campaign aiming at achieving an objective. It was usually used by the subordinate group, also known as the subaltern group, which consists of peasants, industrial workers, labourers and women. But at present resistance can be expressed by anyone through various means such as speech, gestures, actions, mood and silence. Resistance to anything that does not align with one's belief system or collective good is becoming the watchword of the contemporary times. Although the injustice has always been taking place but now the writers are coming forth to voice it out in their writings. It is not that resistance has been absent from literary discourse but its representation has been unaccounted for in the earlier writings. Previous poets have used their verses to oppose slavery, war, racial

oppression, discrimination and other forms of violence, although it was not explicitly represented. Currently resistances through rallies, protest marches, recitation of verses dealing with burning issues are widespread. In addition to this, returning award as a mark of protest is also currently in vogue. It was Palestinian writer-critic Ghassam Kanafani who used the term “resistance” for the first time in 1966 in his book *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine*. Barbara Harlow first introduced the term “Resistant Literature” in the book *Resistance Literature* (1987). The world has seen tremendous rise in turmoil over the past few decades. Therefore, the writers have emerged to express their opinions about the political and social issues of the period so to support and speak on behalf of the marginalised and wronged. Writers have always been at the forefront of resisting the oppression. In the beginning poets could not openly express their resentment about the time period they were living in and often instead portrayed fake reality of the time under duress to keep the monarch pleased. In literary world, resistance became apparent during the restoration period with the advent of writers who wrote critical writings against the earlier writings and society. With the dawn of Marxism the proletariat began resisting against the capitalism and the trend began. Literature once served as an entertainment piece for the elites. However, as the time passed the aim of literature came to be seen as reflecting and addressing the issues of the society. Later, it became a medium for bringing change in the society. During Victorian times, Charles Dickens and many other writers of the time wrote critiquing the social strata of the time. Dickens used his writings as a medium to exhibit his concern for the English society. His idea was to reform the society by divulging its grim realities. His novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1839), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854)

expose the victimization of children, crime, hypocrisy, poverty, emergence of social class distinctions and several other ills of the Victorian industrial society.

Bernard Shaw expressed his favor for Fabian society and condemned the democratic system of his time. He denounced the employers who exploited ignorant workers. In a letter to Henry James dated January 17, 1909, he stated, “I, as a Socialist, have had to preach, as much as anyone, the enormous power of the environment. We can change it; we must change it; there is absolutely no other sense in life than the task of changing it. What is the use of writing plays, what is the use of writing anything? (Shaw)

Rampant and open resistance in the form of verse actually began from First World War onwards. War poets witnessed and wrote poems in reaction to the war and in response to the crisis. Carolyn Forché introduced the term “Poetry of Witness” to the poetry that attempts to disclose human sufferings during the time of the war. In her famous book *Against Forgetting* (1993) she writes:

The poems are for those who died leaving behind legacy for the future generation and also a tribute to those who have survived the brutalities of war. These poems bear the trace of extremity within them, and they are as such evidence of what occurred. Their poems are memorial to those who suffered and resisted through poetry. In fact, the poem might be our only evidence that an event has occurred it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence. (31)

Poetry of Witness not only brings an awareness of the brutal realities of the war but also warns the reader so that further recurrence of the atrocities could be prevented. The inherent wisdom of the poetry of witness demands that people learn from the past and see

to it that it does not happen again. It is a medium for expressing and resisting the oppression of the time and place and creates space for deep reflection, general awareness and action. In his article, "Poetry in the time of Terror", Robin expresses his idea of Poetry of Witness saying that, "poets also have to write about here and now. And writing about it lends a sense of immediacy and vividness to their poetry. This is perhaps what constitutes 'the poetry of witness.'" (172)

Jean Paul Sartre's experience in war and imprisonment led him express it through literature. In "Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence" he shares:

Indeed the cruelty of the enemy pushed us to the extremes of this state, in forcing us to ask those questions one neglected in time of peace-all those of us who, knowing something important to the Resistance, have asked ourselves in anguish, "If they torture me, can I hold on?" thus indeed was the question of liberty brought to the very edge of the profoundest comprehension that man can have of himself. For the secret of a man is not in his Oedipus or inferiority complex; it is in his power to resist suffering up to the point of death. (43)

He highlights how the oppression caused to them by the Nazis during the war made them pine for freedom more than ever before. He further asserts that the power of men lies in their courage to resist against any form of oppression. George Orwell also resisted against social injustice and the prevailing politics of the time. His *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) showed contemporary politics of soviet Communism. The novel *Animal Farm*, Orwell wrote "was the first book in which I tried with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one

whole” (Qtd. in Harold Bloom 24). Orwell used literature in order to create awareness among people about corrupt politics of his time.

With the emergence of postcolonial writings resistance derived its real meaning. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) criticises the western world for their fake cultural beliefs. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Mask* (1952) condemned racism in France and in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) he spoke on decolonization as essential due to the fact that maximum damage has already been done due to colonialism. In Africa, writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wo Thiogo wrote against imperialist power and resisted against neo-colonial system in Kenya and oppressive regimes in Africa. Chinua Achebe constantly spoke for the right of Africans and encouraged them to narrate their story in their way rather than allowing non-African writers to represent them. In India during the colonial era, writers, freedom fighters and activists resisted the British rule and wrote on the themes of bloodshed, exploitations, justice and freedom. Homi K Bhabha writing is also a resistant against colonialism and its impact on the colonised nation’s culture. Postcolonial writings gave importance to minority writing in order to give voice to the suffering of minority ethnic groups. Modernist writings equally responded to the horrors of the war, the senselessness, chaos, anarchy, violence, pessimistic view, meaninglessness prevalent in the society. Earlier resistance writings have definitely influenced the present day writers in taking stand against various forms of discriminations and inequalities. At present, the emerging body of literature from the North-East India is resistance against the diverse issues surrounding the region. Most of the poets write in their native language but which has been translated into English to reach out to the wider reader. In terms of reaching a broader audience using English

language as a medium of expression similar view is shared by Bill Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back*, (1989) where he explains that, “Many other non-English speaking writers who have chosen to write in English do so not because their mother tongue is regarded by them as inadequate, but because the colonial language has become a useful means of expression. And since one reaches the widest possible audience through English.” (Ashcroft 16)

Poets like Robin are protesting through their writings against the different forms of violence unleashed by the armed forces and militant groups. By doing so they are seeking to transform the existing situation. He portrays torture and murder of the people by the militants and the events which have been forgotten and ignored. To resist everything that hampers the growth and development of the society, to remember the victims and save them from oblivion has become the pressing need of the time. Hence, resisting oppression, violence and ethnic animosity in Manipur, Robin narrates the accounts of his people in his voice and terms instead of simply allowing to be represented by mainstream discourse. Resistance is ridden with risk but endurance has its limit as evident from the poem “Will Endure No More” by the Pakistani writer Fakhar Zaman:

Will endure no more
 Endured too much but will
 Endure no more
 There is some limit
 To bear agonies, pains excuses
 You butchered us with blunt knives
 With relishing pleasure

You cut our tongues
 Blinded our eyes
 Poured molten lead into our ear
 To sum up you did everything within your power to finish us
 Now we will pay with stone for every brick thrown by you
 Are you ready?
 Then here comes the first one. (Chaudhury)

This is one of many instances of resistance poetry, using lines such as these, many poets are now breaking silence through their writings in order to reveal the injustice suffered and not become a passive victim anymore. Robin, one of the prominent poets from Manipur, uses his verse as a medium for voicing this kind of resistance. He expresses what he and his people have undergone and endured for an extended period of time.

Robin Ngangom (1959) born in Imphal, Manipur, is a bilingual poet and a translator who writes both in English and Manipuri. At present he is an Associate Professor of English in North Eastern Hill University. His books of poetry include *The Desire of Roots* (2006), *Words and the Silence* (1988), *Time's Crossroads* (1994). He has also co-edited *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East* (2009) and *Anthology of Contemporary poetry from the North-East* (2003) with Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. He was conferred with the Udaya Bharati National Award for Poetry in 1994 and Katha Award for translation in 1999. He has distinguished himself as a fearless spokesman of his people and of deeply internal politics of contemporary time. In one of his popular poems "Native Land" he says:

First came the scream of the dying

in a bad dream, then the radio report,
 and a newspaper: six shot dead,
 twenty-five houses razed,
 sixteen beheaded with hands tied
 behind their backs inside a church...(1-6)

Using the technique of poetic reportage and consistent with the witness tradition the poet lays bare the macabre, the details of the horrific event. The incident is the result of the raising conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis, and the agony of the common people. This blatant exposure is a manifestation of his resolve to resist and resent mindless homicide and wanton shedding of blood though helpless to stop it. The narrative mode has a distinctly visual quality for the reader. The fierce irony lies in the fact that the horror is enacted inside the church. The teachings of Christianity such as love, compassion and kindness towards each other so far followed ardently took a backstage blinded by hatred. Church, a house of worship, with all its influence and spiritual claim is powerless to tame the inherent bestiality and mindless intolerance leading to the sad transformation of the shrine into a slaughterhouse. This exhibits that the perpetrator is blind in his deeds and brutal against humanity. The poet further says:

I ceased thinking
 of abandoned children inside blazing huts
 still waiting for their parents. (11-13)

In a subdued state of resignation and helpless powerlessness the poet can only cultivate deliberate oblivion. The poet presents a grim picture of slaughter and arson. What one finds here is an outburst of righteous indignation, disgust and disillusionment. He appears

to be angry, frustrated and says that he stopped thinking how many children were set ablaze inside the blazing house. The poet further depicts the gory picture of pregnant women being killed along with several others:

And the women heavy with seed,
their soft bodies mown down.(18-19)

Merely thinking of the events makes him restless and unhappy; thus, he took to his pen. He is aware of the truth as he has witnessed it, but he could do nothing about it. After a while he says that life went on as though nothing has ever occurred. It is not easy to live when his mind is filled with guilt hence, he chooses to write:

I didn't care anymore.

I burnt my truth with them,
and buried uneasy manhood with them

I did mutter, on some far-off day:
"There are limits", but when the days
absolved the butchers, I continue to live,
as if nothing happened. (23-29)

The poet is expressing utter desperation and resignation. He protests at heart that this atrocity has to be stopped but when he finds that the perpetrators are absolved and exonerated he could do nothing about it and continued to live. He reaches out to the victims through the medium of his writings which may also be seen as a form of atonement on his part and an assertion of his solidarity with these victims. The poet being a witness is also a helpless observer. He writes with minute details and wishes that his poetry normalises the situation. His poems are influenced by acute political and social

crisis. Hence, there is a direct link between political and social turmoil of the region, his experience as a witness, and his poems. The exigency of the time as narrated in distinct words and vivid images in the poem also conveys his inner turbulence. The ethnic clashes between the Nagas and the Kukis also known as ‘Joupi Massacre’, has been represented in this poem:

The cold blooded massacre of 88 villagers of Joupi and Zanglenphai deserves to be told. It was a tale of horror, deception and sheer hatred. On the 5th September, 1993, 40 armed NSCN (IM) cadres, including 7 females, swooped down upon Joupi village. They herded all the men folk into the village community hall and detained the women and children inside the church...it should also be noted that 5 Haipi villagers were shot dead inside the church during the New Years’ Night service on 1/1/95 by Naga militants. (Kipgen)

The poem “Native Land” presents the horror as perpetrated by NSCN to Kuki tribes. Shivananda H in *Ethnic Conflict and Security Apprehension in North-East Indian States* (2011) mentions:

that the clashes between the Naga and the Kuki tribes which erupted in 1992 in the Chandel district remain a major ethnic conflict in the state sparking a reign of terror in the hills of Manipur. It resulted in a death of nearly a thousand people and an enormous loss of property. Over 2000 houses were burnt and hundreds of villages were affected. It continued for about five years and came to end in the early part of 1997 after the intervention of the Meiteis and other neutral tribes. Besides, the demand of an ethnic group has been a reason for conflict with others. (Shivananda).

The poet further chooses to express his angst and speak up rather than keeping quiet and allowing the brutalities to take place. He personally believes that a poet cannot remain silent when many untoward events perpetrated by a man against his own kind are taking place around him. In another poem “Curfew” he represents the situation during imposed curfew. The Naga and Kuki tribes used to enforce frequent indefinite curfews along the highways to seek the fulfillment of their demands. It affected the livelihood of many people due to the shortage of essential goods:

People were killed in a lawless firing
and the streets today observe
hour long silence for the departed.
Surely we are not used to
this life in a cage. (13-17)

People in the hills were never ‘caged’ as they feel are now which is obvious in the above lines. His poems appear as reportage of violence in the region. He depicts the predicament of common people and the image of fake encounters that killed hundreds of people rampantly in Manipur. The common people have to bear the brunt of this terrible violence. Similar incident is narrated with poignancy in “The Strange Affairs of Robin S Ngangom”. Due to ethnic clashes and curfews roads are blocked for months making life hard for the common people:

Nothing is certain:
oil
lentils
potatoes

food for babies
 transport
 the outside world.
 Even
 fire water and air
 are bought and sold. (116-25)

The above lines depict complete negation of freedom and no access to free gifts of nature. Even the elements of nature have been controlled by people. They have established cold authority as they have become acquisitive and because of which freedom is negated. People through their self seeking drives are controlling every sphere of life. Lives have become a prolong imposed curfew where no one seems to be free and the poet says, “We honour the unvarying certainty, / and pay routine homage to silence.” (“Strange Affair” 94-95). Narrating the unrestrained violence the poet shares how his, “Cousin Joe died young. / Friend Tomba still in jail” (“Homeland I left” 10-11), and the rich are ruling the roost without shame and freedom in his region means being guarded by security forces:

I hear a wicked war is now waged
 on our soil, and gory bodies
 dragged unceremoniously
 through our rice-fields. That they have
 dropped the word “shame” from the vocabulary,
 and the newly-rich are ruling our homes.
 I hear that freedom comes there, only
 if escorted by armed men. (“Homeland I left” 27-31)

The reader can visualise the graphic details of the poem as portrayed by the poet. Through corruption some few in the region have accumulated easy money and the poet is depicting the brazen acts of the corrupt. Freedom means to be free, to have their choice but when the poet says freedom means being guarded reveals there is indeed no freedom at all. In a way people are caged by the presence of different security forces around the hill. There appears to be no freedom and people cannot move around without taking risk. The poet commenting on corruption, extreme materialism and greed in the region says:

We have witnessed growing ethnic aggressiveness, secessionist ventures, cultural and religious bigotry, the marginalisation of minorities and the poor, profit and power struggles in government, and as a natural aftermath to these, the banality of corruption and the banality of terror.... make the picturesque North-East especially vulnerable to tragedy. (Ngangom 171)

He is pained to see how his once pristine and peaceful land has degenerated into the hands of corrupted lot who think of extracting the most for themselves insensitive to the the general wellbeing of others. In the poem “I am Sorry to see Poetry in Chains” he observes:

Once prime land, beneficent and fabled
and now playground of black-marketers,
haven for fortune hunters where
none misses a heartbeat
as you feed money, sell honour, peddle justice. (36-40)

The poet remarks that the place has become a haven of gambling, prostitution, and corruption. The space of once serene and secured land is being abused. In most of his

poems besides representing various conflicts Robin also talks of love. Showing act of love is a mark of humanity, and the poet feels only love can heal the wound. The poet's depiction of decay of filial emotions can be the ultimate blow to humanity. What can be a greater loss when brother buys brother and father sells his son? Protesting against corruption he says:

Here everything is bought and sold

to the highest bidder.

The gunpoint, the hypodermic needle, and currency

notes: these are the only languages we know.

Brothers buy brothers and fathers sell sons

as a way of life. ("Racial Progression" 8-13)

Man has turned into a trader buying and selling everything with no regards for human emotions. The poet is depicting a decadent culture tottering under growing weight of materialism, flourishing of drug addiction, corruption, collapse of human relationship and decay of filial bonds. His language is unadorned with economy of words. Robin's poetry of witness is one of direct communication, straightforward and shorn of ornate metaphors.

The rapacity of people seeking more is the plight of the present day. Colonialism virtually ended after the Second World War but its residue is continuing in the attitudes of elites and politically powerful in subjugating the weaker populace. And surprisingly, their domination has never been acknowledged rather more accepted by the people as normal. The poet actively denigrates and lambasts both the culprit and victim for he believes that both are equally responsible; one for perpetuating the crime and the other

for accepting it. By pointing out the frailties of his society the poet hopes for a better society. He is trying to change the thought and action of every individual and reform them rather than reforming the social conditions that oppressed them because he believes that an individual contributes for the betterment of the society. He is indicating at the growing materialism amongst people who are least bothered about humanity and relationships. As a poet he cannot remain mute to the happening around; his words can be literally taken as a wakeup call for the action of mankind and their attitude that has degraded and has crumbled with the passage of violent time. In another poem “Racial Progression” the poet says:

We have no illustrious past we can think of,
 our history is shrouded in obscurity.
 We all take pride in our forked tongues
 and devious chroniclers.
 Our necks and hands shake with perverse lust.
 We respect with avarice only the richest new
 Our election emblems are the bottle and the glass.
 The best orators are our secret campaigners at night
 and we use great poetry as party slogans.
 our guardians give an inch and take a foot
 and their promises are the latest jokes. (14-23)

In one way they do not have proper history and in the other the history they have is the versions of some British officials and missionaries. The poet appears to ponder over the fact that how can the region progress as people are busy indulging in hollow

materialism, luxury, and physical gratification. The politicians have no proper ideology of their own; they exploit people by giving them false hope and empty promises which never get fulfilled. They extract as much as possible and exploit people and deliver so little. Poetry seems to be uncared for and unvalued as it is wasted for sloganeering. The poet's idea here is to report the prevalent issues of the region as they are and to awaken, jolt out the people from their slumber, state of stupor and complacency. Thus, he is critiquing the present society through his poetry. The poet is in utter disgust and disillusionment; many empty promises were doled out but never worked towards its realization. He is in a way sickened with people's way of appreciating the rich. This also reveals common people's attitude of being complacent with paltry gifts that are distributed to them before the elections. Therefore, the poet feels that each and every one of them is responsible for the events happening there. In the poem "Arms Will Flower Here Too", the poet says:

Here where only rhododendrons
and cherries are meant to bloom
arms will flower in their place. (1-3)

North-East region is primarily known for its beauty and splendor but slowly it is being replaced by arms, bullets and wanton violence. The talk of natural beauty is losing its importance and has been now pushed to the background. This depicts an unhealthy transition from a state of peace, natural serenity to a state of insurgency and disturbance.

For all these, the poet believes:

We are all guilty
like men all over the earth,

we know why poverty

had walked the countryside naked. (“Arms will Flower” 21-24)

The poet has created graphic visual image of poverty. His poetry not only exhibits the turbulent time the people went through but also brings out their dreams for peace and the time of stability that the region was once endowed with. The poet believes that peace will continue to elude in the region until and unless “worshipping new gods of greed” is forsaken:

For offending the old gods

they were cursed, to be turned

into a blind and deaf people

worshipping new gods of greed

and narcotic death.

surely peace will elude us. (“To the Blind, the Deaf” 27-32)

For neglecting tradition and culture and adopting modern devious culture people have become blind and deaf as they can see and hear nothing good; they only know to worship greed therefore peace seems to be evasive. These corrupted lots have lost their spirituality and have become blind because they cannot see the truth and deaf because they cannot benefit from the wisdom of their ancestors. Only those who have wealth and steeped in terrorism and drugs are their models. All this creates a kind of uncertainty and vagueness and peace becomes just a mirage. Yet in another poem “To Pacha”, reminiscing one of the Meitei finest poets he says:

There are no more tears to shed

In this withered country where they

Kill pregnant women and children; its
 Nipples have long gone dry, and leering
 Death walks your homeland. And why should
 Anyone weep for your lonely alcoholic end?
 Young boys and soldiers are butchering each
 other by the dozen, in the hills, the angry
 streets, day after day, and too many heroes
 and villains are not worth remembering at all.
 Death is callous, Pacha, in the land of your
 innocent birth. (7-18)

Apparently, the poet seems to be alright with the death of Pacha because he is not alive to witness the degeneration of his place where blinded by the hatred the young boys and soldiers are after each other lives. It is said that people and organisations are illegally taxed in order to support many insurgent groups. The elected leaders keep the public in illusion of false promises. Revolutionaries threaten and extort money and demand free services. If their demands are not met the civilians are threatened with the dire consequences:

The ophthalmic optician
 shut down his clinic
 after far-sighted revolutionaries
 came for a free check-up
 But that wouldn't sound aesthetic
 even though it's the truth. ("Writer" 16-21)

The poet while narrating the events of his place says that his place has been defiled by many factors and not sacred anymore as was in the past. In “Poetry in the time of Terror”

Robin says:

Manipur, my native place in North-East India, is in a state of anarchy, and my poetry springs from the cruel contradictions of that land. Manipur boasts of its talents in theatre, cinema, dances, and sports. But how could you trust your own people who would entrust corruption, aids, terrorism and drugs to their children? Naturally the Manipur that I ritually go back to every year is not the sacred world of my childhood because:

Childhood took place

among fairies and weretigers

when hills were yours to tumble

before they housed soldiers

and dreaded chambers of torture.

Childhood took place

when boys built fugitive fires

and talked of women

until your friend adored a gun

to become a widowmaker. (“A Libran Horoscope” 21-33)

He recollects the memories of happy, vibrant, wholesome and serene past and compares it with the distressing violent present. His word is his main weapon “marking an active stance of resistance against forces that crush, erase and rewrite histories” (16). There is persistent search for identity in his poems:

But I need a Homeland
 Where I can recognise myself
 just a map or even a tree or a stone,
 to mark a spot I could return to
 even when there is nothing to return for. (“Poem for Joseph” 2-6)

Home is an end in itself thus he wants to return to his home because he can locate his identity and root. He also urges people to protect their identity at any cost and not to abandon their roots:

Do not say you have refused
 the gift of your soul,
 abandoned the sad refrain
 of the *duitara* waiting
 to be mended. (“Your Name Protects” 7-11)

In their culture *duitara* mending tradition signifies a culture that has receded to the background and largely forgotten. Thus, repairing *duitara* implies reviving the cultural past which is the gift of the soul. The colonial intervention in the region during the 19th century and the subsequent missions of the missionaries intruded their culture, tradition and affected the social fabric of their society. Thus, poets like Robin are emerging in the region appealing for reviving the lost tradition.

His poems are the testimony to the events he has personally witnessed. The readers are being called to bear upon the witness by reading his poems. It can wake up from the self complacency of the people and make them realize that if ethnic conflicts as ghastly as has been taken place in Manipur it can take place anywhere. Thus, it does not

permit people to be indifferent but makes them aware so that events such as these can be prevented in the future.

He often calls himself an ‘outsider turned insider’, as he left his homeland Manipur when he was young and now visits rarely. In his words “As a fumbling fifteen-year-old I abandoned my forward-looking native people/ who entrusted terror, drugs and/ a civilised plague to children (“The First Rain” 6-9). A deep sense of cultural loss fills his poetry. Before the arrival of missionaries, all of them worshipped the same gods and goddesses. But with their coming they brought in the kind of changes that is familiar even today. Recollecting his past days of free life in the poem, “To a Woman from Southeastern Hills” he says:

taking us back to a time before they gave us
 religion to divide us, before politician priest
 who labored for their own redemption,
 mouthing the name of god among benighted heathens. (32-35)

The poet misses those days of simplicity away from artificiality of life before the arrival of missionaries. They were animist away from revealed religion. They came with the political agenda, for their own progress and not for natives’ redemption. The priest considered the locals as heathens and indoctrinated them. The poet has shown a cultural transformation society has undergone:

That was the time of the weretiger, before
 temples and churches, time of the freethinking
 dormitory, when boys trained in the school of
 the warrior, time of the daring headhunter,

when legends could not wait to be born, and
places were named. And time before this

English tongue we speak now. (“To a Woman from Southeastern Hills” 47-53)

He is trying to find an analogy between his early childhood experiences and this present experience. Analogy is often vivid in his poems as it makes him express what was, what is and what can be done to improve the scenario. He recalls the time when young boys were trained in dormitory where they were taught to be courageous and stand for themselves and for the society. The beautiful past is now history but it can be revived. Surprisingly, the poet is hopeful amidst all these events and incidents. The poet hopes for the day:

One day we shall walk that road where
Carrion-hunters have not defiled memory.
You could not exorcise the demons of the mind.
Yes, they exist. Listen, I’ve also come from a
Country where pregnant women were pierced
By abortive lead, and children were sometimes burnt
As offerings to dark gods,
I come from a country where they took our past
And returned them as terrible dreams. (“Poems for Samir” 31-39)

The poet laments the destruction of his culture and persuades his people to contemplate on the reason behind the conflict so that some solution could be arrived at and also to seek out the perpetrators responsible for perpetuating this madness:

But what is this wound we opened ourselves

and drew blood where no blood was?
 who brought this unrest of dialectics,
 who honored the same vegetation gods
 and poured mutual libations of rice-wine? (“From the land of the Seven huts” 13-18)

He is trying to understand the sources of the trouble, misery, mystery behind this kind of ugly transformation in the place through a series of questions. Once they honored the same source, had same belief system but suddenly discord and hatred took over and the poet is unable to understand this kind of transition. Ngangom donnes the role as the representative, an artist, a witness, an annalist, a chronicler and as a voice of the communal conscience. He is not just witnessing but sharing the events and making each one responsible for their actions. In a way the poet feels that in the present times poetry makes people realize that they each and everyone directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously are all accountable and answerable. Thus, now is the need of the collective response and solution. By presenting the reality of his native place; he also makes the reader participate in and visualise the suffering of the masses and the clashes between different ethnic groups. In this way, the very act of reading his poems brings back the history into the present.

The voice of the common people is lost in the labyrinth of the different external and internal conflicts. Therefore, the poet emerges out as a representative of the lost voice of the region. Manipur is a home to diverse communities and cultures, each asserting its ethnic identity. A sense of insecurity and uncertainty among the people in the last few decades have seen thousands of death, destruction of homes and displacement of people

in various ethnic conflicts which have left literally nothing for the survivors. The rebels have turned blindly against each other and on the innocent people. The inhabitants of Manipur are concerned about the preservation of their land, ethnic culture, identity and language. The poet seems to be in a contemplative frame of mind:

Why do trees weep leaves without warning?

Why do the old choose to die in their mountain hamlets?

Why did his people turn to terror?

Why does love tie him down?

How is he a poet if he's afraid to look for answers? ("Poet" 1-5)

The poet appears to be pondering upon the above questions. He wonders at the way the older generation is in a state of resignation and hapless acceptance of their lot. What makes people turn to terror, to participate in this desperate act; does it happen by choice or chance? He is raising the above question and let the reader reflect over it. A poet cannot be afraid and evasive, he has to look for the answer to his questions which means a poet has responsibility and has to uphold what is right and oppose what is wrong. The poet further says instead of giving up to the despair it is better to write and laugh it out because things remain as they are irrespective of what he poet wishes, "You should write when you can still laugh at yourself and the world, before you give up to despair." ("Revolutionaries" 55)

Poet's native land is innately connected to his heart and memory. However the situation is, he is drawn to it and will not be able to forget as long as he lives. Due to ethnic cleansing, many people from the region had to leave their native land in search of job and a peaceful modest life outside and this situation makes the poet feel sorry to see

his people working outside the homeland because their native place is no longer safe for them. He observes in his poem “Everywhere I go”:

Everywhere I go

I carry my homeland with me.

I look for it in protest marches on the streets of the capital,

in darkmaned girls of beauty contests

forced to waiting now behind windows.

I harbor the wretchedness of those youths

who do not wish to return

but would rather serve in a city’s sordid restaurants

because devils and thieves rule their home. (1-9)

Home is so much part of his being, in every protest and marches he finds his homeland pictured because of the condition it represents. He imbibes the wretchedness and plight of the youth who are not in a position to fight back; hence they escape in search of greener pastures outside their homes. Homeland is not promising for them as their home is hijacked by corrupt evil mongers and thieves and they embrace the hard life in the city for the sole reason that they do not have to live in constant fear of death and uncertainty.

He further narrates an incident of twelve middle aged women protesting naked outside the Kangla fort on July 15, 2004 holding a banner “Indian Army, rape us too, We are all Manorama Mothers” against the brutal rape of Thangjam Manorama by Assam Rifle Force. She was picked up from her home for interrogation on the suspicion that she was playing a major role of insurgent group and on July 11, 2004 her body was found the

next day raped multiple times and shot in her genitals. This was the reason for the protest and resistance against humiliation and violence:

And I want to tell my poet-friends
of the twelve mothers who stripped themselves
and asked soldiers to rape them.

In fact, I make imaginary journeys
to its little world every day
and wait for the fog of justice to lift. (“Everywhere I Go” 16-21)

This event is also known as Naked Women Protest or Kangla Protest of 2004 and the poet says he is still waiting to see the justice to murdered Manorama. People started reacting in a myriad ways against governmental, military and patriarchal controls. At present people are more or less awake to the atrocities taking place around and there are several activist organisation formed who protest against conflict, violence and the military rule. The poet feels in spite of all these that revenge indeed is not sweet and hence love is what he believes will bring change and triumph “but the bread of revenge is not sweet. / They destroy and with each bleeding peace / we try to mend and dream again.” (“In the Beginning was Love” 26-28). The poet’s proactive response to the prevailing situation is overwhelming.

Describing his land and what it has turned into in the poem “The Dead Shall Mourn the Living”, the poet wonders who is better off, is it the dead or the living and about the situation that hatred has led into:

How many times have we seen
love dying in crystal eyes and

the slow cataract of hate forming?
 Look, childhood has died for that boy.
 He now lights his *bidis* in the dark daylight
 and bears the crucifix
 of a home on his stunted back.
 The dead shall mourn the living.
 Both unknowing who is better-off.
 Mutually shaking their heads
 in shadow-pity. (7-13, 30-33)

The poet bemoans the loss of childhood of the boy who shoulders the responsibility of his family at his young age. He exhibits the consequence of violence as borne by a young boy who perhaps has lost his parents and is working hard to raise his family. By raising his voice he is shaking up his people from their laziness and slumber and is imploring them to wake up to his words. Once they lived in mutual harmony and care and concern for each other was foremost in their mind but now the situation has just turned opposite as his people want to accumulate and has drowned in the sea of greed and selfishness. In a way the poem suggests that a few people amassing wealth are responsible for general poverty and degeneration of the society. In the poem "To My People" the poet narrates:

In this town the blind singer
 with a derelict guitar
 folded his mat and left,
 tired of the culture of inhumanity.
 Capital of thieves, pimps, cutthroats,

malignant peasants and stray dogs!

Come for a contest of riches

at the town's premises. (1-8)

He communicates the region's appearance as corrupted and polluted where inhuman people come to compete for money, and for acquiring riches:

You who earn like a dog

and eat like a horse.

One day you'll find

no earth, no trees or rivers

and would even sell

a handful of blue sky

to prolong your decadence. (13-19)

Steeped in complete physicality these greedy and corrupted people are devouring everything and soon nothing will be left. They will sell everything for their selfish motive and for spreading a culture of decay. Amazingly, all the drawbacks of the place has been recognised and accepted by the people as the realities of their conflicting world. Eventually, he says, his people have the knack of celebrating life however the situation, and whatever the season they move on with their work:

Whether winter or summer

Whether bombs burst or don't burst

Beautiful women walk gracefully

Faces eyes lips shaded with colours

Walk the women.

Whether crossfire or no crossfire,
 whether deaths or no deaths

Men look at beautiful women

Handsome men look at beautiful women, ugly men also look. (“Worshipping
 Imoinu” 1-8)

In short, it is a culture of total nonchalance, indifference and apathy. This is a death in life situation, the extreme example of mechanization of life. He again says, perhaps he must stop agonizing too much as he sees his people fine with their lives. The people in the region seem vivacious and celebrating life in all its hues with a hope that situation may change. Despite what is happening around, and how the media represents, they still retain their poise and dignity which reminds rightly the age old adage “whatever happens, life goes on”:

But whenever I touch my homeland’s streets
 everyone seems happy and have no grouses.

I must stop agonizing or save what I can

Such as the tunes of my homeland

which dance in my blood. (“Everywhere I Go” 93-94)

Robin shows the disappointment but regains his bearing in the thought that his people appear to be self-satisfied. These poems are the testimony to the events of the hard times the poet and his people have lived through. The poet opines:

I think the task that literature of the North-East must address is what Camus called “the double challenge of truth and liberty.” Truth, because what can the writer hope to accomplish now except tell the truth. When the unspeakable is out there

being enacted and quickly consigned to oblivion, when cruel things are done but never undone, and media machines are busy feeding one sided lies, the writer can only tell the truth about what he knows. After all, Czeslaw Milosz also said : “There is no such thing as in innocent bystander. If you are a bystander, we are not innocent.” Literature cannot bring harmony or a moral revolution by telling us what we must do and forces are always at work to rob the writer of his freedom. Liberty, therefore, is a necessary precondition, which the writer must fight for in order to tell the truth he knows, it is the lifeblood of his heart. During these pessimistic times, the responsibility of the writer is much more modest than what well-meaning people would like him to shoulder, at the most, poetry of the North-East can only mirror the body and the mind of the times. (Ngangom 173)

If writers decide to stay silent where they should speak, they implicitly endorse the course of events. Nothing is more dangerous than a violent incident go unquestioned and unchallenged. One man will always be left alive to tell the story. The poet feels it is better to speak the unspeakable even if it means defeat:

What is tradition and our history
 but death with a long memory?
 For how long will we make
 our forefathers walk as ghosts?
 When we conceal tradition
 as if it were an old man’s wrinkles,
 or a syphilitic scar
 we will forsake the values we cherished:

courage, fidelity, openness. (“The Book of Grievances” 27-30, 64-68)

The tradition has just remained in memory, and the poet predicts that if they all continue to ignore their fast fading tradition then they will lose their once cherished values. The poet is not seeking much; he is just looking for peace for his people and for himself and not the soldiers behind to guard them:

Peace without fear of another vicious tomorrow
 is what we search, and not the false dusk of
 the seven brandished swords who guard our backs.
 We have exhausted springtide flowers to plant
 in the muzzle of guns, and
 what we desire is the witness of still winds; natural calm and peace.
 we wish to hear the melodious laugh
 of the cheeks of children, the eyes of beloved women.

(“We are not ready for the Hand of Peace” 6-13)

Robin mourns the fact that region’s serene beauty is marred by people persistent indulgence in violence. They have expended their productive energy on resisting violence and the genocide that was committed in the name of ethnic cleansing. But, now the poet urges his people to focus on the finer pursuits of life.

While narrating how babies were torn apart the poet says people may think that the poet is being too insensitive and may not believe in truth he has represented but they believe in the politicians who come to give a glance at the place and disappear. He is being sarcastic here about the way Indian leaders visit the North-East region in a hurry:

If I told you how babies have been shot down

from their mothers' breasts
 you would put it down to a poet's overworked heart
 but we like to believe in leaders who flock to the capital
 only to fly back with spells as latter-day sorcerers. ("The First Rain" 17-21)

The poet observes that perhaps people and the land is tired of witnessing excessive blood and violence but despite the prevailing situation, the poet feels, "But where can one run from the homeland, / where can I flee from your love? (Strange Affair"188-89). Nothing as such in the world can be compared with one's homeland. Serenity, a sense of identity and belongingness can be felt only at home that is why the poet seems to be asking rhetorical question as where can they leave from their native land. He further adds:

May be the land is tired
 of being suckled on blood,
 may be there is no peace
 between the farmer and his fields,
 may be all men are tired of being men,
 may be we have acknowledged death. ("Strange Affair"172-77)

He observes that the land once supplied nutrition and vitality has absorbed human blood and appears to be tired. The breach of unity between the farmer and his land is due to the violence. The poet wonders how long men can remain contented with the attributes like this because it does not bring happiness:

Day after day we merely witness
 scenes from the living, and
 day after day we go on dying.

How long does the dead remain dead?

Even clothes come alive when they shelter bodies,
and the wind is alive if it can heave trees, and
the river because it can scar the stone's face.

The women we loved left us because
we died in their arms, we have no homeland,
no forwarding address, we must be dead. ("The Dead" 31-40)

In the above lines, the poet poignantly articulates his emotions about the general condition of his place he has witnessed. Nevertheless, in a confident and more determined word the poet thus utters: They can stop us but not our thoughts / from coming out into the streets, / they can shoot us but cannot kill the air / which carries our voices. ("The First Rain" 32-35)

Poems written in the spirit of resistance have the competence to move the reader as it has a sense of personal urgency, understanding and inspired by current events. The poet has definitely brought an awareness about conflict ridden Manipur through his poetry. His poetry conveys a sense of personal urgency and an intense understanding of his people:

When I turn with a heavy heart
towards my burning land,
the hills, woman, scream your name.

Soldiers with black scarves like mime artists
turn them in seconds into shrouds.

For the trucks carrying

the appliances of death and devastation,
 for the eager rescuer in his armoured car,
 for the first visitor to the fabled homeland,
 the graves of youths who died in confusion
 are the only milestones to the city.

But the hills lie draped in mist.

Instead of your musk I inhale the acrid smoke of gelignite and pyres. (“Strange
 Affair” 66-81)

The poet says that Manipur is no more known for its pristine glory of the past rather it is substituted with death, murder, bomb, arson etc. further he illustrates that nothing new or inspiring news appears in the newspaper, it is same bland items and too many images of violence as usual. By presenting what is missing in the region, he is hoping to see it taking shape. The longing to see his place a haven of peace appears to be immense and not merely the following reality that pervades the land:

Morning papers like watered-down milk

hawk the same bland items:

rape, extortion, ambushes, confessions,

embezzlement, vendetta, sales, disappearances. (“Strange Affair” 87-90)

In the present times, literature, especially poetry has become an important channel for exhibiting resistance. Therefore, Robin has used poetry as a medium to resist the ethnic conflicts and the economic, political and cultural circumstances of the region. His vivid diction and tone helps readers to grasp the message he wants to convey. He is conscious of his purpose as a poet to bring awareness among the masses and create a better society.

He articulates the hopes and concerns, oppressions and tensions of the people and explicitly writes about everything within his experience and observation. Reading his poems sufficiently enlightens the reader about the social and political turmoil that has been taking place in the region for over several decades. He acknowledges that he wrote poetry with a desperate desire to be accepted and understood:

Having acknowledged this growing restlessness in me, poetry became an outlet from pent-up feelings and desires, where I can bare myself without actually being demonstrative. Poetry therefore has remained an underground exercise with me. It perhaps began as a dialogue with the self, and has become an illegitimate affair of the heart, because I believe in the poetry of feeling, which can be shared not cerebral, intellectual poetry which is inaccessible, and which leaves the reader outside the poet's insulated world. I suppose I've always tried in a naïve way to invite the reader into my small world. Perhaps I have written poems because I have felt this desperate need to be understood, and to be accepted:

I want to describe myself again and again

To people who do not know me.

That is why I always look for paper and ink,

Even in the midst of terrible loss,

Or, a dangerous illness

Because someone said

The spoken word flies

But the written word stays ("I want to describe myself"/ "Terror" 168-69)

He writes because he believes that words on the page will survive and pass along, heard and understood. By resisting, he is seeking for solution, for promoting change, for restoring peace and bringing general awareness among the masses about the various forms of injustice they were subjected to so far. He justifies the reason behind his writing on the insistent reality of the region in the following excerpts:

I don't have faith in inspiration, but since poetry cannot originate in a vacuum, I have also left my influences open, and have allowed myself to be ambushed-by political events, books, biased memory, a dogged sexuality, womankind, films, streets even. But my poetry seems to be drifting towards something 'more'. It is no longer a mere diary of private incidents, or a confessional. I have been trying to come to terms with this change of heart. And I have perhaps opened my eyes to insistent realities and have stepped out of the proverbial ivory tower. If anyone should ask now why my poems do not speak of my land's breathtaking landscapes; its sinuous dances, its darkened women, I can only think of Neruda's answer : "Come and see the blood in the streets". (Ngangom 171)

Conflict is inevitable in every plural society, but plurality is almost everywhere today in the world especially in this age of large scale migration. Therefore, embracing each and every aspect of life, remaining in solidarity but maintaining one's ethnicity, culture and tradition intact has become a necessity. Different insurgent groups in the region are demanding separate state or greater autonomy within the state. This fragmentation and division of the groups, and communities if continues may create more conflict. When the people from within the region are constantly in conflict against each other then no amount of aid from outside the region will bring any possible solution. Therefore,

understanding the root cause of the violence they all have to collectively put an effort for conflict resolution and for the growth and development of their state. Fighting in the history and the global damage brought by war has not solved any conflict. Undoubtedly, politics in Manipur is rampant but it is the case everywhere. The modern educated youths, mass media and a fruitful dialogue among different ethnic tribes in the state could play an active role in minimising the conflict and in bringing peace. Robin has used poetry as a vehicle for expressing the lives and agonies of his people; one can see that there is anger and frustration of the poet born out of helplessness of the situation, but then there is also love and hope for the better future.

Michael Foucault once said, “where there is power, there is resistance.” This can also denote when and where there is resistance against any form of atrocity, there is power. Resistance weakens the oppressive force and empowers the oppressed. Thus, instead of being passive if people collectively resist against the injustice and domination, transformation is bound to occur in society sooner or later. At present mass education in the region has brought awareness and enough confidence among the people to resist the injustice, inequality and oppression heaped on them. People are awakened and are not silent anymore. In such precarious times, Robin in “Poetry in the time of Terror” defines the role of poetry as:

Poetry cannot help anyone to get on in life, or make a successful human being out of anyone. But poetry should move us; it should change us in such a manner that we remain no longer the same after we’ve read a meaningful poem. For all these reasons, a poet can never be a conformist. He may not be an anarchist, a nihilist, or an inquisitor, but by the token of his verse he is a natural dissident. Poetry is

always an act of subversion. And paradoxically, the poet perhaps is the most ironic realist. Each word must be fashioned from a private hurt, and writing poetry is like trying to keep a deadline with death. That is why I have always felt that poetry should comfort us, and not merely amuse us, or make us think. Poetry must heal the heart of man. (174)

The battle of Kohima and Imphal which caused devastation during the Second World War should have been a warning signal for the people in the region. Unfortunately, it is largely forgotten. The inscription on the war memorial at the Kohima War Cemetery reads, "*When you go home / tell them of us and say, / for their tomorrow / we gave our today.*" This inscription explicitly communicates how soldiers died while serving their fellow men. It also serves as a reminder of what actually took place once and the damage it caused. It should allow people to ponder upon the consequence of war and to stop it before one of its kinds ensues. In fact, the kind of conflicts that have marred the region's peace, development, and human potentialities should be enough evidence to work collectively to further prevent it.

By depicting the scenario of the region and resisting through his poems Robin is looking for solution. His poetry is a diatribe against the conflicts among the different tribes and a message for reconciliation and harmony. The world already has a history of hatred, violence and destruction, thus through his poems the poet is trying to send a gentle reminder to be aware of all these and not propagate again. His writing thus turns into a voice of protest, resistance and of warning. He stood against the oppressions by refusing to become a part of the crowd who either sing praises of the tyrant out of fear or prefer to remain in a state of nonchalance. His poetry expresses a profound understanding

of the struggles and atrocities committed against the common people of his native region. He has succeeded in bringing out the history of the region through his impartial vision and the graphic narration of his poems.

The present advance technological era has made life easy yet complicated. The natives of the region are disillusioned and have begun to feel the absence of their past cultural heritage. The present day poets of the region focus on going back to their roots and reviving their traditions. As they believe that many present issues of the contemporary times are due to the fact that people have shunned their culture and tradition which contains a great deal of their history and their way of living. The possible solution of the present day could be found in the tradition of the past hence the next chapter will deal with how a poet like Temsula Ao dedicates herself absolutely to the cause of reviving the oral tradition of her community.

CHAPTER V

Poetry and the Representation of Cultural Decay: Temsula Ao

The chapter five of this thesis has introduced the brief cultural and political history of Nagaland in order to explore the region and understand the Nagas in general and Ao Nagas in particular. It has delved into Ao's myth, folklore, tradition and culture to comprehend the present cultural degradation, identity crisis and conflict as elaborately represented by Temsula Ao in her poetry.

Nagaland is one among the eight states in the North-Eastern part of India with Kohima as its capital. The state is divided into eleven districts and shares borders with Assam to the west, Manipur to the south, Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam to the north and Myanmar to the east. Nagaland became the sixteenth state of India on 1st December 1963. There are sixteen major Naga tribes in Nagaland namely Ao, Angami, Sumi, Lotha, Chakesang, Kachari, Kuki, Konyak, Phom, Chang, Sangtam, Rengma, Yimchunger, Pochury, Zeliang, and Khiamniungan. Several other Naga tribes are also found in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Myanmar. The Nagas are not a homogenous tribe; each of the tribes has distinct cultural tradition, social structure, rituals, festivals, folklores, belief system, dialect, costumes and immensely rich heritage handed down through generations. They believed in a supreme creator, many deities, spirits and medicine-men who appease and banish these spirits according to the requirements. English is the official state language and the medium for education in Nagaland and intertribal communication is carried out in Nagamese. The tribes do not have their own script so they use Roman script introduced by Christian missionaries for

writing in their respective languages. The term 'Naga' is given by the plain inhabitants and was used to refer all the diverse Naga ethnic groups. The word is not of native origin as it is said that there is no reference to it in Naga dialects. The origin of the term 'Naga' has been so far rounded up in guesses and assumptions:

Some point its derivation from the Sanskrit word 'Naga', a mountain, hence mountain man. Some linked it to be from the term warrior and some thought it was from the Hindi word Nanga, meaning naked and some believed it was derived from the word Naga, meaning snake. The most likely derivation is from the word Nok, which means people in some few local dialects. Ancient Indian scriptures also referred to them as 'Kiratas'. The territory of Nagaland is mentioned in some recent Sanskrit scriptures as 'Nag Bhumi', the land of serpents. But it is shrouded in mystery in what context the mention was made. (Kumar 24)

For long Naga Hills remained untouched due to its inhospitable terrain. British advent to this place was quite late at first they came and established rule over Assam and gradually annexed the Naga Hill areas. The British was successful in establishing its administrative control over the Nagas through the help of Christian missionaries. Till their conversion to Christianity Nagas were preserving their respective faiths but after the conversion they were asked to give up their traditions. The missionaries transformed their indigenous ethnic identity into a Christianised identity and brought a social change in Naga society but these changes disturbed their close knit clan and family life. The attitude of the Nagas towards conversion varied from tribe to tribe. Some tribe readily accepted the new faith, whereas some others, such as the Angami Nagas continued to

resist initially and did not show inclination towards conversion. Formerly known for strict adherence to indigenous customs and rituals, at present Nagaland is known as the most populated Baptist state in the world.

Education as introduced by the missionaries brought modification in the Naga society and positive change in the lives of the Nagas. The inmates of these schools dressed immaculately, displaying commendable proficiency in the English language that considerably increased their employability. During the First World War the British government recruited around 2000 labourers and porters from different Naga tribes and sent them to France. This exposure of the First World War introduced them to the new lives and ideas of the outside world which helped them in changing their outlook and to develop a sense of collective Naga unity, identity and solidarity. Many of them who returned from France in 1918 founded The Naga Club. During this time, the fight for Indian independence had begun and The Naga Club also felt that the Nagas should be permitted to choose their future independence and to preserve their tribal identity. Hence, the Naga Club appealed the Simon Commission for exclusion of Nagas after the British departure from India. The Naga Club and The Naga Hills District Tribal Council merged into an organization called the Naga National Council. The Second World War had destructive effect as the Japanese entered Kohima and the Nagas faced the grave consequences of the war. The Japanese tortured the villagers and burned the villages when they failed to get their support. The Nagas endured the pain but refused to aid the Japanese invaders and thus they did not betray the British force. Shortly, before the Indian independence the Naga National Council demanded independence. Many talks and meetings with Indian government regarding their demand yielded no results to the

satisfaction of the council. Consequently, the different point of view between the Indian government and The Naga National Council steered the armed revolt and insurgency which exist even now. In 1956, with the guidance of Mr Angami Zapu Phizo, the council founded the Naga Federal Government which led to a war between the Indian army and the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the innocent Nagas had to bear the brunt of this war. Their villages were burned, they were tortured and beaten up if caught helping the insurgents and were impelled to contribute grain and cash for the cause of the Nagas. By the end of 1960s many Nagas got disillusioned with the long lasting violence and began to express their desire for peace. This longing marked a new phase and gave birth to an organization named, The Naga People Convention whose sole concern was settling for peace. With the cooperation from the large number of villagers they finally decided to choose statehood within India. The Naga People Convention evolved into a political party called the Naga National Organization and formed the first state government of Nagaland securing majority in the elections. Meanwhile, the Federal Government remained stuck to their purpose and refused to settle for anything other than the attainment of total independence. In 1975, finally Shillong Accord a peace treaty between the Indian government and the Naga Federal government was signed. At present, the Naga National Council and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland have further split within themselves into splinter groups and clashes continues among these splinter groups each vying for supremacy. The resolution of their conflict is never addressed properly therefore, not resolved. The early part of the 1980s saw some peace in the state but violence re-erupted and conflict persisted between the rebel groups till the late 1990s. Fortunately, it is less frequent now. The state is experiencing several changes but these

are certainly changes for the worse as social ills have continued to multiply. Thus, the Nagas have started harking back to their peaceful, harmonious past and their bygone traditions that they grew up with. For the welfare of the community many young Naga leaders and students have started movements to revive and protect many of those traditions which though faced threat are not completely extinct. Reviving and strengthening the ethnic pride of one's culture has been felt as the need of the hour.

The culture and traditional art of various Naga communities is reflected in their dance, costumes, art and crafts, shawls, scarves, and various other accessories. Each tribe has its colour, crafting patterns and distinctive designs. However, there are only a few older people who wear traditional costumes on a regular basis. Others only wear traditional outfits as and when some special social gatherings demand. Temsula Ao has exactly emphasises this in her book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (2012):

It is an undeniable fact that the rhythm of the tradition is disrupted and its relevance certainly diffused. In many ways it finds itself out of step with the modern world and it is at a stage, where ostensibly, the only acknowledgement it receives is in the wearing of traditional garments and ornaments on special occasions. Old songs and dances are re-learned in a hurry and presented awkwardly but on another level one believes that the moral values imparted by the tradition are still relevant and they continue to govern the people wherever they may live, not because they are the values of a certain people but because they are universal human values. (189)

Although, in the fast pace modern world everything is done or presented in a hurry yet Ao says the moral values as imparted by tradition is still pertinent as it continues to direct people. Among the sixteen major Naga tribes of Nagaland, Ao tribe was the first one to embrace Christianity and availed the western education that came along with it. At present the Aos are almost hundred percent Christians. The Ao call themselves “Ahor”, which in several local dialects means “mountain dwellers” (Imchen 20). Ao tribe dominates today both in politics and bureaucratic domains and has relatively the highest literacy rate among the Nagas. They are largely settled in Mokokchung district and consider Chungliiyimti as their ancestral city of origin. They have high regard for stone deity. Christianity first entered the Ao territory when an American Baptist missionary Edwin Winter Clark and his wife Mary Mead Clark reached Ao village called Molungkimong in 1872 and established the first Baptist Church. They learned their language, habits, medicine, set up schools and dispensaries, translated the Bible into the Ao language, compiled an Ao dictionary, wrote a grammar book, and introduced Roman script to their language. Clark mainly focused on spreading literacy and preaching the Bible. They understood that unless the local Ao people knew the basics of reading and writing, the teaching of the gospel would not yield effective results. Clarks were determined to dedicate themselves to the people and started their work in the Naga Hills despite initial opposition from the Nagas. The missionaries eradicated headhunting practices, superstitious beliefs, sacrificial rituals, prohibited dancing and drinking of alcohol, taught them health and hygiene and encouraged voluntary community service. Gospel of peace and love taught them to live in unity and harmony and brought new dawn to their life. Thus, today the predominant religion of Nagaland is Christianity

amounting to 87.93 percent population according to 2011 census and the services rendered by missionaries are remembered with love and affection. Indeed their pioneering positive contribution cannot be overlooked. Simultaneously, while taking a note of their positive work, the impact their mission has had on the communities cannot be ignored. However, there are differences of opinion regarding the impact of missionary's activities; it would be biased to credit all the changes and progress to Christian missionaries alone:

There are two opinions regarding the impact or effect of the new religion. One group thinks the missionaries are not totally to be blamed for the issues resulting from two cultures, while the other opinion says the missionaries plundered and destroyed Ao culture. It is observed that the later missionaries prohibited all cultural songs, dances, stories, folklore and festivals on the grounds of immoral behavior such as excessive drink and waste of wealth and energy. (Imchen 157)

As a matter of fact the missionaries had shortcomings evident from their inability to comprehend the meaning and value behind the Ao culture. For them everything was filled with the presence of the unseen and elaborate ceremonies and rituals were integral part of their religion. Their behavior, activities and attitudes were guided by the principle as laid by their religion. Their system of social democracy, ceremonies, cultural costumes and dances reflect their philosophy of life. Ao religious system was often labeled as disorganised and unsystematic but a closer examination will reveal the contrary.

In pre-Christian society they had the concept of genna, which in the Naga belief system meant forbidden for a certain period. Every religious ceremony was marked by a

certain type of taboo. After learning gospel they realised that they were suffering not due to their sin but because of their adherence to the concept of genna which was attached to almost every part of their daily activities. It was the gospel that liberated them from their years of observance to a number of superstitious beliefs. In the ancient times as well as today to a certain extent, witchcraft which is associated with the medicine man or tigerman played a vital role in socio-religious life of the Ao community. An Ao tigerman is often consulted for any social mishappenings. Likewise, interpretation of dreams and divination has an important role in their life. Dreams were and are still considered as disclosure of divine will and are interpreted for various occasions including war as they believed in the prophetic value of such dreams. Dreams even today play a significant role in the Ao society and dream experts are believed to disclose unexplainable things. The ancient Ao village was independent, capable of internal and external administration and looking after the welfare of every citizen. Major Butler during his military expedition into the Ao village commented “ every man follows the dictates of his own will, a form of the purest democracy which it is very difficult indeed to conceive as existing for even a day; and yet that it does exist here is an undeniable fact.” (Elwin 525)

Before the advent of modern schools, the *Arju* or Morung system (a traditional learning institution also known as Ao Naga dormitory) existed where an adolescent young man were given a rigorous training to shoulder the responsibilities in adult life. A Naga who did not go through this life was not chosen for any responsible duty in the village. Therefore, an Ao boy accepted such a regulated life. Likewise for adolescent girls as well, similar dormitories named Zuki were maintained at the village eldest woman’s house where they learn handicrafts, social etiquette, songs, customs and traditions. This

basic training that was imparted before the birth of schools was essential for every young boy and girl to equip them to meet challenges of life. It taught them values like importance of hard work, sacrifice, sincerity, fearlessness and loyalty.

Like all other Naga tribes, the Aos too have their varied dress and ornaments. Each clan has its own choice of dress and ornaments which they trace back to their origin. Ao Nagas like other Nagas belong to a patriarchal society. The shawl *Tsungkotepsu* or *Mangkotepsu* were only worn traditionally by men. This shawl which is black and red in color with a white strip in the middle and the depiction of the tiger, the cock, and the human head marks the social status, bravery and affluence of the wearers. In the same manner, the tattoos were practiced among the womenfolk only. Besides ornamenting, the distinct tattoos among girls help in identifying marriageable clans. Moreover, they serve as mnemonic devices and provides glimpse into their folk traditions and legends. However, like many other traditional customs, tattooing was also prohibited by the missionaries and it is now no longer in practice.

In Ao custom a woman does not change her maiden surname even after her marriage. Women have a high place in the society; they are respected and given education but in olden days they were confined to their households. The Ao follows a strict exogamous relationship and consider marriage sacred hence marriage within the same clan is forbidden. The adherence to exogamy among the Ao Naga tribe till today points out to their origin myth of three men and three women from three major clans who emerged out of the earth at a place called Lungterok. The myth goes on to say that the marriage among these six people took place with clans other than their own. Apart from all these, Poetry is a popular form of Ao literature. The Aos have different types of songs

for different occasions. Pangjung Ao writes, “Singing is an indispensable accompaniment of all Ao festivals. All Ao traditions of the past and notable events of the present are enshrined in their songs... The meanings are implied rather than expressed...an Ao song is a series of words each full of hidden meanings. Translation into other language is extremely difficult. (Imchen 130)

The story of their origination, beginning of headhunting and many other significant events are enshrined in their songs. A simple song may contain the history of some events of their lives. Other than the song, the feast of merit is a feast given by a rich man in the village for the entire community. This is also a way of expressing gratitude to God for granting him wealth. The essence of sharing among younger generations today can be less visible. Before Christianity the Aos used to keep the dead at home for six days performing all kinds of rituals. The practice was considered unhygienic by the missionaries and they stopped this practice. Owing to their practices they were labelled by the British as primitive and savage which is based on wrong way of perceiving them. C. Levi Straus in “Race and History” wrote, “the more we claim to discriminate between cultures and customs as good and bad, the more completely do we identify ourselves with those we would condemn....The barbarian is, first and foremost, the man who believes in barbarism.” (Strauss 101)

The literature from the North-East, particularly poetry is influenced by various legends, myths and folklores. These influences have enriched and rendered a vibrant hue and unique identity to the literature of the region. The region is replete with folklore that has been passed down from generations to generations. Folklore generally enlightens on the early ancestor’s society, their way of decision making, resolving conflicts, facing

challenging events, beliefs, history, practices, and customs. It also provides insight into the life of bygone world and perspectives on one's cultural tradition. Folklore helps preserve one's ethnic identity and brings meaning to the life of people who are disillusioned and are in moral, spiritual and existential quandary. Since time immemorial mythology, folklore and religion has not only defined the identity of the people but also has been the vehicle for perpetuating the ancient knowledge. At present the world has become a global community and people with diverse cultural backgrounds mingle but it is also observed that with the onset of globalization resistance to tradition is prevalent all over the world. However, the truth is that the more society advances, the more becomes the need for acknowledging mythology and folklore. Although it is a challenge to keep the tradition alive but since it has become the dire necessity of the time it can be preserved through extensive study, understanding, tracing its roots and practicing. Myths, folktales, fairytales apart from capturing imagination of people also impart strong moral values and many positive traits through its characters which may help people navigate and understand different trying phases of life. In a world where an individual has constructed a barrier, it has become necessary than ever to share the story so that a sense of belonging is ever maintained. Sharing, narrating, listening and reading stories together both from the past and the present unite humans; renders a sense of relatedness and provides a glimpse of the cultures of the other group. Transmitting oral tradition has become all the more significant in this age of massive social, technological, and political changes. Realizing its vital role in peace building process, maintaining the society in continuing the culture several communities have began initiatives in this direction. According to British Columbia Folklore Society:

Folklore is common to all people. Understanding, appreciating and sharing one another's folklore transcends race, color, class, and creed more effectively than any other single aspect of our lives and as a source of our past and present society. It is something that we can all relate to. Its value is no less than any other part of our history and heritage. It must be documented and preserved as legacy for our culture. (BCfolklore)

Human values and societal norms are deteriorating at a rapid pace thus folklore here plays a pivotal part to educate people into cultural values of the society. In earlier time's folktales played a major role in imparting moral values to the people and at present these tales are being adapted into various forms such as cartoons, videogames, comics book, some television series in order to familiarise both young and adults into the mythic lore. Folklore is very much relevant and alive as people consciously or unconsciously engage with it every day in the forms of every conceivable ritual that they perform. Giving a closer look will disclose the fact that folklore still flourishes under the veneer of modern civilization and the ancient rites and customs are to this day performed in every society but the participants are unaware of the meaning behind the ceremonies. In fact, modern theories and ideologies are replete with mythic connotations. Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* (1991) says "A ritual is an enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth" (103). It gives stability to a culture, brings meaning in life, gives guidelines for living, offers solution on various fields and often explains the unexplainable. Although it is changing with modern variant added into it nevertheless its essence remains the same.

There are several Ao folklores which have come down from generation to generation which has to be preserved in order to maintain their traditional identity. The threat of destruction of identity is inevitable if the folklore gets extinct. AOs were famous for voluntary community service. These attitudes have become necessary because it is around such service that the sense of unity, love, concern for each other is maintained. Traditional arts appear to be losing its relevance as the younger generation with their fascination for western culture gives rare regard to their ancient Ao culture. The few elderly people who possess ancient knowledge are disappearing hence, meeting and interacting with many knowledgeable elders of the tribe will be of immense revelation. Realising that every cultural tradition is vulnerable in this rapidly changing modern world, many people from the indigenous communities of the region have in recent years come forward to probe into their own heritage.

In the ancient tribal society oral tradition played a pivotal role in influencing and governing the people in many aspects of their lives. Ao oral history was transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to another through songs, maxims, ballads, stories, and prayers. The history of Ao Nagas, their religion and entire social life are shaped by their oral tradition. For them, life on earth is not the final existence as they believe in life after death. An enquiry into the Ao Naga religion, folklores, myths and legends will reveal the story of their origin of life. Myths contain their history, philosophy, values, do's and don'ts and belief system. John J Honigmann in *Understanding Culture* (1963) says "Myths affirm the values of the past event, even those unsupported by sound documentary evidence. A social system's value-charged mythology is a distillation of the past prepared from selected facts and beliefs." (194-195)

Myth is an early narrative of events, history of societal origin, and was indispensable part of primitive society. All cultures in the world have their own myths which projects rituals, people's hopes, values, fears, aspirations and are considered sacred. Myth is a part of folklore and it is still relevant because people have traditional rituals which guide their lives in every possible way. Besides, celebrating rituals give people a sense of belonging to their regional ethnic world which they identify. Myth is the basis for most of the literary narratives it also helps historians to collect the information of the past. Joseph Campbell considered myth as decisive for a happy life and "advocated myth as a panacea for not only psychological woes but also social woes, and he attributed almost all human problems to the absence of myth." (Segal)

As Guerin, points it in *A Handbook to Critical Approaches to Literature* (1999) "Myths are by nature collective and communal, they bind a tribe or a nation together in common psychological and spiritual activities. It is the expression of a profound sense of togetherness of feeling and of action and of wholeness of living" (160). A closer look would reveal that every society is held together by myth, it has rules to guide men thus it has indispensable function, "Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an ideal tale, but an active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom." (Malinowski 101) The similar view is highlighted by Jung in *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, (1993):

The myth in a primitive society, i.e., in its original living form, is not a mere tale told but a reality lived. It is not in the nature of an invention such as we read in our novels today, but living reality, believed to have occurred in primordial times and to be influencing ever afterwards the world and the destinies of men.... For

the natives on the contrary they are the assertion of an original, greater and more important reality through which the present life, fate, and work of mankind are governed, and the knowledge of which provides men on the one hand with motives for ritual and moral acts, on the other with direction for their performance. (5)

The above lines are suggestive of the fact that myth indeed has been playing a major role in the lives of the natives since time immemorial. A closer reading of any text in the world will reveal its reference from the myth of the ancient world. Myth needs to be properly understood rather than just discarding it as ancient trash. It has plenty to offer and enlighten. The ancient identity of the Nagas, their location of origination, migration history is immersed in mythical lore. However, there is no historical record to back this up but have been accepted by people as an inalienable principle of their tribal history. Folktales facilitate understanding of a particular society and its associated rites; understanding Naga culture requires study of its oral traditions, of which folklore is an important part. Oral tradition is invaluable in the lives of the Nagas. It is considered as trusted sources for tracing their earlier history and also for reconstructing their history. Longkumer in “Oral Tradition in Contemporary conflict Resolution: A Naga Perspective” says:

Indeed the very history of the Naga people, their religion and entire social life is shaped by their oral tradition. In the socio-cultural and political life of the Nagas oral narration was and still is, a powerful weapon to prove or disprove, substantiate and support any dispute or conflict. It is instrumental in peace negotiation or to conduct truce in times of war or confrontation. (11)

The emerging literature from the North-East is rooted in native's cultures and oral traditions. The North-East region is endowed with vast repository of cultural heritage and the writers from the region are making use of it in order to bring its significance to the forefront. The poetry of Temsula Ao, (born 1945) voices her personal as well as the collective experience of her community. Ao is a renowned writer, a poet and one of the most celebrated women writers of North-East India. She has been the recipient of many awards including the Padmashri in 2007 for literature and education, the Nagaland Governor's Award for distinction in literature in 2009, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013 for her collection of short stories *Laburnum for My Head* (2009) and the Kusumagraj National Literature Award for poetry in 2015. Her most widely known works include two collections of short stories called *These Hills Called Home: Stories From the War Zone* (2005), *Laburnum for my Head* (2009), *Aosenla's Story* (2017) and an essay called *Henry James Quest for the ideal Heroine* (1989). Her poetry collections are *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs That Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), *Songs from the Other Life* (2007) and *Songs along the Way Home* (2017). Her other notable works are *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* (2012), *Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags: A Memoir* (2014) and *On Being a Naga: Book of Essays* (2014). Her foray into the world of creative writing was with poetry. Her works have been shaped and hugely inspired by oral tradition, myths, and folklores of her communities'. The perceived similarity between poetry and song impelled her to designate her poetry collections as Song. Her poetry presents the cultures, traditions, and beliefs of the Ao tribe of Nagaland. In addition to myth and folklores, love, death, beauty, ecological degradation and nature are some of the other recurrent

themes in her poetry. She also writes about issues such as colonialism, modern existential crisis, cultural and moral decadence that are of global relevance and not merely Nagas' concern. Thus, her concerns are universal and humanitarian.

In her poem "Stone-People from Lungterok", she highlights the story of Aos ancestral origin. The word Lungterok in Ao language means six stones. According to Aos, their ancestors emerged out of the earth at Lungterok. It is said that some of the stones are still to be found in the first village established by the Aos at a place called Chungliyimti. Chungliyimti holds special significance among the Aos as it was and still is considered as the centre of Ao civilization. BB Ghosh the author of Mokokchung State Gazetteer writes, "It was here that the Aos attained a remarkable achievement as an organized society, a tribe with proper village government, distribution of powers, a set of customary law to abide by, and consciousness of moral and ethical aspects of mankind" (32). The Ao myth records that out of the six stones, which emerged at Lungterok, three were male and the other three were female. The various Ao clans track their respective source of origin to one of these stones. Furthermore, this myth has been strengthened throughout Ao history by way of folk songs, legends and beliefs of the people:

LUNGTEROK,

The six Stones

Where the progenitors

And forebears

Of the stone-people

Were Born

Out of the womb

Of the earth. (1-8)

Using anthropomorphic vision and imagery of earth element, the poet narrates how her ancestors were animist and diehard romantics who brought the ethereal world alive through the perception of their imaginations and faith. Every living and non-living worlds were revered by them:

STONE-PEOPLE,

The romantics

Who believed

The sun can sulk

The moon can hide

And the stars are not stars

But pure souls

Watching over bereaved hearts

Here below

With their glow. (24-33)

The poet has humanised, personified and has extended anthropomorphism even to ethereal zone like sun and star. She is addressing the celestial body partaking in the sorrows of the human, they are part of the large poetic canvas of the poets and human non human are looked as equal. She has established a bond, a stable connection between the two worlds of human and natural world. In the preface to her book *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* Temsula says, for Ao “folklore is culture, and culture is folklore” (ii) this suggest the importance of folklore in Aos’ lives. Hence, through this poem the poet is trying to locate and revive her culture and instill a sense of pride in the tradition of her

community. The poet says that, “The Ao-Nagas have documented their history, culture and social mores through an elaborate network of oral devices and this have been able to hold the fabric of society together for generations” (xi). She also makes a reference to the tradition of headhunting, weaving and carving that was famous in the Ao culture. Orality can be seen reflected in the structure of the poem itself:

Stone-people,

The potters and weavers

Planters and growers

Hunters and carvers

Singers of songs and takers of heads,

Gentle lovers and savage heroes.

Builders of homes and destroyers of villages. (34-40)

By using strong antithesis, and contrary elements the poet is depicting the qualities of her ancestors as embodiments of opposites. They had both positive and negative attributes; they were constructive and destructive as well. They upheld the notion that without contradictory there is no progression; hence, they embraced life in all its diversity, paradox and contradiction.

By maintaining a tone of certainty about her faith in tradition she says that her ancestors were possessors of special skills and were aware of the secret wisdom of nature. They worshipped and felt the presence of unseen and believed in the life after death:

STONE-PEOPLE,

The worshippers

Of unknown, unseen Spirits
Of trees and forests,
Of stones and rivers,
Believers of soul
And its varied forms
Its sojourn here
And passage across the water
Into the hereafter. (41-50)

She describes her ancestors as believers of soul and death after life, worshippers of nature who had unwavering faith in it. The idea of pre-existence is in very much keeping with platonic philosophy that, this life is not an end but a journey towards the other. The recurrence of the word 'Stone People' shows her motive in revealing her ancestral originality and identity. The poem presents an idea of coexistence and fine ecosystem of the living and non-living.

Her ancestors were intellectually equipped and were polyglots. They could understand the sounds of non-human world. Their understanding and respect for everything that surrounded them is deeply embedded in their folklore and folksongs. They revered nature as sacred and hold a strong belief that men, gods, animals, aquatic creatures and plants harmoniously coexisted since time immemorial. Ao Naga names, continues to play a significant role in the preservation and perpetuation of the culture of the people. Names are storehouse of their legend, and history.

In the various districts of Nagaland modern archeologists have discovered artifacts from ancestral sites which throw considerable knowledge on its historical

importance. Already beliefs surrounded about these ancestral sites are largely disappearing due to the rapid social change in Nagaland. The 19th century theory of Volksgeist (the cultural spirit) advocated that “each national ethos be preserved in music, painting, literature, law and science lest the permanent element of every nation disappear” (Orringer). Stories of the events once occurred may be recounted by the generations to come, but the evidence of the sites would be lost and with this loss it would seem like a reminder of another myth that once existed in the past. Thus, preserving, protecting and maintaining historical and cultural heritage sites in and around the world which are fast disappearing should be given paramount importance. Just like Aos, there are many communities in the world whose invaluable cultural heritages are at stake; their vast cultural resource contains information about the history of their past which has to be restored.

Correspondingly in her other poem “Blood of Other Days” Ao narrates the Naga history, their early gods and customs, the advent of Christian missionaries and subsequent cultural death. Temsula mentions how once her people believed in the existence of supreme power in various forms of nature and worshipped with absolute faith:

We believed that our gods lived

In the various forms of nature

Whom we worshipped

With unquestioning faith. (9-12)

Missionaries labeled the tribes as heathen and the indigenous faith as frivolous and primitive. Missionaries had their plans beforehand in propagating Christianity and evangelizing the natives. They proclaimed that the native religions were preposterous and

thus forbid them to observe it. It is to be noted that the missionaries had an attitude of superiority about their religion, and they looked down upon other religion. They stopped the traditional practice of the natives which had a pivotal role in their cultures. By saying so Ao is also trying to bridge the present gap between human beings and nature, between her people and their past:

Then came a tribe of strangers missionaries
 Into our primordial territories
 Armed with only a Book and
 Promises of a land called Heaven.
 Declaring that our Trees and Mountains
 Rocks and Rivers were no Gods
 And that our songs and stories
 Nothing but tedious primitive nonsense. (13-20)

With the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century the native's traditions were threatened and indigenous relics were destroyed, their traditional system of beating drums and dancing were silenced by musical hymns and prayers. Although the missionaries unified the tribes with common language and a message of peace, love, compassion and unity but their traditional culture was ripped apart by an acute sense of identity crisis. The poet appears to be disgruntled at the way she is narrating the history of the advent of missionaries in the region and their subsequent Christianisation process. Through her tone the reader can sense that she is ambivalent in her attitude towards Christianity as she is not been able to alienate herself from her culture. The missionaries prohibited the tribes from taking part in their traditional dancing and singing. They imposed restrictions and

insisted on changing the lifestyle of the tribes. With a strict moral code imposed by the missionaries, the tribes did not dare to sing their songs in praise of their spirits which gradually led to decline of their traditions:

We no longer dared to sing
 Our old songs in worship
 To familiar spirit of the land
 Or in praise to our legendary heroes. (25-28)

The knowledge of other days was tabooed because the natives were not allowed to talk or practiced them. It records a spiritual transition to which they were subjected. Change is inevitable yet painful especially when it occurs suddenly and the people are unprepared for it. To adopt a new religion that tells an entirely different story from what was followed before is something they could not accept and comprehend. According to Ao, they were soon attracted to the charm of “a new heaven” and this made them neglect their ancient customs:

Schooled our minds to become
 The ideal tabula rasa
 On which the strange intruders
 Begin scripting a new history. (37-40)

John Locke in his, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (1689) stated that human mind at the time of birth remains in a blank state so basically men are born free and has freedom to define and choose the life they want. Unfortunately, the tribes despite having their indigenous mode of life was made to accept the alien religion as their own. Even their old narratives faded into oblivion, ancient faith got uprooted, all the

cultural traces were removed from the page of history and memory. Their spirituality began to shrink, impression made by culture was completely erased, a new history of culture was created and a new mind was formed. The poet calls the missionaries as intruders, unkind and unsympathetic; her sympathies are still with her traditional belief systems.

The missionaries were successful in some measures to annihilate the traditional native cultures and this way the natives lost their roots assimilating the new culture. Their minds were wiped clean to be written by the strangers who “began scripting a new history”. They indoctrinated and destroyed their belief system, history and made them to believe in fictitious history written from their point of view. They followed one step after another in order to do this:

We stifled our natural articulations

Turned away from our ancestral gods

And abandoned accustomed rituals

Beguiled by the promise of a new heaven. (41-44)

The poet while narrating the history of her community’s cultural transformation and the growth of alternative spirituality is also deploring this transition. The loss was not much felt immediately after the conversion and during the missionaries sojourn in Naga hills. But these days due to vast cultural shifts tradition and heritage are losing their value. Hence, the poet brings into the limelight those damages that took place long ago. The poet says that her people were taught to imbibe an alien culture and religion, during this process, they lost their essential values and mimicked the ways of the western

missionaries. By using the word “We” she implies that everybody is collectively responsible for all that happened:

We borrowed their minds,
Aped their manners,
Adopted their god
And became perfect mimics. (45-48)

The poet’s voice is strident and resentful as her rich culture and original way of life was replaced. But she reiterates that by denying what once was, does not mean it is not there, it is, it will be ever as she says the imprints of their identities are intact in their mind and the only work left is to work towards reviving it:

But a mere century of negation
Proved inadequate to erase
The imprints of intrinsic identities
Stamped on minds since time began. (53-56)

They all collectively have betrayed their own faith and the need of the hour, asserts the poet is to work collectively for the restoration of their cultural identity and ancestral heritage:

Demanding reinstatement
Of customary identity
And restoration of ancestral ground
As a belligerent post-script to recent history. (65-68)

A new dawn in realising, re-visioning, re-thinking forsaking the old, becoming pugnacious and determined to revive their old belief system has to take place. While

narrating the history of her forefathers through poetry she also makes people re-consider the cultural crime they have committed against their identity and cultural heritage. According to GJV Prasad in *Book of Songs*, “This poem encapsulates Temsula Ao’s position on the recovery of history and the uses it should be put to. It shows her essential courage of conviction, and her compassion, her desire to recover a past and work towards a peaceful future of togetherness” (xxxviii). She is urging the people to prepare counter narrative and fight back the history prepared by the British and the missionaries. Christianity has been seen as an instrument of change both constructive as well as destructive in the lives of natives. Ao society prior to the teachings of gospel was engaged in war and inter-village feuds. The conversion to Christianity undoubtedly brought about many socio-cultural changes but Christianity cannot be only seen as the single agent of change in the Ao society because, “it is not only the missionary intervention that estranged the people of her lands from their past and their traditions and ways of life but also the continuing violence and tensions that have eroded any semblance of living in peace in a place to which you belong, a place which belongs to you.” (Ao xvii)

Above all, through her poetry she has exhibited an intense desire to reconnect and establish continuity with the tradition and mythology of her community, and to find a sense of purpose. Temsula Ao believes in her long cherished history and identity and is afraid of losing it to the forces of modernization and globalization. The folklore of her community is a source of history. Her poems portray the history of her ancestors and encapsulate the culture and traditional life of Ao people. In the poem “Heritage”, she narrates her personal experience in a museum in Europe where she discovers:

treasures of my heritage
caged within imposing structures
in designated spaces
with labels that scream

DO NOT TOUCH. (2-6)

At present, “there is a very real risk of the ethnic becoming a chic marketable commodity. As her poetry reveals that she is equally aware of the threat posed by ‘fetishisation’ or the danger of ‘museumisation’. She further says that she immediately got attracted to it and came closer to have a glance of it:

as if pulled by a mystic thread
I draw closer and read the label
that proclaims this marvel
to have come from my tribe!
I stand there stunned
with the silent anguish
of the truly dis-possessed
and mortified that
I had to traverse the skies
to have a first glimpse
of what is essentially mine. (22-32)

She is stunned to see that the artifacts which she found in the museum are not available in her native land. She seems to ponder upon how other country have preserved it and her own people have forgotten. Due to globalisation local products are remodeled to suit the

global market. The identities contain in local cultural products are destroyed for commercial purpose. The poet is afraid that her heritage may be available only in museum as is the case here. In her essay “Identity and Globalisation: A Naga Perspective” she states:

The cultures of North-East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity markers does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. Globalization in this sense will eventually reduce identity to anonymity. (7)

Therefore, she has become a torchbearer sharing her experiences with others. Her poems are a testimony of an enormous desire to unite with the traditions of her community. With great honesty she joyously sings of her heritage as she becomes aware that being cut off from one’s past and identity is indeed a terrible loss at the fast pace modern society. It conveys her passion, dedication to renew the past and work towards a peaceful future of harmony and belongingness:

stand firm amidst the treasures
of my heritage, to find the answer
in the depths of my soul
where ancestral voices reaffirm:

they are my priceless past
and also my insistent present
though the oceans now intervene,
and I should not rest easy
until the purloined treasures
of my heritage
overcome their bondage
and come home to flourish
in the soil of the true inheritors. (92-104)

This experience led her to explore her own culture and identity. Through this poem she is also trying to exhibit the solution for the present day loneliness and identity crisis which can be alleviated by bringing communal togetherness, by identifying with one's tribe, lands and finally with humanity at large. What Ao is trying to emphasize here is that traditional values and culture appears to be still continuing, although ignored or unacknowledged. Every society has a tradition and every person faces contradiction between traditional culture and modern values and integrating the two together is often an arduous task. The use of technology has radically altered the way of life. Urbanization and industrialization have not only brought development but also the sense of isolation and alienation among the people. Cultural growth is affected hence people are into virtual world than the real world. In the present day, tradition and culture of a community could be seen only during some cultural functions. It has become rare but it is still relevant as it continues to govern the conscience of the people. In the preface to her book *Ao Naga*

Oral Tradition narrating her personal experience at the University of Minnesota she writes:

I can state that the more I delve into the context of the tales the more convinced I became that I needed to understand the Ao Naga oral tradition in its entirety which has shaped and nurtured the Ao Naga people for so many generations. As a Fulbright fellow at the University of Minnesota, I was attracted to the Indian Studies Department there being in close contact with Native Americans observing and interacting with them was a unique learning experience for me. There may not be any direct material input of this experience in the present enterprise but it heightened my awareness of the vulnerability of the indigenous cultures in the face of rapid modernization and other related forces, it also taught me to look at one's own culture with a fresh insight and greater appreciation. Above all, it created in me a sense of urgency to learn more of my culture before time caused any more diffusion and loss of the lore. (vii)

She is mindful about culture vulnerability in the rapidly changing world. She is a witness to the present cultural degradation and uses her poem with an intention to revive and preserve it for posterity. Her poems therefore are endowed with concern for her community and a vision for the better society. Her desire for restoring oral tradition in the face of change is an underlying feature of her poems. With the advent of modern life, oral traditions are fast vanishing. She feels that it is only through assimilating the ancient knowledge that the modern society is strengthened. According to Ao tradition:

The Aos had a written script but lost it in the following way. In the beginning, when the earth was still young, and there was no sharp differentiation between darkness and light, man and beast lived together. During this age, according to the Aos' claim, there was a written script. The script was written on the hide of an animal and was hung on a wall. One day, when the people were away in their fields, a dog dragged it down and ate up. From that time onwards, the people had to commit all knowledge to memory and began transmitting the same by word of mouth to succeeding generations. The oral traditions thus begun became the repository of all knowledge about the origin of the tribe, the clan divisions and organisation of the important institutions governing community life based on these divisions, as well as the belief system and forms of worship. (Ao 8-9)

The above lines indicate the importance of oral tradition among the Ao community. She then narrates her story:

I have lived my life believing
 Story-telling was my proud legacy.
 The ones I inherited
 From my grandfather became
 My primary treasure
 And the ones I garnered
 From other chroniclers
 Added to the lore.
 When my time came I told stories
 As though they ran in my blood

Because each telling revitalised
My life-force
And each story reinforced
My racial reminiscence. (1-14)

Her community depended on the oral story as they lost their script to dog. Hence, she knew the importance of storytelling tradition and recounts in the following lines how her grandfather warned that forgetting the stories would mean losing one's very identity:

Grandfather constantly warned
That forgetting the stories
Would be catastrophic:
We would lose our history,
Territory, and most certainly
Our intrinsic identity. (27-32)

Grandfathers warning have somewhat proved to be true in the present context. So as her duty and "racial responsibility" she told stories in order to preserve her history and identity for the present as well as coming generation:

So I told stories
As my racial responsibility
To instill in the young
The art of perpetuating
Existential history and essential tradition
To be passed on to the next generation. (33-38)

Although, Ao is doing her best to restore her tradition but she is dismayed to see that the modern youths hardly show any interest in oral folklores. Citing example of her own grandson she shares:

But now a new era has dawned.
 Insidiously displacing the old.
 My own grandsons dismiss
 Our stories as ancient gibberish
 From the dark ages, outmoded
 In the present times and ask
 Who needs rambling stories
 When books will do just fine?
 The rejection from my own
 Has stemmed the flow. (39-48)

Each of the above line conveys her sincerest yearning for reviving oral arts which the readers may experience as they read it. Her poems possess an amazing lyrical quality that makes the reader visually imagine the world she paints. The younger generations are losing interest in oral tradition and it is becoming a challenge to creatively blend the ancient art into modern so that their interest may linger on. Of course stories are being narrated these days through illustrations, cartoons, games which is making children glued to television and which may help them to be in touch with not only their traditional roots but also the roots of others. She observes the growing distance between her people and their past and hence her poetry is an attempt to reunify. She is encouraging younger generations to learn their traditions which otherwise may get lost. While narrating the

history of her ancestors, and her community she is also simultaneously urging the readers for preserving their own respective identity. She is inviting the reader to explore the rich traditions of her community and in a way indirectly makes the reader explore their own tradition. She draws experiences from her own community but her concerns are universal. She states that folklores have been the absolute source of her community history. In her essay “Identity and Globalisation: A Naga Perspective”, she asserts:

The existential identity of the Nagas is immersed in mythical lore how they originated, the location of their origin and why they come to live at different places or inhabit the geographical area called Nagaland and outside the state in some places in the adjoining states. There is no concrete “historical” or material support for the myths of origin; however, these myths have been accepted by people as an inalienable principle of their tribal history. (6)

Ao believes that folklore connects an individual to his society and people which in turn will help in maintaining peace and minimizing conflict. GJV Prasad in the introduction to *Book of Songs* states that “she searches for the past that has disappeared into the mists of time, for it is in the very unrealisability of that history that her people’s troubled present arises” (xiv). Almost every aspect of Naga life ranging from history, religious belief, social life, politics, culture, love, romance, marriage, are deeply embedded in their folklores. The poet is not against the modern age; she simply attempts to make her tradition adaptable in modern context. The oral cultural history of her community is documented by Ao and in this time when history is questioned for its veracity these poems will live as a historical record of the past, present and for the future.

In the poem “Forgive Me”, the poet mourns the loss of Aoness or her ancient tongue as it has been substituted by the alien tongue. The poet is saddened to see this happening right in front of her thus she seeks refuge in her poetry. She fumbles for right words to speak to her soul in order to find her misplaced world. A sense of loss and a quest for the past pervades her poetry. She is aware that people are cut off from their mythologies, from their past heritage, and this she perceives as a terrible loss:

Today our youth struggle with the twists
of the archaic sounds and seek refuge
in the alleys of cyber-space
and substitute native terms with
ersatz jargon of the alien web
that mutate them further
into speechlessness
before the ancient tongue of elders.
My heart trembles with fright
and my eyes brim with tears
for not finding the right tones
to speak to my soul
this wandering soul looking,
still looking for the lost trail
from where the precious words
came home to roost on our hills
and gave me my name. (1-17)

Through the above powerfully evocative lines, she presents the deplorable condition of her own state where she finds her fumbling for words. Modern education and development have brought tremendous new cultural changes among the Ao Nagas. Jumping too fast into imported western culture without critical analysis, study and reflection has led to decline of their cultural and religious values. Modernization has threatened family norms, social ethics, culture and have produced uncertainty of future for many. The crux of the misunderstanding rests upon an assumption that anything western is of higher value than the natives' culture. This is both the mentality of the western mind and the contemporary Aos. Ao Nagas have their own view of life conceived in their philosophy of religion.

The present day youth wished to be better off alone on their own, sharing folktales of their community hardly occurs in their mind. Sharing her personal feeling the poet in her poem "Nowhere Boatman" says that she is disturbed because none at the present day bothers to enquire about her ancestry and lineage:

But of late I've become
 Deeply disturbed:
 To realize that no one
 Has ever enquired
 Who I am and of which clan
 And most important of all
 Where I belong:
 The land they have left
 Or the one they are going to? (29-37)

Clan traditions and loyalty to their community used to play a significant role in the life of Nagas, but in the present time it appears to be fading. The specialty of her poem lies in her effective blending of her ancestral myth with the current deplorable situation. Here, she uses the mythical concept of boatmen to share about the present situation. In her another poem, “The Other World” she shares how much she misses her misplaced world. The following lines reveal her persistence to catch a glimpse of the lost world:

This incongruous mind is relentless
 In contesting my otherness
 And constantly insists on glimpses
 From that lost-out space. (57-60)

Through her personal experience, the poet has become familiar about the void, emptiness and meaninglessness of the present day modern society. Although, she has embraced modernity to full-fledged yet deeply she believes that the juice that brings meaning to life lies in her ancestral heritage:

Shattering the illusory yearnings
 From my dream-like past
 Forcing me to re-embrace
 The now familiar waves
 In the inevitable act
 Of final surrender
 To the fathom-less void
 Of this other world. (90-93, 94-97)

Sharing the myth about tigers who would pay homage to their king on each full moon night for receiving his guidance in her poem “Night of the Full Moon” the poet says in Ao society aged person were revered because of the belief that the aged people are the storehouse of the wisdom of their lore. They were considered *O tashi* meaning one who ‘knows many words’. It was a compliment given to the elderly people. She further says that she mourns the fact that now elderly people are no longer revered and sought for counsel:

He sits silently for a while and observes
 The old decorum that ruled his father’s court
 And due reverence to age
 That controlled young behavior
 All but gone from his court tonight. (24-28)

In her poem “Trophies” she articulates her opinion about the headhunting practices the Nagas once indulged in. she says that she has personally witnessed what women folk had to go through when their husband emerged victorious and brought enemy head home. This shows that Ao is not saying that the entire customs has to be followed blindly but she is stressing the point that there are things which has to be discarded because it no longer serves the purpose whereas there are so many other things as well which if adhered to will benefit the entire society and many generations that are yet to come:

All they seem to ever care for
 Is the glory in bringing home
 An enemy head to prove
 That they are heroes

While the home-fires often go unlit.
 I have witnessed this sorry spectacle
 Countless times and shared the misery
 With other women whose husbands too
 Indulge in such meaningless heroics. (29-37)

Here, she is voicing out against the vainglorious headhunting practices of the tribes who severed off heads of enemies and intruders until recently and displayed them outside of their houses as a mark of their proudest achievements, and a symbol of valor and honor. She feels culture that encourages positive values should be nurtured, practiced and retained, whereas that does not serve any purpose should be discouraged. Charles Chasie in her article “A Naga View of the World” states that:

There are also good and bad in every culture. And, I am convinced that while we may need to shed the bad, we all ought to keep the best in our cultures and traditions because these are the only unique things we could share with the world. Probably, too, sharing our uniqueness is the reason for our having ‘collective separateness’ and a great part of the reason for our coming into this world. (260)

Although headhunting is banned by Indian government in 1960 but it is said that this tradition went on for some more years. It is a thing of the past but Ao has witnessed how it caused suffering among womenfolk at home. She further says:

I do not know what
 The other women think
 But I can no longer
 Remain silent about

This senseless pursuit
 After vain glory
 And vacuous reward. (38-44)

She is digging her past to unearth the gems that it carries so to disseminate them to a vast reading public. In her another poem titled “History”, Ao speaks about how folklore carries history throughout. She utters:

These Songs
From the other life
Long lay mute
In the confines
Of my restive mind
Unrelenting in their urging
For new vocabulary
To redraft history. (1-8)

Ao reveals that the songs from the ancient time are unexpressed and unsung. It is lodged in her restless mind but she is unable to articulate with the new vocabulary she possessed. As new situation demands new vocabulary, she is looking for it to redraft her community history. She shows irresistible urge to write, to feel the presence of it and to see it afresh. The unrecognised lore is actually the reality that carries history and the poets is in favor of creating a new way of interpreting history in order to further reinforce it:

They now resonate
In words of new
Discernment

To augment the lore

Of our essential core. (9-13)

Myth and history appears to be opposite to each other but they are very much interconnected. In “History and Myth” (1956), Peter Munz states that:

in common usage the two words ‘myth’ and ‘history’ are used as if they denoted contradictories. Historians are inclined to call the version of an event which they consider untrue, a myth. Myth and History, in a very special sense, are interdependent. They fertilise each other; and it is doubtful whether the one could exist without the other. (1)

History and myth appears to be in stark opposition as history is often associated with truth and mythology with falsehood with no evidence to back it up. Moreover, myth and history in a way has their version of story but common understanding describes myth as false and history as based on truth. But the fact is “There is no history without oral history. It is, after all, the oldest form or even “pre-form” of history’s existence, and today with our contemporary possibilities of recording and transmitting the spoken word, oral history takes on greater meaning” (Budzan and Zamorski xi). Myths are simple stories that demonstrate deeper meaning of the universe and of human life. Eugene Ionesco said, “There is nothing truer than myth: history in its attempt to realise myth, distorts it, stops halfway; when history claims to have succeeded, this is nothing but humbug and mystification. Everything we dream is realizable. Reality does not have to be, it is simply what it is” (quotes). Campbell wrote “Myth is much more important and true than history. History is just journalism and you know how reliable that is.” (goodreads)

These poems are enough evidence of the present day identity and cultural loss of the Ao community of Nagaland. However, the poet is not talking about the phenomenon of Nagaland alone, she is giving an inkling of the cultural degradation of most of the society of the present day world. Western thought as imparted by education, Christianity and the present day conglomeration of varied culture, technological advancement, modernization, and globalization has led to many societal changes and identity crisis not only in Nagaland but the world at large. Nevertheless, Ao is not against all these forms of changes, in fact, she stresses on embracing the change in every form possible, but at the same time to be utterly, unapologetically and intrinsically attached to one's tradition, culture and identity. According to Ao, "I persevered because I believed that I owed it to myself and my people to document whatever I could of the culture which bred me and gave me my identity." ("introduction" x)

In the North-East, apparently, missionaries' methods of weaning the tribes away from their roots were unfair they could have contributed to the development of people without evangelizing them. They could have understood and respected their cultures, belief system and helped them anyway. However, this is what the missionaries failed to deliver. There are of course both pros and cons and it is better to stop debating over it as they did whatever they deemed appropriate at that particular time but now the void they created in the life of the tribes are more pronounced and demands distinct solution and collective action so to preserve whatever is left behind. If Ao has done her part in bringing the fact of what was and what is, it is up to the people now to delve deeper into what went wrong and come out with solutions so that while retaining its originality, it can integrate into the process of modernised world. The demise of culture that is already

evident in the society at present is going to be more likely in the future as it is threatened by several modernizing forces. Humans are social being who craves for an identity, a sense of belonging, self-importance, and longing for love, appreciation, to be with their own folks, culture and heritage. Thus, a human through his choice or some other means is drawn to the tradition. Even in this advanced world human appears to still have the same ancient requirements as ever such as food, shelter, love, happiness, appreciation, acknowledgment, warmth, protection, security, faith etc. Therefore, Ao is emphasizing on balancing, to embrace the changes but appreciate one's own values and cultures. She is enlightening on what already happened and what can be done ahead in order to bring stability in the society in this rapid modern changing world. She believes that the indigenous mode of living with positive traits should be nurtured, practiced and retained. On the one hand, various changes brought about by proselytization, modernization and western education have made negative impact on the oral traditions but on the other hand it still has contributed for the betterment of the indigenous communities. Many traditional practices has been lost for good, many are still alive but unvalued; one of the reasons could be the high literacy growth in the region which has brought many cultural revival among the present younger generations. Hopefully, the same literacy can awaken them towards working for reviving it.

Naga's folklore which is replete with history became a base for the growth of emerging literature from the region. Poets like Ao drew inspiration from this rich body of folklore and brought before the world the importance of rich Naga tradition. Therefore, through her poems she exhorts the readers for preserving the Naga identity and culture in the face of rampant global change. Her poetry is a personal appeal for consideration as

she senses the danger of destruction of traditional cultures, extinction of variety of human folks and language. Almost every facet of Ao Naga life ranging from history, religious belief, social life, culture, marriage etc are deeply embedded in their folktales. Thus, Temsula, being a prominent voice from the Ao community uses these tales to let the entire world acquaint with the cultural traditions and belief system of her community and in a way attempts to preserve the rich heritage:

As is well known, North-East India with its hills and plains is the homeland of an almost bewildering variety of ethnic groups, both tribal and non-tribal. The region has been, and still remains, a veritable 'folklorist's paradise'. Although various factors of change represented by proselytization, modernization, and liberal education' of the western model, accompanied by large scale literacy, have made deep inroads, oral traditions still remains an abiding force for most of the indigenous communities here. Thus, much of the tradition has been lost and much discredited, and yet much is still vibrantly alive, often juxtaposed with what is radically new. (Ao xiv)

Certainly, the North-Eastern states have been affected by the changes brought about by British administration, Christian missionaries, the ethnic politics in the region and many other factors. The negative traits of modern foreign culture appeared to have engulfed all of them. Nagas once had their rich indigenous faith but they fashioned themselves with the changes that came along the years, the results have had negative repercussions on every Naga. Many traditions were left behind as it clashed with Christian and modern lifestyle thus the poet through her poems is capturing the essence of her communities' history and lineage basically reminding them about their loss past and an urgent need to

renew it. Her personal experience urged her to delve deeper into the tradition of her community, she shares in the preface to her book *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition*:

One particular incident from my American experience evoked a deep sense of sadness which has stayed with me in all its sharpness. This was a language class I remembered were attended by adult natives who were trying to learn their own native language in the most elementary way like ‘what is your name?’ ‘it is cold today’ etc the sense of loss I experienced was for these young men and women in particular and other such natives who would never fully grasp and feel their native culture due to the loss of language which is the medium to the heart and soul of any culture. (vii-viii)

These are the experiences that led her to do an extensive research on her oral tradition and the fruit of her research is poetry collections. Identity is the very essence of human; therefore, the search for identity in the face of diverse change has become important. At present the importance of oral tradition has come to be widely recognised. These days many seminars, conferences, workshops are being organised in an attempt to find out the ways for the preservation of cultures. Furthermore, scholars both from within and outside the region have realised dwindling cultural heritage and are carrying out an extensive study of various indigenous communities. The Ao oral traditions in many ways are the source of their literature, social customs, religion and history.

Her poetry is linked with the history, tradition, society, geography of her community and depicts the current cultural predicament of her people and subsequent negligence of oral history. In a simple yet powerful language she expresses her concerns

of cultural loss. Her years of researched on the Ao Naga community had paved way for bringing forth her ideas into the literary realm. Her poems can be seen as the voice of the ancestors demanding for the renewal of their indigenous faith and tradition. She has endeavored to re-visit the ancestors whose presence once was felt with reverence and at present is neglected. Change is inevitable and as such modern phenomena alone cannot be credited for the decline of traditional cultures, because it is people while accepting the modern reject and ignores their traditions. Simultaneously, adhering strictly to every aspect of one's own cultural practices is also not feasible in this age of constant change and advancement. There has been a lot of debate regarding cultural revival in recent years. Some people are not in favor with the belief that revising old belief system and practices would not go with the modern way of life whereas some are fiercely trying to revive. To revive one's culture does not mean blindly practice the religion but to preserve those that can lend a value and reject those that are of no significance. Ao culture is not only endangered by Christianisation, modernisation, globalisation or western culture but also due to the infiltration of migrants, foreign influences, outsider settlements and domination in almost all spheres of society. As a result the sanctity and identity of Ao cultural heritage are under threat because of giving priority over other cultures than their own. English language has completely replaced Ao dialect in church services, youth gatherings, conferences and social occasions. There is fear among the Aos of losing Ao-ness assimilated into a foreign language. Under such circumstances, the Aos having realised that the total demise of their culture is likely have started a cultural revival or reformation of the ancient Ao cultural heritage.

It is also noticed that the entire cultural value system is not gone but instead many readjustments of the old with the new have taken place. Overall, had it not been for the missionaries' activities, their preachings of gospel, the lives of the Nagas would not have been what it is today in many fields. Many missionaries were asked to leave the region after the Indian independence but until today people remember them fondly and acknowledge the service they have rendered for the growth and development of the region. They still celebrate the arrival of missionaries day, the day that the entire region's conversion to Christianity. The older generations who had experienced about the British days have a proud story. Thus, the moral impact of the west and the wave of modernism is still strongly felt in the region.

Today preaching is westernised...architecture of church buildings are reproductions of chapels and cathedrals in the west, in some cases with a mixture of cinema hall...The church often does become an exhibition theatre for dress, fashion and cosmetics. The younger generation is westernised so that youth conventions and camps look like a western concert with western musical instruments. There is a real danger of complete loss of Ao music and song.
(Imchen 163-64)

Therefore, the poet insist on to appreciate one's own structure, cultural heritage instead of imitating others, regenerating one's own would be profitable, enriching, and a new learning experience, it would be utterly benefiting for them as well as for many more generations to come. Youngsters can hardly talk in Ao, they ignore their heritage and culture as old fashioned. Unknowing the fact that the language binds and bonds people and the loss of language also means loss of one's root, culture, traditions and history and

a tool for communication and connection. Thus, they must be encouraged to nurture their creative talents with the wisdom from the past and reality of the present. A new tradition is to be created where the essential core of their oral tradition reverberates with new strength and power. This is the prevailing reality of not only among the Aos but in all Naga society and elsewhere around the world. It is now significant that the Aos are changing fast, however, towards a better society, in spite of earlier setbacks. V Elwin observes:

In some ways, however, the last few years have witnessed a revival of Naga culture. Even the Christian Nagas are showing a new interest in their traditional dances: they want to build up their own literature in their own language, to record their epics and stories... They are in fact beginning to feel that there is less conflict between yesterday and tomorrow than they had once feared. Their innate essence of beauty their good taste, their own self-reliance will probably maintain....but with new motives and a new direction. (Namo 16)

Emphasizing the need for reviving cultural roots and traditions Charles Chasie in her article "A Naga View of the World" says:

No man, and no people, is without 'roots'. And when we talk of roots, it is not just the family tree that we refer to. We mean much more than that. It is our identity through a set of beliefs, and practices that sets us apart from all others, and make us unique, that we mean. The solidity of our character depends almost entirely on our culture and value-system. Without them we would all be a colourless homogeneity, completely uprooted and floating around, because

without beliefs or identity, there would be no meaning to our existence...But it is our roots, and our culture, that give meaning to life and raises mere existence to purpose and living. This, no doubt, also entails all kinds of struggles and miseries. But 'meaning' makes it worthwhile and helps us bear the hardships that confront us. Therefore, anyone who belittles his/her culture is only belittling himself/herself. (259)

A teacher and a scholar Ao has done her best in simplifying the oral tales of her communities and has made it comprehensible to all. In doing so she is making it easy for the readers so that they value their respective oral cultures and also she believes that, "Give in to grief / And verbalise / The core / Or your sorrow / Lest you leave / Unsaid" (137). She as a "Transcriber of a fading song, Chronicler of history; Teller of tales; Pioneer of Naga writings in English and Observer and Participant in the Naga way of life and speeches has provided "a new narratives, new perspectives, and new solutions" through her writings (*Morung Express*).

The literature from Nagaland is still in its nascent stage but Ao is pleased that a transition is reflected in emerging writings from the region by the young writers who are writing about the prevailing reality of the place bringing traditional element into their work thereby crafting a new sort of fusion. She is rather hopeful that, "Our persistent engagement with the oral tradition' bears testimony to the fact that we have not altogether abandoned the essence of who we are, even as we evolve with the dynamics of a modern, technological and 'written' world around us." (preface xi)

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Poetry and history are often held in opposition and poeticality is seen as being antithetical to historicity but on a closer examination it is found that historicity can be a vital component of a significant body of poetry including the poetry from North-east India. Historicity is shown in this thesis to inhere particularly in an emerging subgenre of poetry that has established itself as Poetry of witness. Thus, this thesis is an attempt to study poetry through the lens of history and history through the lens of poetry and the fusion of the two thereof. This research has tried to establish that a considerable part of the corpus of poetry in reality is history. Often using the technique of reportage the poet of witness captures and records significant historical events that push the poet to a situation of extremity thereby making his poems historical documents. The three poets represented here-namely Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Robin S Ngangom, and Temsula Ao, through their poetry present crucial issues of the time such as ecological crisis, violence and loss of cultural tradition, more powerfully than any historian. North-East literature as a whole has a clear interface with the reality of the contemporary times, replete with narratives of homicide and arson and lived experiences of trauma. Many other writers, such as, Easterine Kire, have voiced their response to the impact of Second World War on Nagas, which is generally ignored and largely forgotten. She has also spoken about the present day reality of Nagaland in many of her fictional and non-fictional works. Similarly, Temsula Ao's short stories present the reality of military violence on innocent and helpless people. There are, likewise host of other writers in the region who depict the reality of their time. The history of North-East India as such is shrouded in various

assumptions and conjectures as in the first place it was not written down because the natives had no scripts of their own. Secondly, it was written much later by many of the British officials during their visit whose accounts show a certain kind of bias and lack of objectivity. In such case, myths and folklores served as the history of the community. In fact, it is highly sought after in case of dilemmas and difficulties in people's lives. Media invariably has done more harm than good in projecting North-East. Disillusioned with the stereotypes the North-East is often projected with by the media, the writers have taken the onus to present their experience in minute details of their respective regions and reveal the fact of their past as veritable insiders. Their poetry communicates the history of the place. Thus, it is poetry which has remained true to the reality of the events, pain and suffering of the people. The images they have evoked in their poetry are drawn from their own deep involvement in their surroundings. As poets of witness their primary endeavour is to document events, people and places that lie capsuled in their poems. They are not concerned with meticulous embellishment of their poetry, and the result is an extraordinary description of people, place and event which no history can provide. They have dismantled traditional assumptions about history that was viewed as the biography of monarchs and the life stories of prominent figures of the society in the past. They showed that history is also the record of lives of ordinary people, their contributions, helplessness, afflictions, trials and tribulations they went through. Hence, they paid attention to the history of unhistorical people whose contributions so far were unacknowledged, undocumented and had been relegated to the periphery. They considered the unreported and underreported past that was overlooked by traditional historiography. As regional writers these poets have also translated their poetry into

English in order to gain wider readership. This way they have saved their works from remaining confined to limited local readership. A large number of literary works still remain untranslated that await the initiative in this direction of scholars and translators. All these three writers have carved a niche in their respective fields. Though North-East poetry is part of the larger tradition of Indian writing in English, its preponderantly historical orientation makes it distinct from other mainstream poets. Their poems are a product of specific time and place and keeping this in mind their poetry has been analysed. These three poets by representing the local ethos are also addressing global issues simultaneously. Each of the chapters of the thesis has dealt with both regional as well as global issues of contemporary times.

The introduction to this research began by trying to establish relationship between poetry and history. Chapter one traces though cursorily the growth and development of English poetry from the beginning to the present in order to explore the possibility of an interface between poetry and history. It has introduced the term “Poetry of Witness” and its influence on most of the contemporary poets. This chapter has further introduced North-East Indian poetry and tried to foreground its essentially witness character and its underlying historicity. It also has laid the foundation for the entire thesis by defining the key terms that have helped to connect the other succeeding chapters. The poets from the North-East have written with absolute clarity so that the message they want to convey remains unambiguous and undiluted. Hence, their poetry has stood out as a true historical narrative. Their poetry is pragmatic in approach with their melioristic agenda. Poetry of Witness has influenced various other forms of poetry that have evolved in the recent times like slam poetry, committed poetry, performance poetry, digital poetry. In the

present era digital poetry has secured a niche of its own, in a click of second everything is known and shared. The long hassle of poetry publishing in the market is taken over by publishing online which is much less hazardous. Poetry is spread out today in multiple ways. The present youths share their individual experiences through these platforms. Poetry slams, spoken word poetry, impromptu street reading of poems has managed to garnered massive audience for poetry. All these have made interaction between the reader and the poet easy and the witness motif is common to all these categories of poetry. At present poets are more conscious and selective about the choice of subject matter of their writings, cognizant of prevalent contemporary issues of their time. They choose to hold a mirror up to day to day happenings around them. Therefore, this way, as has been suggested earlier time and again, poetry becomes the carrier of history.

Chapter two has examined the relationship between colonisers, Christian missionaries and North-East people as an inevitable prelude to the poetry of the region. It has shown the advent of the British in the North-East and their subsequent occupation of the entire region, followed by missionaries of different denominations and their various missions in the North-East. It depicts their contributions and also the negative impact their activities had on the natives. The chapter has further probed into how people in the hills partly blame them for their present crisis, loss of tradition and culture, numerous insurgent activities and ethnic tensions. It is found that on the one hand there is an overwhelming acceptance of Christianity and on the other there is also a strong resistance to the changes that Christianity has brought in their traditional society. Although, at present majority of the people are converted to Christianity, they have still managed to retain their essential indigenous self due to multiple revival movements. People are free

today to choose their religion among many denominations of Christianity prevalent in the region. Many emerging writers from the region have started depicting the loss of traditional values and ardently seeking for the solution towards re-creating their history and reviving their oral traditions.

Chapter three has dealt with the issues of environmental crisis in Shillong as elaborately reflected in the poems of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. The chapter began with the introduction of man and nature relationship since ancient times to the present. It then examined the western versus eastern perspectives on nature, the arrival of the British in North-East India and their outlook towards the environment and natural resources in the region. It further explored the approach of ecocriticism in literature to see how this school has brought considerable awareness among the people about the ecological degradation in the recent years, which is one of the primary aims of a pragmatic study attempted in this research. The chapter then introduced Khasi society, the function of natural world in their lives and the present day environmental crisis as represented in the poems of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. The chapter has also shown how the depiction of the reality of Shillong by the poet may be interpreted as the contemporary ecological history of the place.

Chapter four has explored the poetry of Robin S. Ngangom. This chapter starts with the politico-historical background of the region that has gone into the making of its poetry. It has further examined the early literature of the region to discover the birth of witness and resistance poetry. There are several issues prevalent in Manipur and poets are responding to them in order to come out with solutions, to bring peace, unity and harmony in the region. The resistance in the present times in the region is seen against the

AFSPA, Indian military forces, against the ethnic strife among different tribes, insurgency, drugs, migration, corruption, politics etc. Due to insurgencies, AFSPA, and numerous rebel parties that are fighting for their rights have vitiated the region's peace. The idea of resistance has seeped into people's consciousness and it is carried out through mediums such as art, music, theatre, poetry etc. One of the major forms of resistance in the region is through poetry which is, as stated earlier, rooted in history and stark reality. Robin has witnessed the violence taking place in the region and his poetry is a kind of protest poetry to counter the violence and political oppression and bring back region's peace which once it was endowed with.

The chapter five of the thesis began with a short cultural and political history of Nagaland in order to examine the region and understand the Nagas in general and Ao Nagas in particular. It has probed into Ao's myth, folklore, tradition and cultural background to understand the present cultural degradation, identity crisis and conflict as extensively portrayed by Temsula Ao in her poetry. The chapter further shows how Temsula shares her own experience about the cultural loss which she witnessed during her brief sojourn at the University of Minnesota. Thus, her poetry is motivated by her real life experiences. Her immense desire to delve deeper into the history of her community and reviving her fast decaying tribal culture can be seen in her poetry. Ao tries to capture the changing times, and many aspects of her culture. She has raised her voice against ominous prospect of losing her long cherished and revered culture tradition and folklore.

Chapter six concludes the thesis by presenting the further scope, limitations and contributions this work has highlighted. In conclusion, it can be said that the poetry of these three poets represents the history of their time they have lived. Their experiences

have emerged from the social, historical, political context. They are aware of their roots, aware of the loss but they are not lamenting the bygone but with this realization, they are trying to restore whatever is left behind through their poetry. Their approach is of reconciliation, accepting the present dilemmas and trying their best to do their part in whatever capacity they can:

A careful analysis shows that in this kind of poetry there is a constant dialogue and dialectic between, 'what is' and 'what could have been'. There is an interminable hiatus between the past and the present. There is no apparent lamentation in the poems, but there are wounds, unhealing, unquiet. A strong historical sense pervades the best of such poetry and there prevails the dialectics between reality and realism. ("Poetry from the North-East in English" 9)

Many earlier tragic events in the form of war, atrocities and ethnic clashes have made contemporary writers conscious about the existing reality and the demands of their time. Therefore, committed poetry evolved keeping in mind the demands of the time and this committed poetry, Carolyn Forché has named as "Poetry of Witness." Committed poetry fastens the events of the time. Many incidents such as World War, partition, militant violence have passed by, it is history now. It is only in the writings that events such as these will survive. Human beings are all witness of the times some just ignore to react against atrocities. By chronicling, the poets are trying to prevent future recurrence of such events and their concern becomes humanitarian and melioristic.

All three poets are university teachers which sets them apart from other writers. They have upheld humanistic values even in grim circumstances and have played a

pivotal role in depicting and developing their history. Although hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds, religion, languages, and regions these three poets have come together in representing the prevailing tendencies of their respective region. Their work is an outcome of the contemporary events that has plagued their society. Their poetry appears to be simple yet power packed with deeper layers of meaning. The main intention behind their writings in the words of Iadlang Pyngrope “ Why do I write?/ To give my ideas, words /And words-wings, / I want my words to grasp you by the throat, / To make you jump out of your skin, / To shake you out of your slumber” (“On being a poet” 5-10) . The motive behind their poetry is to bring greater awareness about the prevailing situation among the masses regarding their nefarious pursuit and its consequences; to warn them about it and a plea for the revival of attitude. The poets here are perturbed at the situation of the present and are equally concerned for the future of their place as once again in Iadlang Pyngrope’s word, “I am haunted by a thousand terrors. / Of what my City will be-when I am old, / When my children inherit it, or what’s left of it.” (“My City” 18-20)

The poetry from North-East India shares universal themes, and is committed to social, political and historical issues. They are the poets who represent the dreams, aspirations of the people of their respective region:

Their poetry at times is simple, yet astonishingly lyrical; they shun, many of them, intellectualism in poetry and believe perhaps that the best of poetry and its finer instincts bear the indelible stamp of the native genius: innate and untutored wisdom. They effectively use the oral tradition and mythology/folklore of their specific cultures and rework these oppositely to achieving their poetic vision and

craft. Above all, they view the craft of writing poetry as essentially meditative, likened to what Wordsworth says of a poet as a 'man speaking to man'. They glimpse such a primal functioning of poetry and attempt to encapsulate the same in their verse. They are nativist, poets but at the same time they are not blind to the inadequacies of their immediate societies. ("Poetry from the North-East in English" 8-9)

In conclusion, the poetry of North-East India carries immense possibilities as it is the critique of the contemporary society. The poets keep shifting between the past and the present, what was, what is and what can be. Their poetry captures the historical reality and documents the contemporary issues. They have employed poetry as a space for expressing their personal and public anguish. These three prominent poets have tried to uncover the real history by writing what they feel strongly about. At present poetry is doing many things which has not been thought before. There was unrest hence poetry reflected the unrest. Now peace and understanding appears to be prevailing among different ethnic tribes of the region which may give new direction to literature of the North-East in future and history embedded in the poetry of the place may reveal more pleasant face with more poems about bird songs than about gun shots. Literary sensibility is bound to change with the passage of time, with the advent of new literary works; it is a historical necessity. These three poets cannot be studied in isolation, rather they are meant to be examined in close relation to one another because as they address a common reality and similar history, one poet reminds of the other and thus they can be seen forming a trilogy, notwithstanding their thematic diversity. As stated in the preceding chapters, their works are deeply rooted in and inspired by present-day events intense

personal experiences. Responsibility and role of the artist in the changing contemporary events has become pivotal and unavoidable. Their poetry is vivid and speaks, among other things, of the here and the now, which lends uniqueness to North-East poetry. Strongly rooted poetry of the North-East presents a collage of land, culture, time-past and present, myth, folklore, gun and terrorism, which has sunken deep into their poetry. Far from being escapists, these poets have chosen to confront the reality in all its horror and ugliness and have emerged intrepid spokespersons of their society. Therefore, these three poets are not only poets but witnesses, annalists, chroniclers and a voice of the collective communal conscience. American poet and writer Audre Lorde said:

“Poetry is not a luxury.” Any serious practicing poet will tell you that this is indeed the case... In my eyes, poetry reveals certain truths that other forms of writing can't. It's like a diamond in which experience is compacted and polished till it shines. I think it is the responsibility of the poet to tell the truth, to show others what the truth is. Poets are literary photographers/ historians/ witnesses documenting certain moments, as well as informers and reformers, all rolled into one. (Kejriwal)

Everything has a link with the past; having said that poetry and history share an integral relationship that manifest itself in a significant corpus of poetry. History actually stimulates the production of poetry, as a genre it has wide influence everywhere. History influences literature and literature shapes the way one views history. A historical reading of a text can help to get a better insight into the text because it is the product of the socio-cultural conditions of its time. An understanding of the political context, the society culture and tradition during which the work was written will promote a lucid

understanding of the text. Background knowledge of the region would help one to appreciate the poem and unravel how a simple poem is embedded with a whole gamut of different events. Poetry allows the reader to re-visit the past and make an assessment. Their poetry acts as a route that permits to enter the past and present. All their poems are products of their experience and their social historical background. Despite hailing from altogether different parts of the region they share human experience that is applicable to all. Their poetry is grounded in history and has served a dual function- recording history and representing history. Their poetry could be connected with history and the reader is made to see history from different perspectives.

Ecological degradation, violence, ethnic conflict and oral tradition are essential part of their works and the crucial point of their poems are common man and their day to day problems. Expressing the turmoil allows them to share their grief that goes unnoticed otherwise. Through their expositions many things came to limelight which or else would have been ignored. Their poetry speaks to the reader with a sense and tone of personal intimacy. There is poise and composure even in their poetry of protest, a voice like theirs is seldom heard. From their choice of words to the forms of expression they will be remembered as exemplary figures that redefined the poetry of witness/resistance and inspiring many more generations to come. Their poetry does not follow the conventional set of proper poetic structure, they write in free verse so that ideas flow and the message is conveyed. After all the test of a poet lies in Mulk Raj Anand words:

What is a writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people, who through his own torments, urges and exaltations by realizing the pains, frustrations and aspirations of others, and by cultivating his incipient powers of expression, transmutes in art

all feeling, all thought, all experience- thus becoming the seer of a new vision.
(Dhawan 14)

Their poetry reveals commitment and purpose of a writer, a commitment understandable enough in view of the overwhelming effects of the issues of their time. There still exist discrimination and stereotypes against the North-East people. North-East has already contributed a lot in the field of literature but the recognition of their work is very less and just recent as compared to mainstream India.

LIMITATIONS

The precise choice of this subject of research ideally was to study at least one poet from each of the seven states of the regions but it could not be possible given its unmanageably vast thematic spectrum and the socio-cultural and historical diversity of the place. Hence, the research has narrowed its focus to only three selected contemporary poets of the North-East and giving a bird's eye view of their vast poetic corpus. Thus, this work has focused only on three issues which are considered to be more pressing, universal and require greater sensitivity and attention. Although, there are hosts of other popular writers but these three poets have been found to be the most representative of the collective North-East literary sensibility. The experiences of these poets as represented in this thesis cover equally the other poets as all of them in one way or the other write what they witness, and issues of violence, cultural identity and ecological degradation are dealt with by almost all the writers from the regions. By examining these three poets and their poems it has been sought to establish that their poetry in reality is history which is argued in the preceding chapters. Having said that, these poets have tried to expand and redefine the meaning of history by taking history beyond its academic disciplinary boundary.

Although the poetry of the North-East deals to a large extent with the history of the region, quite evidently not all the events as represented in the poems are personally witnessed by the poet but he has been told or he has lived through the situation as suggested by Carolyn Forché in her poetry collection *The Angel of History* (1994), “It is less about experiences and more consciousness of passing through them.” (xii)

CONTRIBUTION

Linking the idea of poetry as history in this thesis has helped to witness history as a living reality in the present, to echo TS Eliot “For its presentness.” These poets have shown through their work that history is not to be located in some distant past; it is also a living entity of the present, touching everyday lives of ordinary folks. In the words of William Faulkner, “History is not was, it is.” By virtue of the reality and events the poet chooses to portray, he well qualifies as a historian and in this way the poet- historian uses his creative intelligence to capture and arrest a historical moment on the page. Another contribution of this research is that it broadens the meaning of history, making it more inclusive, stretching beyond its academic disciplinary confines. The thesis also raises the issues that are present around the world. Hence, the issues reflected in this thesis are global and local at the same time. Although articles and journals are there but organised and comprehensive research in this subject has not been undertaken. Re-situating the three poets in the emerging tradition of the Poetry of Witness may be seen as the contribution of this research. The study is pragmatic as it views a major corpus of North-East poetry, including the poetry of the three poets under consideration as end-driven, conscious and systematic avoidance of, to quote Robin Ngangom “wooly aesthetics and verbal wizardry.”

FUTURE SCOPE

The emerging North-East Indian literature is vast; hence, the study undertaken here is in no way an exhaustive study but merely a nugget from the vast treasure house of North-East Indian writing. The importance given to the North-East writers during the present day sufficiently indicates that their poetry is indeed been read, heard and reflected upon. The literature from the region is rich and diverse which has plenty of scope for the further study. Not enough research has been done in the field and further research in this area would enrich its literary scholarship from the region. Apart from poetry there are other genres such as theatre, fiction, short stories, folk epic, tribal literature which reflect the contemporary day to day issues of the region which can be explored further.

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