

**THE “UNEASY COEXISTENCE OF PARADOXICAL  
WORLDS” IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY FROM  
NORTH EAST INDIA**

**ABSTRACT**



**Scholar: Nazina Changme W. Momin**

**Supervisor: Prof. Esther Syiem**

**Department of English  
North-Eastern Hill University  
Shillong**

**2008**

Thesis

NEHU LIBRARY

Acc No. 102901

Acc B. in

Date 22-4-09

Class D. by

Sub. Head 13 by

Enter by

Transcribed by

*[Signature]*  
31/08/09

DS

809.895416

MOM

## **Introduction**

This dissertation is a study of ten poets from North East India – Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh; Nilmani Phookan and Anupama Basumatary from Assam; Thangjam Ibopishak from Manipur; Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Robin S Ngangom from Meghalaya; Mona Zote from Mizoram; Temsula Ao and Nini Lungalang from Nagaland and Chandrakanta Murasingh from Tripura.

North East India originally comprised of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, erstwhile known as the seven sister states, before another state, Sikkim was added to it. “A salient feature of Northeast India is the high concentration of tribes in close territorial contiguity. Located on one of the great migration routes of mankind the region has various ethnic elements held to be remnants of the ancient Mongolian overflow into the country”<sup>1</sup>.

Their poetry forms a cross-section of the kind of poetry being written throughout the region. Since, almost no critical material on them is available, much of the work has been based upon an attempt to understand the poets, as being representative of and speaking for a particular region

which has come as a result of the close reading done of the poems and the interviews conducted with them. This dissertation attempts to arrive at a comprehensive view of the kind of poetry that simultaneously encompasses nature, myth and violence within its purview holding together paradoxical realities that have formed the social and political texture of life in the region. Hence transcendence, as an aesthetic or a philosophical objective will not be a possible part of this study.

The dissertation is divided into the following chapters:

**Chapter-1: Introduction**

**Chapter-2: Images of Violence**

**Chapter-3: The Realities of Nature and Myth**

**Chapter-4: Confronting the Paradox**

**Chapter-5: Conclusion**

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

“ The image of the North East region of the country is that it is a mosaic of tribal culture. That it is very remote. That it is full of trees and mountains and that it is a troubled place with lots of insurgency and army, and counter insurgency operations... Many people also associate the region

with a beautiful landscape, a naturalist's paradise, a land of big rivers and colourful festivals in worship of benevolent gods and goddesses.”<sup>2</sup> It showcases a rich variety of tribal culture and natural beauty that has drawn a good deal of attention. Contradictorily, however, the region is also known for its political instability that stems from a variety of causes. The poets of the region have been continually examining the nature of these causes and attempting to give voice to their concern for the growing deterioration that seems to be endemic to the region.

“Here men and women, with common origins but different nationalities, share a racial, historic, anthropological and linguistic kinship with each other...”<sup>3</sup> that seem to be more vital than their links with the rest of the country. Many of the communities of this region have not been able to negotiate themselves into the national mainstream. Some have been demanding separate states on the basis of their ethnic and linguistic identities resulting in violent confrontations. Most of the time, the region is in the news for its violence, insurgency, bandhs and protest rallies.

The ethno-linguistic complexities and the accompanying violence has submerged North East India in a cauldron of unresolved conflicts. The state capitals and important towns “have the crackle of gunfire and fierce cries

which disturb the night... bullets sprayed from guns at point-blank range, passing through one or two of several bodies, the slash of steel on soft flesh, the dull thuds of blows, the crack of broken bones - all that picturesquely is the northeast.”<sup>4</sup> A major issue in the region is the search for identity, a quest for self-assertion, which has a “highly emotional content including a feeling of age long deprivation.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand North East India “holds a special, magical attraction with its mist-clad hills, lush green forests and smooth valleys, the bewildering range of its languages and the rich, colourful mix of its people ranging from former head-hunters to city slickers.”<sup>6</sup> It is the home of many tribes and communities where “there are upwards of 130 major tribal groups in North Eastern India, including the few inhabiting the plain areas.”<sup>7</sup> Being inhabited by diverse tribes and communities that have different cultures and traditions, it is an area teeming with a variety of people following their own cultural patterns.

It is against this backdrop that the contemporary poetry of North East India has been examined. Emerging from different states of this region, the poetry of North East India is seen to be distinctive from the rest of the country in its concern with issues that characterize the paradoxical make up

of their world. The dissertation has also attempted to examine the elements that set poetry from this region apart from other regions of the country.

## CHAPTER 2: Images of Violence

Unrest and violence has engulfed most of the states of North East India essentially because of a deep sense of deprivation. The problem of insurgency has been endemic to the region after Independence. “Most states have been besieged by three to five decades of armed conflict; ranging from demands for self-determination and greater autonomy to assertion of complete secession from India”<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, in North East India, where violence, bloodshed, conflict and corruption have spilled over into everyday life, poets from the region show their concern by speaking about them in their poetry. Their poetry is often referred to as *Poetry in the Troubled Zone*<sup>9</sup> or *Poetry in a Time of Terror*.<sup>10</sup> Poets from this region are often engrossed in the writing of the poetry “ of survival with guns pressed to both the temples: the gun of revolution and the gun of the state.”<sup>11</sup> With a sense of terrible loss, poets speak of their land and people in a language that is filled with images of guns and bullets,

anger and frustration, politics and corruption, bloodshed and destruction,  
thus:

... 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.<sup>12</sup>

These poets cannot close their eyes and remain oblivious to the brutalization of life when “heartrending events are happening” around them. One hears of “chilling accounts of what man has done to man.”<sup>13</sup> Realizing that their land is in a state of anarchy, these poets attempt to shake people from their slumber. They speak of the horrifying incidents happening in their region where their poetry reflects the agonies and fears of society:

Fear like a militant  
had silenced every sound<sup>14</sup>

One envisions the fear that creeps into society as insurgency makes its way into the town itself and silences everyone. Nongkynrih further says that as peace is fast disappearing, people begin to live in fear.

“The crisis of identity is the cornerstone of various social, political and insurgent movements”<sup>15</sup> in the region. Aware of their distinct cultural and ethnic identities, militants from different parts of the region are demanding for autonomy, and independence. Nongkynrih depicts these conflicts and ideologies, thus:

Somewhere in a forgotten little corner of the world  
a hill tribe of one million, fearful of its extinction,  
waged an arms insurrection against a nation.<sup>16</sup>

Proud of their own language, dialect, culture, custom, tradition and historical background, they are not willing to merge completely with mainstream India. They want to maintain their distinct identity and so have been demanding and fighting for separate states on the basis of the respective ethnic and linguistic identities. In the process, many lives are lost and their goal seems to be a distant dream. Women poets too show their concern by refusing to be mute spectators. “Each family in Nagaland has a story to tell: of personal loss, of bereavement; of physical and emotional trauma.”<sup>17</sup> Lungalang depicts the loss of innocent life as a result of violence:

I saw a young man gunned down

As I shopped in the market place  
 Two thick thuds and then he fell,  
 And thrashed a bit, on his face<sup>18</sup>

Here, she talks about a lost homeland where people live in fear, guilt and pain. They remain silent spectators even when their loved ones are killed. The poet mentions the death of her own brother slain in a similar way. Everyone seems to be travelling on the road of destruction. She too feels that she has been stained by scarlet, the colour of death in her poem. In the same way, Mona Zote speaks about a present marked by violence. People not willing to support such violence will have to suffer:

A boy & his gun: that's an image will do  
 to sum up our times<sup>19</sup>

The poet even feels that she had spent her youth in vain “self enforced isolation” because tradition had obstructed her view of the present. Further she expresses her views against what she considers a faulty independence “Swaraj: acid anthem in our veins”.

Compared to other regions of the country, North East India is behind in many areas of development. The reasons cited for this are, that the “... Central government fails to provide adequate funds for development.

There is massive corruption on one state or the other... that the Central Government gives money to make the people corrupt.”<sup>20</sup> The poets’ reaction to the rampant corruption is reflected in poetry that is filled with anger and disgust:

Here everything is bought and sold  
to the highest bidder<sup>21</sup>

Grief-stricken at the present condition of his land, Ngangom compares it with its glorious past, thus:

Once prime land, beneficent and fabled  
And now playground of black-marketeers

...

as you feed money, sell honour, peddle justice.<sup>22</sup>

Money rules the land and everything, including honour is peddled cheaply. Injustice prevails everywhere. The corrupt government official who wields influence and power in the region is a powerful symbol in his poetry:

A cashier counts old one rupee notes

...

Then after the final count, washing his hands clean with dettol.

He eats up the notes, one by one.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the region has become a “capital of thieves, pimps, cutthroats.”<sup>24</sup>

Using irony and satire, poets from the region talk about the “peril of lawmen turning terrorists,”<sup>25</sup> and politicians creating instability in the region, changing parties and governments for their own interests:

for here they change parties and  
governments  
like Hindi film stars changing dresses  
in a song<sup>26</sup>

where they merely indulge in meaningless talk:

The minister has neither inside, nor outside,  
No air, no fertile soil on a sandbank  
There are only words,...<sup>27</sup>

evoking images of politicians with empty promises and no action.

Riven by forces which work under “slogans that have been twisted,” people have “witnessed growing ethnic aggressiveness, secessionist ventures, cultural and religious bigotry...” Images of violence are used to evoke the terror of the land “threatening moral and social dangers.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, these poets reveal through their images, the reality of life for people of the region. Through their poetry, we begin to understand the troubled torn

region of the country, the fears, sufferings, miseries and insecurities of the people. Using the evocative colours of red and black, Nongkynrih portrays the region, thus:

I close my eyes  
turn towards the sun  
the colour I see is disgorging blood.<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, Nilmani Phookan depicts the uncertainty that holds everyone ransom:

Who can tell of morrow's sun  
Rising in red or in black<sup>30</sup>

The future is bleak but each poet shoulders his/her responsibility of awakening his/her own people. They take upon themselves the task of making people aware of what is happening around them. Their poetry is both a wake-up call and an indictment against the society that tolerates the violence and corruption, that they are witness to.

### **Chapter 3: The Realities of Nature and Myth**

Myths form a significant part of the oral literature of the people of North East India. The oral tales that deal with them or those that have a

mythical base, signify the depths of traditional wisdom. They are inextricable from the oral history of the region. The richness of this region lies in its vibrant cultures, traditions, rituals, festivals, dances and folklore, “the way of life of the masses is still rooted in the traditional social base, - group solidarity and group consciousness for collective endeavour and welfare..., creativity is collective and participating. As a result, folklore is still a major component of the living culture of the people of the region. It has been growing and absorbing new elements.”<sup>31</sup>

To many writers of this region, “legends and stories are still a wellspring of thought and emotions that are restored in a peculiar blend of myth and memory unique to the region.”<sup>32</sup> Most of the poets of this region use myth and nature alongside themes of violence, corruption and politics. Being deeply rooted in their past, these poets speak about their history and their past, the land and its people, its myths and rituals, culture and tradition, festivals and dances. Legends are portrayed with the “intensity of reality and reality is portrayed with the intensity of longing for a vanished past”.<sup>33</sup> Thus:

The history of our race  
begins with the place of stories.

We do not know if the language we speak  
 belongs to written past<sup>34</sup>

In these lines, Mamang Dai, a poet from Arunachal Pradesh talks about the mystery that shrouds the origins of the people of this region. “North-Easterners are conscious that they have no recorded history about their antecedents. Their historical past and migration routes are shrouded in mystery.”<sup>35</sup> Some of their myths and legends are concerned with the coming of the first progenitors of their own communities. In relation to this, in one of her poems, Temsula Ao refers to an Ao-Naga myth:

Lungterok  
 The six stones  
 Where the progenitors  
 And forebears  
 Of the stone-people  
 Were born  
 Out of the womb  
 Of the earth<sup>36</sup>

According to the Ao-Naga myth, “the first people, three males and three females, emerged out of the six stones at a place called Lungterok,”

which literally means ‘six stones’. The males were Tongpok (of the Pongener clan), Longpok (of the Longkumer clan) and Longjakrep (of the Jamir clan); and the females were Longkapokla (of the Pongener clan), Yongmenala (of the Longkumer clan) and Elongse (of the Jamir clan). Tongpok married Elongse, Longpok married Longkapokla and Longjakrep married Yongmenala. “This was the institution of exogamous marriage established by the first fathers, which continues till today and is an inalienable tenet of Ao-Naga social custom.”<sup>37</sup> Here Temsula Ao has been able to bring out the historical and mythical foundation of her own society. Her poem articulates the mythical sense of history that characterizes most communities of the region.

A poet like Nongkynrih draws upon his own myths for purposes of moral education. As a poet, he would like to remind his people, “of the virtues of their ancestors’ ways and the necessity of perpetuating them.”<sup>38</sup> In this poem, he talks about Ren, a fisherman from a village called Nongjri, who falls in love with a river nymph and goes to live with her in the river leaving his old mother with this consolation:

“ Mother,” he had said,

“listen to the river,

As long as it roars

You will know that I live.”<sup>39</sup>

Here, “symbolically, Ren is asking later generations to listen to the sound of his people’s life.”<sup>40</sup> According to the poet, the sound of his people’s life and their ways can only be voiced through one’s mother tongue. He feels that it is only through his mother tongue, that he will be able to reach out to his own people and impart their culture and tradition, thereby, helping them in preserving it. However, Nongkynrih also continues to write in English.

The treatment of rituals, traditions, dances and festivals form an important layer of the poets of this region. Rituals are performed on different occasions and have a “pronounced role to play” in folk religion as is the assertion of “identity”.<sup>41</sup> Mamang Dai describes the rituals performed during funerals, thus:

When the singing rises

death itself will cease

Blue beads in your hair will turn you.<sup>42</sup>



Here the poet explains the strengthening of ties, through women who tell stories and men who sit near the dead. They sing songs of lamentation

recalling childhood and youth, as the relatives of the deceased fasten beads and sacred twine to their hair and wrists.

The overwhelming presence of nature in the poetry of North East India is an important aspect. One hears the “river with its magical voice, the twin gods of water and mist, the land heavy with memories, the forest that lingers...”<sup>43</sup> They speak about their disappointment over the environmental degradation that has taken place in the region, the disappearance of forests and the overwhelming barrenness all over the region. They recall the virgin forests of the past with their tall trees that seems to be “Unpenetrated / Even by the mighty sun”.<sup>44</sup>

Living close to nature, poets from this region elicit the sounds of nature like the “Woodland notes of the birds, / Melody of the flute floating from the hut on stilts” and “Bark of the deer from the northern hills” which “the cool wind carries all the time”<sup>45</sup>. Anupama Basumatary describes the setting of the sun through metaphors:

You know well  
 how the crimson lass  
 enters the blue house  
 opening the cloudy door<sup>46</sup>

The picture of the setting sun as a crimson lass and the sky as the blue house with a cloudy door into which the lass enters is a evocative presentation of nature's best moments. These lines also emphasise again and again the sense of rootedness that these poets keep alive within them. Thus, they are always trying to recapture nature in their poetry. This consists of the mosaic of myths and legends, rituals and dances, festivals and cultures, traditions and people that make their poetry dense with meaning. Nature images and metaphors derived from this mosaic give their poetry a sense of rootedness and belonging for they go back into the past to emerge better able to understand their present.

Intimately interwoven into their poetry is this sense of history that is animated by their deep interest in their own myths and legends. These are the other realities that they are bent upon preserving through their poetry. One sees that these poets are also conscious of themselves as being the interpreters of the natural landscapes of their homeland whose poetry captures the essential beauty of the land, when that beauty is almost on the brink of being wiped out.

### Chapter 4: Confronting the Paradox

The poetry of North East India consists of the paradoxical realities of violence and myth, past and present, love and bloodshed, cultural and political dilemmas. Even as they talk about contemporary evils, they must go back to their myths and legends as their poetry reveals the “complex terrain of everyday negotiations where nature and politics, the physical and the cultural, are inextricably engaged”.<sup>47</sup> They take their poetry into areas that are distinctively associated with the kind of experiences that are unique to them. On one hand it brings the gunshots and the bloodstained faces of the region “within earshot distance”, while on the other hand’ “ it takes us right into the hearts of the people, their dreams and desires, myths and memories and long struggles through history”.<sup>48</sup>

Their journeys into the past bring out the realities of the cruel present that they have to live in:

Childhood took place  
 among fairies and weretigers  
 when hills were yours to tumble  
 before they housed soldiers  
 and dreaded chambers of torture.<sup>49</sup>

Some poets prefer to believe that the past is far better than their present, “Our past, we make believe, is pristine/ Even as we reaped heads and took slaves.”<sup>50</sup> They return to their childhood years with nostalgia:

How we hunted small-game in the rice fields  
and covered every land of Imphal on bicycles,  
making passes at almost every girl!<sup>51</sup>

Ngangom recollects his childhood when he roamed about freely in his homeland without fear. Reality has, however, changed completely. Thangjam Ibopishak speaks of his homeland as the land of the half-humans: “...nameless citizens the nameless representatives govern the land/ of the half-humans. Because whether to give human names to the/ head or to the body - no one can decide ...”<sup>52</sup> The image of ‘half-humans’, conveys a picture of the degradation that has crept into a society that is now described as the land of “perpetual internal strife”<sup>53</sup> hitting the headlines almost everyday. This image evokes a candid picture of the degradation of the land and its people. According to the poet, people have stopped acting like humans, they live decadent lives that bring no profit to anyone.

In an age of conflict and violence, a poet like Phookan takes refuge in the legend of the protective Da-Parvatiya:

Ageless

Those two women

At the gate of *Da-Parvatiya*

In a gesture of welcome<sup>54</sup>

Da-Parvatiya is a tiny hamlet near Tezpur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. It has the remains of a temple in the Gupta style which has a relatively undamaged door-frame with two river goddesses on either side. These goddesses seem to welcome everyone and are like a refuge for the poet. He chooses to believe in them rather than in the bullets that have done enough damage to his land.

However, even as their land is swollen with violence and corruption, they take refuge in a past consisting of their myths, legends, traditions and rituals. In ‘A Day In Cherrapunjee: I-V’, Nongkynrih talks about the beauty of his native land and the myths associated with it. In ‘A Day In Cherrapunjee: II’, he tells about the Dainthlen Falls, where according to the Khasi myth, the *thlen* or serpentine master was killed and cut into pieces, “how the evil Thlen was killed / in the very spot”.<sup>55</sup> In attempting to resurrect myths along with his childhood memories, he tries to impart a

sense of folk history to modern readers unacquainted with a valuable dimension of their past.

In 'The Voice of the Mountain', Mamang Dai speaks about the people who still follow tradition even in a fast changing world:

The other day a young man arrived from the village.

Because he could not speak

he brought a gift of fish

from the land of rivers.

It seems such acts are repeated:

We live in territories forever ancient and new,

and as we speak in changing languages

...<sup>56</sup>

A gift as a way of showing gratitude is part of a tradition that her people diligently try to preserve even in a fast growing world.

To quote Jayanta Mahapatra "the miseries of contemporary dilemmas are apparent"<sup>57</sup> in the poetry of North East India. This is specially reflected in its persistent search for identity. Some have had to leave their lands because of the ethnic cleansing that has taken place in some parts of

the region. This has become an all consuming passion for poets like Ngangom. A deep sense of loss is thus felt:

But I need a homeland  
 where I can recognize myself  
 just a map or even a tree or a stone,  
 to mark a spot I could return to  
 like a pissing animal  
 even when there's nothing to return for.<sup>58</sup>

Torn away from his native land, Ngangom experiences a deep rift in his personal life resulting in a sense of exile in his poetry.

Most of the poets from North East India feel threatened that “outsiders” may swamp their identity, tradition and culture. This fear surfaces in their poetry. They blame them for distorting their culture:

They dislodged me from my moorings  
 They tore me from her side  
 They chipped and chiseled  
 They gave me altered dimensions.<sup>59</sup>

Using the chipped monolith as an image, Temsula Ao tells us how the ways of the hill people have been changed by “outsiders” who come from far off

places to influence them. She feels that her people have not been allowed to grow and have been made to deny their real selves.

They talk about the influence of the West and how their boys now “...sit on terraces / with their dolorous guitars...” Before the white people came, all of them worshipped the same gods and goddesses. But with their coming they brought in the kind of conflict that is familiar even today: “...religion to divide us, before politician-priests/ who laboured for their own redemption, / mouthing the name of god among benighted heathens”.<sup>60</sup>

Corruption and materialism have also taken hold of society in the region. Talking about materialism, Ngangom says that “poetry can never be an ally of this numbing materialism or a party to mindless violence. Materialism, wherever it abounds, begets a particular kind of terrifying alienation, for the simple reason that we forfeit our ability to love when we place commodities above our fellow men. And someone who cannot love is always alone.”<sup>61</sup> Lungalang seems to share the same view as Ngangom. She talks about how a man has become “ ...a stranger among his own,/ And his home, a space between walls”.<sup>62</sup> Thus, showing one how materialism has created alienation. The stature of a man in this materialistic world according to her is “a terse of equation of his bank books”.

However even in a land filled with violence, bloodshed, hatred, revenge and corruption, nature's presence is felt even in the face of sure destruction:

The haunting *madhavi* fragrance escapes the rustle of spring,  
It is acrid with the smell of gunpowder<sup>63</sup>

Poets like Phookan persistently long for renewal and search for a better world, “ I have seen several times / the sighing hand of his / among countless hands.”<sup>64</sup> Even though destructive forces seem to have been let loose in the world, he still has immense faith in humanity. He urges people not to look at life in a negative way but to be positive:

No do not tell me  
we shall never arrive  
No water in the river  
No fire in the water<sup>65</sup>

Confronting the paradox has always been a challenge for the poets of this region. They articulate the contradictions and speak about them in order to be able to make sense of the senselessness around them where “tradition rubs shoulders with modernity, folk rhythms jostle uneasily with the western pop, virgin forests stand a mute testimony to the debauchery of

urban life, and recalcitrant nativism co-exists with the ‘otherness’ of the outsiders”<sup>66</sup>. They succeed to the extent that they are able to recognise and accept the realities of a conflicting world.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

The contemporary poetry of North East India provides insight into a region that is lush, with verdant forests, hills, valleys, rivers, and waterfalls. Myths and folklore tell of “ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors”.<sup>67</sup> The other aspect of its poetry reflects the terror and grief of warfare and tragedies of wasted lives that have taken over the region. This poetry is also pregnant with images of violence, corruption, politics as also of the countryside, rhythms of village life and its rich cultural heritage. Mamang Dai constantly brings out this double-edged aspect of poetry, “we wade through gutted entrails slippery with blood, and we run through the green bamboo crushing earthworms and frogs, living amidst death and resurrection all at the same time”.<sup>68</sup>

Since, North East India has been synonymous with militancy, poets from the region cannot remain silent when they are witness to horrifying

incidents. Their poetry has always reflected the chaos that has erupted in the region. They speak of innocent people being killed in fake encounters and also of others who have had to flee to jungles to escape from the tortures of the Indian Army. They sympathise with the young who join rebel groups but make waste of their lives. They follow the conflicts and write about the ideologies of people who want to maintain their identity. These poets also talk about the corruption and materialism which are prevalent in the region.

However, against all odds some of these poets still believe in the survival of life. They celebrate life as it were and for some of them, poetry “is the voice of humanity”; each poem is “a human moment...Moment of inexpressible joy and sorrow, culminating in a silent but sure regeneration of awareness”.<sup>69</sup>

They are rooted in their past, their land and people and talk of their origin and creation myths, traditions, rituals, festivals and dances. These form a significant dimension of poetry that moves backwards and forwards in time, in order to establish a pattern of thought and understanding. The presence of nature does not outweigh the images of violence that erupts in their poetry. Rather these poets reveal an innate ability to understand the

true nature of things, thereby taking an unambiguous stand against violence and yet refusing to idealise the past.

Poetry from North East India thus reflects two opposite worlds – the world of myth and nature on one hand and the world of violence and bloodshed on the other. They have skillfully maneuvered their poetry through these paradoxical worlds. While caught up in issues like insurgency, corruption, political turmoil and conflict that have taken over everyday life, their poetry also reveals the beauty of natural landscapes and the enduring quality of their myths and legends. The coexistence of these paradoxical worlds in their poetry is a strong motif that identifies them as being poets of this region, consciously writing about the rifts that divide and control them. Though rooted to their land, yet their poetry has a universality that communicates itself to all readers.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> P S Datta, ed., North-East And The Indian State: Paradoxes of a Periphery (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1995) 78.
- <sup>2</sup> Mamang Dai, “North East Poetry” Muse India the literary ejournal, Jul-Aug2006,27March2007<<http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>.
- <sup>3</sup> Sanjoy Hazarika, Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India’s Northeast (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 1995) xvi.
- <sup>4</sup> Sanchet Barua, “North East: does agony of the people matter?” Meghalaya Guardian 30 Aug.2007.
- <sup>5</sup> Soumen Sen, “Identity Expressions in Ritual and Myth,” Tribal Studies in North East India, ed. Sarthak Sengupta (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002) 33.
- <sup>6</sup> Hazarika, Strangers of the Mist xv.
- <sup>7</sup> Sarthak Sengupta, Preface, Tribal Studies by Sengupta IX .
- <sup>8</sup> Preeti Gill, “Women in the Time of Conflict,” The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall, ed. Geeti Sen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 214.

<sup>9</sup> Rana Nayar, "Poetry from the Troubled Zone," Kavya Bharati 15 (2003) 125-131.

<sup>10</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007  
[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007  
[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>12</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poem for Samir", The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 31-32.

<sup>13</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, April 2007 <[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "Forebodings", NEWFrontiers 1.1 (1998): 49.

<sup>15</sup> Soumen Sen, "Identity Expressions in Ritual and Myth," Tribal Studies in North East India, ed. Sarthak Sengupta (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002) 33.

- <sup>16</sup> Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "Play of the Absurb", Kavya Bharati (2003): 53-54.
- <sup>17</sup> Gill, "Women in the Time of Conflict," The North-east 217.
- <sup>18</sup> Nini Lungalang, "Dust", Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 258.
- <sup>19</sup> Mona Zote, "Rez," Indian Literature 233<sup>th</sup> serL.3(2006)23-25.
- <sup>20</sup> B.B.Kumar, "North-East India: Need for a Fresh Look," North-East and the Indian States: Paradoxes of a Periphery, ed. P.S. Datta (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1995) 17.
- <sup>21</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Racial Progression," Words and the Silence, Robin S Ngangom (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1998) 20-21.
- <sup>22</sup> Ngangom, "I am Sorry to See Poetry in Chains," Words and the Silence, 69-70.
- <sup>23</sup> Thangjam Ibopishak, "Dali, Hussain, Or Odour Of Dream, Colour of Wind," Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast. eds., Nongkynrih and Ngangom, 90-91.
- <sup>24</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "To My People," Words and the Silence, 42-43.

- <sup>25</sup> Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "The Poet as Chronicler: An Overview of Contemporary Poetry in North East India," India- Poetry International Web, 1 March 2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2695](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2695)>.
- <sup>26</sup> Kynpham S Nongkynrih, "The Parking Lot," Telegraph 4 Sept. 1994.
- <sup>27</sup> Chandra Kanta Murasing, "Of A Minister," Nongkynrih and Ngangom, eds., Anthology 258.
- <sup>28</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Northeast Literature and The Art Of Witness." New Frontiers: A Journal of the North East Writers' Forum 2 (2000).
- <sup>29</sup> Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "The Colours of Truth," Indian Literature XLVIII. 3 (2004): 25.
- <sup>30</sup> Nilmani Phookan, "For a Good Many Days Together," Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan, trans. Krishna Dulal Barua (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007) 98.
- <sup>31</sup> J.B. Bhattacharjee, "North-East Indian Perspectives in History," Datta, ed., North-East 12.
- <sup>32</sup> Mamang Dai, "On Creation Myths and Oral Narratives," Sen, ed., The North-east 5.

<sup>33</sup>Mamang Dai, "North East Poetry" Muse India literary ejournal, Jul-Aug 2006, 27 March 2007 <<http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>.

<sup>34</sup>Mamang Dai, "Obscure Place," Indian Literature XLIX. 4 (2005): 85.

<sup>35</sup>Patricia Mukhim, "Where is this North-east?" Sen, ed., The North-east 181.

<sup>36</sup>T Ao, "Stone-People From Lungterok," Nongkynrih and Ngangom, eds., Anthology 213.

<sup>37</sup>Temsula Ao, "Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective," Between Ethnography and Fiction: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Questions in India (New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2005) 161.

<sup>38</sup>Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity," India-Poetry International Web, 1 March 2002March2007<[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=6285&x=1](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=6285&x=1)>.

<sup>39</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "Ren\*." Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast. eds., Nongkynrih, and Ngangom 158.

<sup>40</sup>Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity," India-Poetry International Web, 1 March 27March2007<[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/)

cms\_module/index.php?obj\_id=6285&x=1>.

<sup>41</sup>Saswati Biswas, "Preservation of Tribal Culture in North East India: How strong is the Non-tribal," Sengupta, ed., Tribal Studies 37.

<sup>42</sup>Mamang Dai, "Let No Tear\*," River Poems (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 2004) 46-47.

<sup>43</sup>K. Satchidanandan, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) cover.

<sup>44</sup>T. Ao, "Lament For Earth," Songs that Tell (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1988) 45-46.

<sup>45</sup>Chandrakanta Murasingh, "Memoirs of the Woods," trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri Select poems (Agartala: Smt. Shima Pal, 2005) 11.

<sup>46</sup>Anupama Basumatary, "You Know Well," trans. Pradip Acharya, unpublished poem.

<sup>47</sup>Arundhati Subramanian, "Chandrakanta Murasingh," India- Poetry International Web, 1 March 2007, 27 March 2007<[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2716](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2716)>.

- <sup>48</sup>Rana Nayar, "Poetry From The Troubled Zone," Kavya Bharati 15 (2003) 125-131.
- <sup>49</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "A Libran Horoscope," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 43-44.
- <sup>50</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "The Strange Affair of Robin S Ngangom," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 65-71.
- <sup>51</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "Homeland I Left," Words and the Silence, 10-11.
- <sup>52</sup>Thangjam Ibopishak, "The Land of The Half-Humans," trans Robin S Ngangom, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 93-94.
- <sup>53</sup> Arundhati Subramanian, "Thangjam Ibopishak Singh," India- Poetry International Web ,1 March2005, 27 March2007 <[http://indpoetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=6290](http://indpoetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=6290)>.
- <sup>54</sup> Nilmani Phookan, "Poems," trans Hiren Gohain, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 52-56.

- <sup>55</sup> K.S. Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherapunjee: II," Moments (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1992) 24-26.
- <sup>56</sup> Mamang Dai, "The Voice of the Mountain," Indian Literature XLIX. 4 (2005): 87-88.
- <sup>57</sup> Jayanta Mahapatra, foreword, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast by Nongkynrih and Ngangom xii.
- <sup>58</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poem for Joseph," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 74.
- <sup>59</sup> Temsula Ao, "Prayer of a Monolith," Songs from Here and There (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 3-4.
- <sup>60</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "To a Woman from Southeastern Hills," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 18-20.
- <sup>61</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007  
[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.
- <sup>62</sup> Nini Lungalang, "Going Home," Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 228-229.

<sup>63</sup> Chandra Kanta Murasing, "Forest-1987," trans. Bamapada Mukherjee, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 254.

<sup>64</sup> Nilmani Phookan, "Poem," trans Nirendra Nath Thakuria, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 59.

<sup>65</sup> Nilmani Phookan, "The Dancing Earth," trans Hiren Gohain, Indian Literature XLVIII.6 (2004) 54-58.

<sup>66</sup> Rana Nayar, "Poetry From The Troubled Zone," Kavya Bharati 15 (2003) 125-131.

<sup>67</sup> Hazarika, Strangers of the Mist xviii.

<sup>68</sup> Mamang Dai, "North East Poetry," Muse India literary ejournal, Jul-Aug 2006, 27 March 2007 <<http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>.

<sup>69</sup> "Capturing the Essence of Humanity in Poetry," BipuljyotiSaikia's Home Page, 7 Oct 2007, 17 November 2007 <<http://www.geocities.com/bipuljyoti/author/nilmoni.html>>

## Select Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Nongkynrih, Kympham Sing, and Robin S. Ngangom, eds. Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast. Shillong: NEHU Publications May 2003.

Ao, Temsula. Songs from Here and There. Shillong: NEHU Publications, January 2003.

Songs of Many Moods. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1995.

Songs That Try To Say. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1992.

Songs That Tell. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1988.

Dai, Mamang. River Poems. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publications, 2004.

Department of English, Nagaland University, ed. Poetry from Nagaland. New Delhi: Savio Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2005.

Ngangom, Robin S. The Desire of Roots. Cuttack: Chandrabhaga Original Publication, 2006.

Time's Crossroads. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1994.

Words and the Silence. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1988.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. Moments. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1992.

The Sieve. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1992.

Phookan, Nilmani. Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan. Trans. Krishna Dulal Barua. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007.

**Secondary Sources:**

Ahmed, Mehtabuddin, and Prosenjit Chowdhury, eds. The Turbulent North East. New Delhi: Akshar Publications, 1996.

Ao, Tamsula. These Hills Called Home Stories from a War Zone. New Delhi:

Zubaan Penguin Pubs. , 2006 .

Biswas, Prosenjit, and C. Joshua Thomas, eds. India's North-East: Meaning,

Metaphor and Methods, Essays of Concern and

Commitment. New Delhi: Regency Publication, 2003.

Datta, P. S, ed. North East And The Indian State: Paradoxes of a Periphery.

New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1995.

Dai, Mamang .The Legends of Pensam . New Delhi : Penguin Books Pvt.

Ltd, 2006.

Doty, William G. Myth: A Handbook. London: Greenwood Press, 2005.

Elwin, Verrier. Myths of the North-East Frontier of India. Shillong: T. P.

Khaund, 1958.

Hazarika, Sanjoy. Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India's

Northeast. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd,

1995.

Jenkins, Nigel, ed. Khasia in Gwalia , Port Talbot Wales : Alun Books,

1995.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends. New

Delhi:

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007.

Phukon, Girin. Politics of Regionalism In North-East India. Delhi:

Spectrum

Publications, 1996.

Saikia, Jaideep, ed. Frontier in Flames: North East India in Turmoil. New

Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007.

Sen, Geeti, ed. The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall.

New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Sengupta, Sarthak. Tribal Studies in North East India. New Delhi: Mittal

Publications, 2002.

Subha, T B, and Sujit Som, eds. Between Ethnography and fiction: Verrier

Elwin and the Tribal Questions in India. New Delhi:  
Orient

Longman Private Limited, 2005.

**Articles:**

Barua, Sanchet. "North East: does agony of the people matter?" Meghalaya

Guardian 30 Aug. 2007.

Das, Manoj. "Tribals in Indian Narratives." Indian Literature: Sahitya

Akademi's Bi-Monthly Journal XLVIII No. 3 (2004).

Dai, Mamang. "North East Poetry" Muse India literary ejournal. Jul-Aug

2006, 27 March 2007<<http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Singh. "Forebodings." NEWFrontiers 1.1 (1998): 49.

"The Parking Lot." Telegraph 4 Sept. 1994:

"The Colours of Truth." Indian Literature 221<sup>st</sup> ser.XLVIII.3 (2004): 25.

Ngangom, Robin S. "Northeast Literature and The Art of Witness." New Frontiers: A Journal of the North East Writers' Forum 2.1 (2000).

Nayar, Rana. "Poetry From The Troubled Zone". Kavya Bharati 15 (2003): 125-131.

Phookan, Nilmani. "The Dancing Earth". Indian Literature 224<sup>th</sup> ser XLVIII.6 (2004): 54-58.

Sharma, Ramachandra. "On Translating Poetry." Indian Literature: Sahitya Akademi's Bi-Monthly Journal XLIII No. 2 (1999).

"Capturing the Essence of Humanity in Poetry," BipuljyotiSaikia's Home Page , 7 October 2007, 17 November 2007.

Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007

<[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>

**Interviews:**

Ao, Temsula. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2007.

Basumatary, Anupama. Personal interview. 14 July 2007.

Dai, Mamang. E-mail interview. 4 July 2008.

Murasingh, Chandrakanta. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2007.

Ngangom, Robin S: Personal interview. 25 Sept.2007.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2007.

Phookan, Nilmani. Personal interview. 13 July 2007.

Zote, Mona. Telephone interview. 10 Mar. 2007.

**WENU LIBRARY**  
 Acc No. 103901  
 Acc B/...  
 Date 22-4-09  
 Cl. n by  
 Sub.Heading by  
 Ent. n by  
 Transcribed by

**THE “UNEASY COEXISTENCE OF PARADOXICAL  
WORLDS” IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY FROM  
NORTH EAST INDIA**

By  
**Nazina Changme W. Momin**  
Department of English



Submitted  
**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement of the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in English**

of  
**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY**  
Shillong-793 022  
2008

Thesis

**NEHU LIBRARY**  
Acc No. 103901  
Acc By...  
Date 22-4-09  
Class by...  
Sub Heading by...  
Enter by...  
Transcribed by...

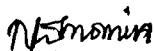
DS  
809.895416  
MOM

**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY**

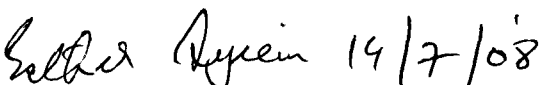
**Shillong**

I, Nazina Changme W. Momin, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.


This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

  
(Nazina Changme W. Momin)

Scholar

  
(Prof. Esther Syiem)

Head of the Department

  
(Prof. Esther Syiem)

Supervisor

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I thank God for giving me the strength and support to complete this dissertation. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Esther Syiem, my supervisor who is the Head of the Department of English for her invaluable guidance and also for taking time out from her busy schedule. She inspires me a lot.

I thank all the faculty members of the Department of English for helping me during my course work and giving me invaluable support. I also thank the office staff – Kong Ritimon, Felissita and Macdonald for extending help whenever I needed.

I am grateful to my sister-in-law for accommodating me in her quarter and also for allowing me the use of her computer. I thank those who have helped me with the computer work – Robert, Hannah, Betsie, my nieces Chibame, Dokatchi, Balmuri, Gnora and nephew Silchang.

I take this opportunity to thank the Education Department, Meghalaya for granting me leave from college in order to do my M.Phil. I thank the Principal, Tura Government College, my colleagues and students for bearing with me in my absence. I also thank the NEHU Library and Guwahati University Library for providing me materials whenever I needed them.

I wish to thank Prof. Ao, Dr. Nongkynrih, Mr. Ngangom, Mr. Nirendra Nath Thakuria and Mr. Pradip Acharya for supplying me with invaluable materials.

My love and gratitude goes to my family especially my sisters for their quiet support and encouragement. I owe my debt to my parents who are no more. They had shown me the way to travel life's journey and laid the foundation of my education. I thank my nieces Amanda and Brenda for their support through prayers.

I am grateful to my friends – Risahun, Rosa, Runumi, Chume, Sanme, Verlia, Dimchi and Evangeline who have always helped me. My gratitude also goes to Mintu for his constant support and encouragement.

Finally, I thank all the poets – Mamang Dai, Nilmani Phookan, Anupama Basumatary, Thangjam Ibopishak, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Robin S Ngangom, Mona Zote, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang and Chandrakanta Murasingh for being so cooperative and willing to give me all the information that I needed.

*N. Momin*  
(NAZINA CHANGME W. MOMIN)

## **CONTENTS**

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1-16</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: IMAGES OF VIOLENCE</b>	<b>17-48</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE REALITIES OF NATURE AND MYTH</b>	<b>49-79</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: CONFRONTING THE PARADOX</b>	<b>80-110</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>111-120</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>121-128</b>

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

“ The image of the North East region of the country is that it is a mosaic of tribal culture. That it is very remote. That it is full of trees and mountains and that it is a troubled place with lots of insurgency and army, and counter insurgency operations... Many people also associate the region with a beautiful landscape, a naturalist’s paradise, a land of big rivers and colourful festivals in worship of benevolent gods and goddesses.”<sup>1</sup> it showcases a rich variety of tribal culture and natural beauty that has drawn a good deal of attention. Contradictorily, however, the region is also known for its political instability that stems from a variety of causes. The poets of the region have been continually examining the nature of these causes and attempting to give voice to their concern for the growing deterioration that seems to be endemic to the region.

Originally the North East region was comprised of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, erstwhile known as the seven sister states before another state, Sikkim was added to it. “Prior to the advent of the British different areas of this region were ruled by different kings and traditional local chiefs...” and

it was during the British rule that they were brought under an administrative unit. In the sixties and seventies, different states and union territories “such as Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh (1972), Mizoram(1972)”<sup>2</sup> were carved out of the state of Assam.

“Here men and women, with common origins but different nationalities, share a racial historic, anthropological and linguistic kinship with each other...”<sup>3</sup> that seem to be more vital than their links with the rest of India. Many of the communities of this region have not been able to negotiate themselves into the national mainstream. Some have been demanding separate states on the basis of their ethnic and linguistic identities resulting in violent confrontations. Most of the time, the region is in the news for its violence, insurgency, bandhs and protest rallies.

“ The ingredients of ethnic nationalism in the region may be traced back to the pre-independence period.”<sup>4</sup> It may be observed that the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) which first “demanded autonomy within Assam” and later “an interim Government for the Nagas “showed beginnings of the signs of discontentment and unease that was later to spread to other regions. Like the Nagas, “Mizos too expressed centrifugal urges and demanded a sovereign”<sup>5</sup> state for themselves. The

Khasi-Jaintia Political Association “demanded a federation of the Khasi areas” with adequate cultural and political autonomy within Assam. Likewise, the Garo National Council (GNC) “put forward the claims for an autonomous Garo region”. Similarly, the Karbi Durbar “emphasized on the protection of local customs, consideration of Karbi areas into a single administrative unit”<sup>6</sup> and for an extension of the franchise. At the advent of independence, the Ahoms and the plains tribals expressed separatist urges in Assam. They formed a common platform known as the ‘All Assam Tribes and Races Federation’ to secure their “political, economic and cultural welfare by promoting co- operation and solidarity among them.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the strong sub-regional and regional sentiments or separatist urges which surfaced in the region after Independence has its roots in a past that has never been acquitted. At present, almost all the states have been witnessing ethno-political movements and conflicts in the region. “The Nagas have a long history of bloodshed and insurgency in post independent years.”<sup>8</sup> They were the first to resort to violence in the region. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya has portrayed these uneasy political and social conditions of Nagaland just after Independence in his novel, ‘*Love in the Time of Insurgency.*’ They declared Nagaland an independent state on

August 14, 1947 and since then militant groups like NNC and NSCN have been fighting against the Indian Government. The fight is not only against the Indian army, but there are also factional clashes that turn the state into a bloody battleground. Presently, the NSCN has agreed to a ceasefire and so destruction of property and killing have gone down but fratricidal killings between its factions, extortion and tax collection still continue.

“ The story of Manipuri insurrection – which began in the 1950s and the origins of which can be traced back to an extent in the manner in which the state was merged with India - continues within an end in sight. At present, there are over twenty-seven armed groups which operate in the state .”<sup>9</sup> It has become one of the most violent states in the region. There are also wars among the various communities and tribes in the state like the Kuki-Naga, Kuki-Tamil, Kuki-Paite, Meitei-Pangal clashes.

Being a multi ethnic state, Assam witnessed several ethnic conflicts after Independence. On April 17, 1979, a militant group the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was formed. It demanded a sovereign and socialist Assam. “Pride in combination with neglect and deprivation, facilitated the birth of militancy in Assam...unemployment, geographical apartness and the continuing illegal migration from Bangladesh are the

primary factors that set militancy in motion in the state. Large-scale corruption, bad governance and economic decline further aggravated the problem”.<sup>10</sup> After the formation of the ULFA, other militant groups like the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the Karbi National Volunteers and the Dima Halom Daogah came into being. Such groups carried out large-scale extortion, kidnapping and other forms of violence in the state. The BLT has been assimilated into the mainstream in 2004 and some militant groups have entered into ceasefire with the Central Government but, violence still continues in Assam. Assam thus, has witnessed constant turmoil since the eighties.

Tripura, the smallest state in the region has also witnessed a conflict between the tribals and the Bengalis. Being outnumbered by the Bengalis, tribal people feel alienated from their traditional homeland and they feel the need for political autonomy and decision-making power in the state. “The 1999-2003 phase marked intense tribal military in Tripura... Violence, intimidation and mass abductions had become the order of the day.”<sup>11</sup> However, it has weakened since 2004 as a result of splits among militant groups.

In Meghalaya, “the first communal clash aimed at ethnic cleansing”<sup>12</sup> broke out in 1979. Even though the state is not so volatile compared to other states of the region, it is not free from militancy. There are a number of militant groups in the state like the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC) and the Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF). The ANVC has currently called for a ceasefire but “extortion and violence have not abated in the Garohills...”<sup>13</sup> Even the present peaceful state of Mizoram had also experienced a lot of hard days for nearly two decades due to insurgency. “In 1966, the situation in Mizoram was very serious, there was armed conflict, killings and lawlessness as unleashed by the MNF. The area was declared as disturbed and handed over to the Army.”<sup>14</sup> It became a full-fledged state on February 20, 1987 and since then there is no problem of insurgency in the state. To date, Sikkim has not witnessed any violence of this kind.

The erstwhile peaceful state of Arunachal Pradesh is also presently gripped by the fear of violence with the NSCN making its presence felt in districts like Tirap and Changlang. These two districts have “become the battleground for Naga militants where villagers are brainwashed and terrorized. Even elected representatives hesitate to return to their

constituencies. All residence pay 'tax' to either faction of NSCN and the promise of economic revival has died since there is no agency capable of delivering without fear of the militants."<sup>15</sup>

The impact of militancy has been enormous and insecurity still pervades in most of the states of North East India. "The victims of militancy are often innocent civilians. Children are orphaned, women are widowed and citizens are deprived of political and economic rights."<sup>16</sup> An atmosphere of threat and fear hangs in the region. People from other parts of the country have little knowledge about the region and they often tend to club the eight states together in hazy understanding of ground realities. Most of the time, the National media fails to cover blockades or fratricidal killings that often take place in the region, showing thereby the indifference of mainland India and the "ramifications of which are dire."<sup>17</sup> Even though, the region aspires for a place in the greater Indian dream, this is often denied by a complexity of reasons and, with "each denial, hope is continually reduced to disappointment, frustration and pain degenerating on a number of occasions into revolt."<sup>18</sup> In a region plagued by violence, people crave for peace. Recently in Nagaland, thousands of people came

out into the streets to demand an end to fratricidal killings among the Naga rebel groups.

“Today, the most common character of the region lies, amongst others, in its strategic vulnerability and in economic backwardness. Whereas the total geographical area of the region is 2,55,037 square kilometers, it has a 4,200 kilometre-long international boundary with Bhutan, China, Burma and Bangladesh and it is connected with the rest of the country by the narrow ‘Siliguri neck’ of less than 20 kilometres.”<sup>19</sup>

The ethno-linguistic complexities and the accompanying violence has submerged North East India in a cauldron of unresolved conflicts. The state capitals and important towns “have the crackle of gunfire and fierce cries which disturb the night... bullets sprayed from guns at point-blank range, passing through one or two of several bodies, the slash of steel on soft flesh, the dull thuds of blows, the crack of broken bones - all that picturesquely is the northeast.”<sup>20</sup> A major issue in the region is the search for identity, a quest for self-assertion which has a “highly emotional content including a feeling of age long deprivation.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand North East India “hold a special, magical attraction with its mist-clad hills, lush green forests and smooth valleys, the

bewildering range of its languages and the rich, colourful mix of its people ranging from former head-hunters to city slickers.”<sup>22</sup> It is the home of many tribes and communities where “there are upwards of 130 major tribal groups in North Eastern India, including the few inhabiting the plain areas.”<sup>23</sup> Being inhabited by diverse tribes and communities that have different cultures and traditions, the North East region of India is an area teaming with a variety of people following their own cultural patterns. “Located as it is on the frontiers of several civilizations – Hindu, Chinese, Islamic and Buddhist northeast India has been a meeting point of various cultures.”<sup>24</sup> In it there exists a variety of cultures where one finds “the tribal and the non-tribal, the acculturated and the assimilated, the highly ‘refined’ and the patently ‘primitive’ all coexisting in a remarkable state of juxtaposition.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the common image of North East India is of a wide variety of folk culture, dresses and lifestyles.

It is against this backdrop that the contemporary poetry of North East India has been examined. Emerging from different states of this region, the poetry of North East India is seen to be distinctive from the rest of the country in its concern with issues that characterize the paradoxical make up

of their world. The dissertation has also attempted to examine the elements that set poetry from this region apart from other regions of the country.

In the words of the editors of the 'Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the North East', "the writer from the Northeast 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 must perforce master the art of witness."<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, being witness to violence, bloodshed, ethnic conflict and corruption, poets from this region write about it as concerned individuals who are anxious about the future of their land. On the other, rooting themselves in their land, tradition, culture, ancestral values and in their past, they must use these themes to understand themselves. "The roots of their beloved land; the roots of their people's culture; the roots of their time; and most of all the roots of their past that is 'lost' to them, have sunken deep into their poetry. And this is the chief reason why their poetry is found to be bonding even though it may come from 'very different regions'..."<sup>27</sup> Despite their linguistic, cultural, social and religious diversity, the poets from this region share similar values and concerns that reveal a great degree of unity in diversity.

Their poetry “offers a view of the hills, river, myths, vibrant traditions, and also the violence which has the region in its grip. The themes are varied and include the geography, milieu, politics, and the classic dilemmas of a Third World Country.”<sup>28</sup> Having experienced political unrest and violent confrontations, their poetry mirrors the pains and fears of society. The misery and hardship of the common people caught between insurgents and security forces are apparent in their poetry. Murasingh speaks about the politician who “...has neither inside, nor outside,/ No air, no fertile soil on a sandbank.”<sup>29</sup> These poets react against rampant corruption too with anger and disgust in their poetry.

This dissertation is a study of ten poets from North East India - Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh; Nilmani Phookan and Anupama Basumatary from Assam; Thangjam Ibopishak from Manipur; Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Robin S Ngangom from Meghalaya; Mona Zote from Mizoram; Temsula Ao and Nini Lungalang from Nagaland and Chandrakanta Murasingh from Tripura.

No study has been made of the poetry of Sikkim because this researcher was unable to obtain enough written material on any of its poets. The poetry from North East India forms a cross-section of the kind of

poetry being written throughout the region. Since, almost no critical material on them is available, much of the work has been based upon an attempt to understand the poets, as being representative of and speaking for a particular region which has come as a result of the close reading done of the poems and the interviews conducted with them. This dissertation attempts to arrive at a comprehensive view of the kind of poetry that simultaneously encompasses nature, myth and violence within its purview, holding together paradoxical realities that have formed the social and political texture of life in the region. Hence, transcendence as an aesthetic or a philosophical objective will not be a possible part of this study.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Mamang Dai, "North East Poetry" Muse India the literary ejournal Jul-Aug 2006, 27 March 2007 <<http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>.

<sup>2</sup>Girin Phukon, "Inter-State Conflicts In Northeast India," Politics of Regionalism In North-East (Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1996) 14.

<sup>3</sup>Sanjoy Hazarika, Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India's Northeast (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 1995) xvi.

<sup>4</sup>Phukon, "Ethnic Nationalism In Northeast India: Overview of its Legacy," Politics of Regionalism In North-East (Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1996)

1.

<sup>5</sup>Phukon, "Ethnic Nationalism In Northeast India: Overview of its Legacy," Politics of Regionalism In North-East (Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1996)

2.

<sup>6</sup>Phukon, "Ethnic Nationalism In Northeast India: Overview of its Legacy," Politics of Regionalism In North-East (Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1996)

3.

<sup>7</sup>Phukon, "Ethnic Nationalism In Northeast India: Overview of its Legacy," Politics of Regionalism In North-East (Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1996)

9.

<sup>8</sup>Chandra Jyoti Sonowal, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in North East India," Tribal Studies in North East India, ed. Sarthak Sengupta (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002) 49.

<sup>9</sup>Binalakshmi Nepram-Mentschel, "Red Chebons and Crimson Wars," Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 47.

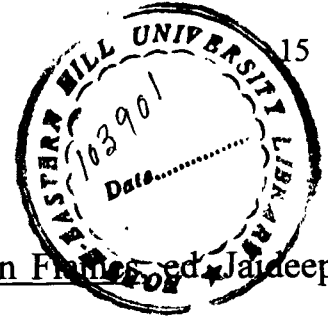
<sup>10</sup>Dilip Gogoi, "Resurrection of a Sunset Dream," Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 116.

<sup>11</sup>Subir Bhawmik, "Taming the Twipra Tempest," Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 109.

<sup>12</sup>Patricia Mary Mukhim, "Turbulence in the Abode of Clouds," Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 5.

<sup>13</sup>Patricia Mary Mukhim, "Turbulence in the Abode of Clouds," Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 10.

<sup>14</sup> "Understanding the Ethnic Unrest in Indian Peripheries," ed. P. S. Dutta North-East And The Indian State: Paradoxes of a Periphery (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, 1995) 177-178.



- <sup>15</sup>Mamang Dai, “Living the Untold Myth,” Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 51.
- <sup>16</sup>Dilip Gogoi, “Resurrection of a Sunset Dream,” Frontier in Flames, ed. Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007) 125.
- <sup>17</sup>Jaideep Saikia, prolegomena, Frontier in Flames by Saikia xvi.
- <sup>18</sup>Jaideep Saikia, prolegomena, Frontier in Flames by Saikia xiv.
- <sup>19</sup> J.B. Bhattacharjee, “North-East Indian Perspectives in History,” Datta, ed., North-East 9-10.
- <sup>20</sup>Sanchet Barua, “North East: does agony of the people matter?” Meghalaya Guardian 30 Aug.2007.
- <sup>21</sup> Soumen Sen, “Identity Expressions in Ritual and Myth,” Tribal Studies in North East India, ed. Sarthak Sengupta (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002) 33.
- <sup>22</sup> Hazarika, Strangers of the Mist xv.
- <sup>23</sup> Sarthak Sengupta, Preface, Tribal Studies by Sengupta IX .
- <sup>24</sup>Tiplut Nongbri, “Ethnicity and Political Activism in North East: Tribal Identity and State Policy,” Datta, ed., North-East53.
- <sup>25</sup>Mehtabuddin Ahmed, Prosenjit Chowdhury, eds, The Turbulent North East (New Delhi: Akshar Publications, 1996) 6.

<sup>26</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom, eds, editors note, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast by Nongkynrih Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) ix.

<sup>27</sup> Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "The Poet as Chronicler: An Overview of Contemporary Poetry in North East India," India-Poetry International Web, 1March2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw/cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2695)  
[cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2695](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw/cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2695)>.

<sup>28</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom eds., Anthology editors note, x.

<sup>29</sup>Chandrakanta Murasingh, "Of A Minister," trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems (Agartala: Smt. Shima Pal, 2005) 51.

## **Chapter 2: Images of Violence**

Unrest and violence has engulfed most of the states of North East India essentially because of a deep sense of deprivation that was a consequence of the achievement of an Independence that divided many communities of the region. The problem of insurgency has been endemic to the region after Independence. “Most states have been besieged by three to five decades of armed conflict; ranging from demands for self-determination and greater autonomy to assertion of complete succession from India”.<sup>1</sup>

Unrest engulfed Assam as a “result of the anti-foreigner movement which lasted for six years, and saw much violence unleashed on vulnerable minority populations by numerous insurgent groups that became active in the region on this issue”.<sup>2</sup> The expansionist and exploitative nature of the Center, “catalysed the formation of Assam’s most influential militant group the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in the year 1979. So also the cases of other militant groups like Bodoland Security Force, Bodo Liberation Tigers, etc.”<sup>3</sup> In Manipur, the secessionist activities started in 1948 with Hyam Irabot, a Maoist communist who wanted “to liberate Manipur from feudalism and semi-colonialism of Manipur kings and Indian

State”.<sup>4</sup> Later, there emerged several other secessionist groups in the state like the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP). In Assam and Manipur, “strong ethnic rivalries have played a major part in the violence and insecurity that has engulfed the region”. In Nagaland and the Naga-dominated areas of Manipur, the conflict has been caused by “their refusal to acknowledge the authority of the Indian state;”<sup>5</sup> while in Mizoram it was the outcome of the neglect and apathy of the Central Government during the devastating famine of 1959. “The Mizos cried out for help as starvation stalked the land. As food grains came too little and too late, an angry and frustrated population turned to violence, demanding sovereignty in almost two decades of armed struggle.”<sup>6</sup> In Tripura, the insurgency has been mainly caused by the “ conflict between Bengalis and Tribals. The tribal people have been out-numbered by the Bengali infiltration from Bangladesh as well as West Bengal”.<sup>7</sup> Since 1979, Meghalaya “has faced regular bouts of communal upheavals, leading to loss of innocent lives”.<sup>8</sup> Then, in the nineties insurgent groups came into existence with their own ideologies, thus ushering in a period of violence. It is over sixty years now that North East India has witnessed such violence in

the region. As counter-insurgency, the Central Government has adopted some measures like the imposition of oppressive laws like the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act, 1958 (TADA), National Security Act, 1980 (NSA), Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (UAP), Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 which have aggravated the situation. The region has remained volatile till now. In the words of Sanchet Barua, this region is “threatening to destabilize the country perhaps more fundamentally than Kashmir.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in North East India, where violence, bloodshed, conflict and corruption have spilled over into everyday life, poets from the region show their concern by speaking about them in their poetry. Their poetry is often referred to as *Poetry in the Troubled Zone*<sup>10</sup> or *Poetry in a Time of Terror*<sup>11</sup>, an apt description that says much of the role of poetry in North East India.

Poets from this region are often engrossed in the writing of the poetry “ of survival with guns pressed to both the temples: the gun of revolution and the gun of the state.”<sup>12</sup> With a sense of terrible loss, poets speak of their land and people in a language that is filled with images of guns and bullets, anger and frustration, politics and corruption, bloodshed and destruction, thus:

... 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.<sup>13</sup>

They cannot close their eyes and remain oblivious to the brutalization of life when “heart rending events are happening” around them. One hears of “chilling accounts of what man has done to man.”<sup>14</sup> Realizing that their land is in a state of anarchy, these poets attempt to shake people from their slumber. They speak of the horrifying incidents happening in their region where their poetry reflects the agonies and fears of society:

Fear like a militant  
 had silenced every sound<sup>15</sup>

One envisions the fear that creeps into society as insurgency makes its way into the town itself and silences everyone. In the poem, Nongkynrih notes that as peace is fast disappearing, people begin to live in fear.

Always in the news for the wrong reasons, newspaper headlines scream about the violence and bloodshed that predominate the region. Ngangom cites the example of his native land being in a constant state of

anarchy. Ethnic clashes are common in Manipur like “the bloody feud and ethnic cleansing campaigns between the Nagas and Kukis in the early 1990s, the blitzkrieg May 3, 1993 riots between the Hindu and the Muslims Meiteis in the valley, and bloodletting between kindred tribes of Kukis and Paites in the late 1990s...”<sup>16</sup> In his poem ‘Native Land’, Ngangom recalls one such ethnic clash between the Kukis and the Nagas called the “Joupi Massacre”, where the people were locked inside a church with their hands tied up:

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<sup>17</sup>

Further, the poet recounts how victors and victims grow in number. His heart becomes frozen till he loses his ‘tenuous humanity’. Helplessly he avoids thinking about ‘abandoned children inside blazing huts/still waiting for their parents’. He does not care whether the women “wore wildflowers in their hair/while they waited for their men”. He burns his truth with them and continues to live as if nothing happens.

In another poem, he speaks of his friend Joseph who was a victim of ethnic cleansing and was driven out of his home:

how ethnic cleansers had palmed  
 your newly-built home off on a people  
 well on their trail back to pure blood,

...<sup>18</sup>

The fact that Joseph is a biblical character has its own significance. The poet identifies himself with Joseph, for he has lived away from his homeland. He too experiences a similar sense of exile. For him, homelessness is a real threat where people are forcibly ousted from their homelands because of which they have to leave their land and love ones. Identity becomes an issue then as people clamour for their own homelands. They redraw maps, redefine territories and assert their identity through violence. The results are manifested in the ensuing violence which render many people homeless.

Even though, Meghalaya has been comparatively more peaceful than the other states surrounding it, there have been communal upheavals since 1979. With the formation of insurgent groups in the nineties, the torturing, killing, kidnapping extortion and ambushing of people have become a

regular affair. Nongkynrih's poetry like Ngangom's reflects this kind of violence that fills up the news items of newspapers:

*A nokma* is gunned down  
 an SP is shot at  
 a tradesman is kidnapped  
 some militants are nabbed<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Meghalaya too is not far behind in the kind of violence that now seems to mark it. With militant groups like ANVC active in Garo Hills before their official ceasefire, some parts of the state have been rocked by violence, as even today, the state is still being held ransom by other terrorist groups like the HNLC, ANLF and LAEF.

Unrest and violence engulfed Assam during the eighties following the movement against illegal migrants. The movement started in 1979, in a democratic way to protest against the illegal migrants. This "non-violent and unprecedented mass movement was replied with bullets of Indian security forces, countless women were raped, young generations were murdered..."<sup>20</sup> As mentioned earlier, this movement lasted for six years and much violence was witnessed during this period. In Nilmani Phookan's

poem, 'Don't Ask Me How I Am', he depicts the violence that occurred during this period by using vivid images of bloodshed:

Down the Kolong comes floating

A headless girl.<sup>21</sup>

The image of death comes through in the violence of the beheaded body of a girl seen to be drifting through the river. Many people are killed and the bodies drifting through the river must have been a common sight. In an interview with him, he says that he is "against violence because it is against life, it creates enmity between brothers and is against equality and fraternity". Further, he says that "any form of violence since biblical times and Mahabharata is fratricidal". Lastly, he says that "violence begets violence".<sup>22</sup> thus:

For where am I to go

I've forgotten from where I came

The day grasps for breath vomiting blood

For the bones and skulls

Waddle along the afternoon road

With guffaws of dry laughter.<sup>23</sup>

Using these images of blood and skeletons, the poet evokes the eerie atmosphere that accompanies the ruthless violence. This kind of violence leaves an individual like the poet in a state of confusion. The poet brings out the intensity of the violence that leaves people in traumatised and unable to react normally.

Chandrakanta Murasingh, also speaks about people who have taken up guns and are creating havoc in his motherland. “In Tripura the insurgency has erupted over land tenancy rights, because the land holdings of indigenous tribes have been reduced to less than 30 per cent of the total land. The fear of being swamped by immigrant Bengali settlers who have come across the border is a very real one. The splintering and factionalism in the many insurgent groups that ‘rule’ Tripura has led to much violence in the state, making it a very difficult task even to access the villages and get data on the kinds of violence and the intensity of violence being unleashed against vulnerable populations”.<sup>24</sup> Fear and insecurity grips the people in the state:

You have taken up the gun

To kindle a fire

But our *jhum* is not aglow

The flashes of gun are scorching our eye.<sup>25</sup>

The poet feels that taking up guns will not bring any solution to the crisis as this is only an expression of anger which results in more suffering.

Likewise, Ngangom also talks about the misguided 'youths who died in confusion' and the land filled with 'acrid smoke of gelignite and pyres' Love is like a forgotten word. There can only be hatred and suspicion of others. So he mourns for his burning land, thus:

Maybe the land is tired  
of being suckled on blood,  
maybe there is no peace  
between the farmer and his field  
maybe all men are tired of being men  
maybe we have acknowledged death.<sup>26</sup>

There is no peace anywhere and people are tired of living in such an environment. The present situation of North East India is such that, anyone "with even an iota of conviction is in immediate danger if he speaks up; a gun points at you if you don't observe a prescribed code of behaviour."<sup>27</sup> The rebels or so called patriots prescribe a "full quota of dos and don'ts"<sup>28</sup>

for the people. This is often backed by violence. Thangjam Ibopishak, portrays this clearly in his poem:

Now in these land  
 One cannot speak aloud  
 One cannot think openly.<sup>29</sup>

Being a witness to gruesome incidents, the poet cannot sleep peacefully. Using ‘nightmare’ as metaphor, he depicts the trouble torn state of Manipur where people live in perpetual fear and are insecure about their own lives. In a land filled with chaos and violence, one can only think of protecting oneself and one’s family from harm. Thus, he remains helpless. He can only vent his feelings through poetry.

“ The crisis of identity is the cornerstone of various social, political and insurgent movements”<sup>30</sup> in the region. Aware of their distinct cultural and ethnic identities, the militants from different parts of the region are demanding for autonomy and independence. Nongkynrih depicts these conflicts and ideologies, thus:

somewhere in a forgotten little corner of the world  
 a hill tribe of one million, fearful of its extinction,  
 waged an arms insurrection against a nation.<sup>31</sup>

Proud of their own language, dialect, culture, custom, tradition and historical background, they are not willing to merge completely with mainstream India. They want to maintain their distinct identity and so have been demanding and fighting for separate states on the basis of the respective ethnic and linguistic identities. In the process, many lives have been lost and their goal seems to be a distant dream.

Poets like Ngangom and Phookan speak about the people who join rebel groups and sacrifice their lives for a cause they strongly believe. In doing so, they voluntarily surrender themselves to a life of violence. Thus, Ngangom says:

while you fight for a selfless cause  
and make a fugitive of your life  
you also burn the flower of youth.<sup>32</sup>

This is echoed in one of Phookan's poems, where he talks about a fugitive rebel who turns up at the dead of night:

One midnight the man popped up fleeing stark naked.<sup>33</sup>

These are the militants who fight against the government for a cause they believe in and are always on the run for their lives. Sometimes they knock on people's doors asking for food and shelter in the middle of the night.

Bandhs, curfews and protest rallies disrupt normal life in the region. They serve as a mark of protest against the Indian Government. During national celebrations like Republic Day and Independence Day, militant organizations hold such protests to establish their own sense of themselves. This has been depicted by Nongkynrih:

when for the fourth time  
 the region's liberators  
 clamped a bandh on Republic Day  
 there was nothing else to do  
 but watch the grey winter sky  
 breeding ill will<sup>34</sup>

These bandhs create fear psychosis as a result of which most people remain at home. Phookan speaks of such bandhs in his poem:

All day and night  
 I've been hearing just a single sound  
 The smell of burned tyres<sup>35</sup>

During these bandhs, the burning of vehicles and tyres on roads are a common occurrence. Assam, being the centre of many militant groups like the ULFA is one of the most disturbed states in the whole of India.

Signs of civilized society are fast disappearing from the region turning it into an “era of the assassin”. Bloody encounters between the armed forces and the terrorist groups are thus the result of such protests. Ngangom portrays this in his poem:

“Young boys and soldiers are butchering each  
other by the dozen, in the hills,...”<sup>36</sup>

It is the common man in the street, however, who suffers the most in this kind of violence and conflict. Sometimes, these innocent people are caught in the crossfire between the terrorists and the armed forces:

“Someone has died in extremist shooting,  
Somebody’s son has died in police firing.”<sup>37</sup>

Tortured by both factions, fake encounters are also a common occurrence:

“Marauders slain in fake encounter with Porker’s goondas”  
“Slain marauder is innocent taxi driver”<sup>38</sup>

Sometimes when innocent people are killed in these fake encounters, there is a hue and cry from the public:

People were killed in a lawless firing  
and the streets today observed  
hour long silence for the departed<sup>39</sup>

but there is clear evidence that nothing much can be done about it. Both armed forces and terrorist are in constant war with each other and most times innocent people are caught in the crossfire.

Chandrakanta Murasingh reveals to his readers that “killers come under police uniform.” Fear of being tortured by them, people have to remain absconding “with children, wife and the family at bay.” They flee to jungles where they live eating wild potatoes enduring “the scorching sun in the day/Black out creeps for sleeping at night.”<sup>40</sup> Life for villagers in militant infested areas in the region is pitiable. Poor villagers are forced to give shelter and food to the militants and later are tortured by the armed forces for doing that. So, they have to run for their lives and spend their days in jungles.

The misery of the innocent people who suffer at the hands of the uniformed personnel is reflected in their poems. They are often killed at the behest of those in power:

A band of their rebels and stray students

Were immediately shot to shreds.<sup>41</sup>

And people live in fear all the time:

I hear freedom come there, only

if escorted by armed men.<sup>42</sup>

In his poem 'Translation' Chandrakanta Murasingh depicts the total disruption of normal life. In the militant infested areas, schools are often shut down and turned into military camps and hospitals too, remain paralysed without doctors and patients:

All the doors are shut for last seven years,

The doors of schools, of hospitals.<sup>43</sup>

In a state like Manipur where the Armed Forces Special Powers Act has been imposed, atrocities take inhuman dimensions:

of the twelve mothers who stripped themselves

and asked soldiers to rape them.<sup>44</sup>

Atrocities are often committed by the armed forces where women are raped and molested. Here in these lines, Ngangom mentions the protest against the alleged rape and murder of a woman called Manorama. He goes on to speak about the kidnapping and murder of an eight year old girl by criminals for ransom. Thus, the poet agonises his sick homeland.

Women poets too show their concern by refusing to be mute spectators. "Each family in Nagaland has a story to tell: of personal loss, of

bereavement; of physical and emotional trauma.”<sup>45</sup> Nini Lungalang depicts the loss of innocent life as a result of violence:

I saw a young man gunned down  
 As I shopped in the market place  
 Two thick thuds and then he fell,  
 And thrashed a bit, on his face<sup>46</sup>

Here, she talks about a lost homeland where people live in fear, guilt and pain. They remain silent spectators even when their loved ones are killed. The poet mentions the death of her own brother slain in a similar way. Everyone seems to be travelling on the road to destruction. She too feels that she has been stained by scarlet, the colour of death in her poem. In the same way, Mona Zote speaks about a present marked by violence. People not willing to support such violence will have to suffer:

A boy & his gun: that’s an image will do  
 to sum up our times<sup>47</sup>

The poet even feels that she had spent her youth in vain “self enforced isolation” because tradition had obstructed her view of the present. Further she expresses her views against what she considers a faulty independence “Swaraj: acid anthem in our veins”.

Temsula Ao too talks about a region infested with militants who bring death and desolation:

The new denizens dressed like trees

Now infest the terrain<sup>48</sup>

It is as if the new terror has entered the region which wastes the land and preys on both beast and man.

“An outstanding role has been played by the Naga Mothers’ Association which came into existence in 1984. They propagated the message of “shed no more blood” in 1994 and initiated dialogues with the ‘underground’ and the state government to stop violence and bloodshed, and spoke against killing by armed personnel as well as militants”.<sup>49</sup> Their efforts, however have been all in vain:

Yet see-

Another

\*Teardrop of blood

Slips from the open eye<sup>50</sup>

As a mother, Nini Lungalang experiences the tragedy of seeing so many young people being killed. Even though, the dead cannot speak or quarrel, memories of them still disturb the sleep of mothers who survive them.

Mona Zote warns people of the disaster that will be brought about by this kind of terror:

And day now the bomb will fall

On those of us, unaware...<sup>51</sup>

She speaks about a time when there will be hidden terror everywhere. Even a poet like Mamang Dai speaks about the violence that has recently entered into her state:

In the hidden exchange of news we hear  
that weapons are multiplying in the forest.

The jungle is a big eater,  
hiding terror in the carnivorous green.<sup>52</sup>

where the jungles have been used by militants and her homeland turned into a conflict zone.

Thus, for the people of North East India, peace is still a far cry. Ngangom says that even in the peace process, there is no honesty involved. He does not believe in peace at the cost of anything. Peace does not ensure justice:

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<sup>53</sup>

Even though, these militant groups may proclaim a ceasefire, the states still remain disturbed. Even if they surrender, there is no justification for those who have suffered much in their hands.

Compared to other regions of the country, North East India is behind in many areas of development. The reasons cited for this are, that the “... Central government fails to provide adequate funds for development. There is massive corruption on one state or the other... that the Central Government gives money to make the people corrupt.”<sup>54</sup> The poets’ reaction to the rampant corruption is reflected in poetry that is filled with anger and disgust:

Here everything is bought and sold  
 to the highest bidder<sup>55</sup>

Grief-stricken at the present condition of the land, comparisons with its glorious past inevitably arises, thus:

Once prime land, beneficent and fabled  
 And now playground of black-marketeers  
 ...

As you feed money, sell honour, peddle justice.<sup>56</sup>

Money seems to rule the land now and everything including honour is “peddled” cheaply. Injustice prevails everywhere. The corrupt government official who wields influence and power in the region is a powerful symbol in his poetry:

A cashier counts old one rupee notes

...

Then after the final count, washing his hands clean with dettol.

He eats up the notes, one by one.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the region has become like a “capital of thieves, pimps, cutthroats.”<sup>58</sup>

The rise of a social hierarchy in the region “mainly through the creation of a first generation nouveau riche-especially typified by families of senior bureaucrats, ministers and government contractors/suppliers et al...”<sup>58</sup> has been noted by many poets. There is a growing materialism that has been ironically pointed out:

We respect with avarice only the richest new

and a pot belly and a manipulating wife

are our status symbols.<sup>59</sup>

Only those people with wealth and money seem to get respect from others.

Using irony and satire, they talk about the “peril of lawmen turning terrorists”<sup>60</sup>, and politicians creating instability in the region, changing parties and governments for their own interests:

for here they change parties and  
governments  
like Hindi film stars changing dresses  
in a song<sup>61</sup>

where they merely indulge in meaningless talk:

The minister has neither inside, nor outside,  
No air, no fertile soil on a sandbank.  
There are only words,...<sup>62</sup>

evoking images of politicians with empty promises and no action.

North East India as Sanchet Barua mentions “is one of the most neglected regions of the country.”<sup>63</sup> Talking about Prime Minister Gujral’s visit during his tenure Nongkynrih says, “ ...he left like defused bomb” and “was sighted by a few/disgruntled leaders,” only. Using a fitting simile, he describes his visit as “snapping of fingers.”<sup>64</sup> Even though government officials and higher ups from the Central Government do come here with

the supposed object of bringing peace and progress, they lack in sincerity and therefore, cannot win over the people of the region.

In ‘ The Land of Half-Humans’, Thangjam Ibopishak draws a “bleak portrait of an irredeemably damaged society that spawns a race tragically unable to reconcile mind and body.”<sup>65</sup> Thus:

...And the earnings of  
the body’s sweat of six months, the six month-old head eats up  
with a vengeance.<sup>66</sup>

Riven by forces that work under “slogans that have been twisted,” people have “witnessed growing ethnic aggressiveness, secessionist ventures, cultural and religious bigotry...” Images of violence are used to evoke the terror of the land “threatening moral and social dangers.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, these poets reveal through their images, the reality of life for people of the region. Through their poetry, we begin to understand the troubled torn region of the country, the fears, sufferings, miseries and insecurities of the people. Using the evocative colours of red and black, Nongkynrih portrays the region, thus:

I close my eyes  
turn towards the sun

The colour I see is disgorging blood.<sup>68</sup>

Likewise, Nilmani Phookan depicts the uncertainty that holds everyone ransom:

Who can tell of morrow's sun

Rising in red or in black<sup>69</sup>

Thus, the future is bleak but each poet shoulders his/her responsibility of awakening his/her own people. They take upon themselves the task of making people aware of what is happening around them. Their poetry is both a wake-up call and an indictment against the society that tolerates the violence and corruption, that they are witness to.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Preeti Gill, “Women in the Time of Conflict,” The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall, ed. Geeti Sen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 214.

<sup>2</sup>Gill 214.

<sup>3</sup>Chandra Jyoti Sonowal, “Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in North East India,” Tribal Studies in North East India, ed. Sarthak Sengupta (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002) 58.

<sup>4</sup>Sonowal 50.

<sup>5</sup>Gill 214.

<sup>6</sup>A H Scott Lyngdoh, “Bridging the gap with North-East,” Shillong Times 30 July 2007.

<sup>7</sup>Sonowal 49.

<sup>8</sup>Patricia Mukhim, “Where is this North-east?” The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall, ed. Geeti Sen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 182.

<sup>9</sup>Sanchet Barua, “N-E can destabilise India more than Kashmir,” Shillong Times 2 July 2007.

<sup>10</sup>Rana Nayar, "Poetry from the Troubled Zone," Kavya Bharati 15 (2003) 125-131.

<sup>11</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06:

Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007

[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>12</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06:

Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007

[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>13</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poem for Samir", The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 31-32.

<sup>14</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06:

Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007

[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "Forebodings", NEWFrontiers 1.1 (1998):

49.

<sup>16</sup>Pradip Phanjoubam, "Manipur: fractured land," The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall, ed. Geeti Sen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 278.

<sup>17</sup>Ngangom, "Native Land," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 81.

<sup>18</sup>Ngangom, "Poem for Joseph," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 74.

<sup>19</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "Rain Song 2000," Chandrabhaga ns (2004) 49-50.

<sup>20</sup>Sonowal 59.

<sup>21</sup>Nilmani Phookan, "Don't Ask Me How I Am," Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan, trans. Krishna Dulal Barua (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007) 63-64.

<sup>22</sup>Nilmani Phookan, personal interview, 13 July 2007.

<sup>23</sup>Phookan 63-64.

<sup>24</sup>Gill 214-215.

<sup>25</sup>Chandrakanta Murasingh, "Your Dreams," trans. Udayan Ghosh, Select Poems (Agartala: Smt. Shima Pal, 2005) 27.

<sup>26</sup>Ngangom, "The Strange Affair of Robin S Ngangom," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 65-71.

<sup>27</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007 [http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup>Tarun Bhartiya, "Liberal Nightmares: A Manual of Northeastern Dreams," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 November 2007 <[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/02\\_tarun\\_bhartiya.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/02_tarun_bhartiya.pdf)>

<sup>29</sup>Thangjam Ibopishak, "Poem," trans. Robin S Ngangom, Indian Literature 156<sup>th</sup> ser.p26.

<sup>30</sup>Soumen Sen, "Identity Expressions in Ritual and Myth," Tribal Studies in North East India, ed. Sarthak Sengupta (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002) 33.

<sup>31</sup> Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "Play of the Absurb", Kavya Bharati (2003): 53-54.

<sup>32</sup>Robin S. Ngangom, "From 'The Book of Grievances'," Time's Crossroads (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1994) 45-50.

- <sup>33</sup>Nilmani Phookan, "One midnight the man popped up," trans. Nirendra Nath Thakuria, unpublished poem.
- <sup>34</sup>Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "Forebodings", NEWFrontiers 1.1 (1998): 49.
- <sup>35</sup>Phookan, "For a Good Many Days Together," Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan 98.
- <sup>36</sup>Ngangom, "To Pacha," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 34-35.
- <sup>37</sup>Murasingh, "Slumber," trans. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems.
- <sup>38</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "Waking Sounds," The Journal of the Poetry Society (India) 16.1-2 (2005): 20.
- <sup>39</sup>Robin S. Ngangom, "Curfew," Words and the Silence, (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publications, 1998) 66.
- <sup>40</sup>Murasingh, "In My Room," trans. Sri. Dibyendu Nag, Select Poems.
- <sup>41</sup>Nongkynrih, "Play of the Absurb," Kavya Bharati (2003): 53-54.
- <sup>42</sup>Ngangom, "Homeland I left," Words and the Silence.
- <sup>43</sup>Murasingh, "Translation," trans. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems.
- <sup>44</sup>Ngangom, "Everywhere I go," The Desire of Roots 93-94.
- <sup>45</sup>Gill 217.

<sup>46</sup>Nini Lungalang, "Dust", Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 258.

<sup>47</sup>Mona Zote, "Rez," Indian Literature 233<sup>th</sup>ser.L.3(2006)23-25.

<sup>48</sup>Temsula Ao, "New Terror," Songs from Here and There (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 70-72.

<sup>49</sup>Gill 223.

<sup>50</sup>Nini Lungalang, "A Teardrop Of Blood," Poetry from Nagaland (New Delhi: Savio Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2005) 97-98.

<sup>51</sup>Mona Zote, "This is so," Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 202-203.

<sup>52</sup>Mamang Dai, "Remembrance," River Poems (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 2004) 16-17.

<sup>53</sup>Ngangom, "We Are Not Ready for the Hand of Peace," The Desire of Roots 89-90.

<sup>54</sup> B.B.Kumar, "North-East India: Need for a Fresh Look," North-East and the Indian States: Paradoxes of a Periphery, ed. P.S. Datta (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1995) 17.

<sup>55</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Racial Progression," Words and the Silence, Robin S Ngangom (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1998) 20-21.

<sup>56</sup> Ngangom, "I am Sorry to See Poetry in Chains," Words and the Silence, 69-70.

<sup>57</sup> Thangjam Ibopishak, "Dali, Hussain, Or Odour Of Dream, Colour of Wind," Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast. eds., Nongkynrih and Ngangom, 90-91.

<sup>58</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "To My People," Words and the Silence, 42-43.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Chasie, "Nagaland in Transition," The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall, ed. Geeti Sen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 258.

<sup>60</sup> Ngangom, "Racial Progression," Words and the Silence 20-21.

<sup>61</sup> Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "The Poet as Chronicler: An Overview of Contemporary Poetry in North East India," India-Poetry International Web, 1 March 2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2695](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2695)>.

<sup>62</sup> Kynpham S Nongkynrih, "The Parking Lot," Telegraph 4 Sept. 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Chandra Kanta Murasing, "Of A Minister," Nongkynrih and Ngangom, eds, Anthology 258.

<sup>64</sup>Sanchet Barua, "N-E can destabilise India more than Kashmir," Shillong Times 2 July 2007.

<sup>65</sup>Nongkynrih, "When the Prime Minister Visits Shillong The Bamboos Watch in Silence," Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom.

<sup>66</sup>Arundhati Subramanian, "Thangjam Ibopishak Singh," India-Poetry International Web, 1 March 2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=6290](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=6290)>.

<sup>67</sup>Thangjam Ibopishak, "The Land Of The Half-Humans," Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom.

<sup>68</sup> Robin S Ngangom, "Northeast Literature and The Art Of Witness." New Frontiers: A Journal of the North East Writers' Forum 2 (2000).

<sup>69</sup> Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "The Colours of Truth," Indian Literature XLVIII. 3 (2004): 25.

<sup>69</sup> Nilmani Phookan, "For a Good Many Days Together," Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan, trans. Krishna Dulal Barua (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007) 98.

### **Chapter 3: The Realities of Nature and Myth**

Myths form a significant part of the oral literature of the people of North East India. The oral tales that deal with them or have a mythical base signify the depths of a traditional wisdom that incorporate everything that have been gathered from a rich experience of life; and are inextricable from the oral history of the region. The richness of this region lies in its vibrant cultures, traditions, rituals, festival, dances and folklore, “ the way of life of the masses is still rooted in the traditional social base, - group solidarity and group consciousness for collective endeavour and welfare..., creativity is collective and participating. As a result, folklore is still a major component of the living culture of the people of the region. It has been growing and absorbing new elements.”<sup>1</sup>

To many writers of this region, “legends and stories are still a wellspring of thought and emotions that are restored in a peculiar blend of myth and memory unique to the region.”<sup>2</sup> Most of the poets of this region use myth and nature alongside themes of violence, corruption and politics. Being deeply rooted in their past, these poets speak about their history and their past, the land and its people, its myths and rituals, culture and tradition, festivals and dances. Legends are portrayed with the “intensity of

reality and reality is portrayed with the intensity of longing for a vanished past".<sup>3</sup> Thus:

The history of our race  
begins with the place of stories.  
We do not know if the language we speak  
belongs to written past<sup>4</sup>

In these lines, Mamang Dai talks about the mystery that shrouds the origins of the people of this region. "North-Easterners are conscious that they have no recorded history about their antecedents. Their historical past and migration routes are shrouded in mystery."<sup>5</sup> Although, no written records are available these stories have been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. They have seeped into the mind of people over the centuries like "a gift of understanding generated by itself."<sup>6</sup>

An accepted practice that is never questioned is that the people of this region go back to the past to reconnect with their roots. Their visions of the past have been captured in the words of Robin Ngangom:

In Kangleipak once upon a time  
the royal feast of Kangla bit his tail

and the land lay snug within his coils,  
and there was no dearth of mundane things<sup>7</sup>

Here, the poet speaks of the vanished past, of how the land prospered and flourished and was well-protected by their warriors. Kangleipak is the historical name of Manipur and Kangla, the ancient seat of Manipur royalty.

Origin and creation myth form the substance of many poems:

The mountain is a disguise  
of earth woman rising to meet her sky lover.<sup>8</sup>

In this story, earth and sky are “lovers and when the sky makes love to the Earth every kind of tree and grass and all living creatures come into being”. The lovers however, must separate, for as long as they cling together there is nowhere for their children to live. In the Minyong tradition, “after their separation, the Earth always longed to return to her husband to be one with him again. But as she was raising herself to the sky, the Sun and Moon appeared, and she was ashamed and could not go further. That part of her which was reaching towards her lord became fixed for ever, as the great mountains.”<sup>9</sup> That is how according to them, mountains stand as high as the sky. Such myths relating to geographical places abound in their poetry.

Mamang Dai attempts to project the importance of these myths in her society by invoking them repeatedly. She continues:

Drop the rainbow down,  
the rain is potent drink  
for spirits seeking heavenly brides.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Sherdukpen's story, a tribe from Arunachal Pradesh, rainbows are "four water-spirits, white, black, yellow and red, who live in springs among the hills and from time to time wander across the heavens for ever seeking wives as lovely as themselves. The rainbow is the path of blended colours that they make across the sky".<sup>11</sup> These people seem to have answers for each natural phenomenon and poets of this region interweave these myths into their poetry. In another poem, Mamang Dai talks about the myth concerning the creation of the world. The Singphos tell of "a woman in the form of a cloud... born out of the primaeval fog and mist. She has a son and daughter, who are like snow, and from them the earth and sky are born. At first the earth is only mud and the sky lies upon it as a thick cloud, but when the wind is born, it dries the mud, thus making the earth solid and drives the sky far away."<sup>12</sup> Thus:

We are the children of the rain

of the cloud woman,

...<sup>112</sup>

After the earth was thus created, human beings came into existence, emphasizing the fact that myth has become a reality.

Some of the myths and legends are concerned with the coming of the first progenitors of their own communities. In relation to this, in one of her poems, Temsula Ao refers to an Ao-Naga myth:

Lungterok

The six stones

Where the progenitors

And forebears

Of the stone-people

Were born

Out of the womb

Of the earth<sup>14</sup>

According to the Ao-Naga myth, “the first people, three males and three females, emerged out of the six stones at a place called Lungterok,” which literally means ‘six stones’. The males were Tongpok (of the Pongener clan), Longpok (of the Longkumer clan) and Longjakrep (of the Jamir

clan); and the females were Longkapokla (of the Pongener clan), Yongmenala (of the Longkumer clan) and Elongse (of the Jamir clan). Tongpok married Elongse, Longpok married Longkapokla and Longjakrep married Yongmenala. “This was the institution of exogamous marriage established by the first fathers, which continues till today and is an inalienable tenet of Ao-Naga social custom.”<sup>15</sup> Here Temsula Ao articulates the mythical sense of history that characterizes most communities of the region. She has been able to bring out the historical and mythical foundation of her own society in a poem that reminds the Ao-Naga society of their roots.

In one of his poems, Ngangom mentions the mythical ancestor of Meiteis, Poireiton, who is believed to have led his people all the way carrying fire with him to find a new settlement. This is how they came to live in their present land that is Manipur. According to their myth, they migrated there as a result of an epidemic. Thus :

On a grey dawn we joined Poireiton  
with provision of fire in his guest  
for men free from disease and death  
...

we the companions of Poireton<sup>16</sup>

Through these myths, they trace their roots to the past by their attempts to understand it through a process of articulation and writing. Poets like Nongkynrih draws upon his own myths for purposes of moral education. As a poet, he would like to remind his people, “of the virtues of their ancestors’ ways and the necessity of perpetuating them.”<sup>17</sup> In this poem, he talks about Ren, a fisherman from a village called Nongjri, who falls in love with a river nymph and goes to live with her in the river leaving his old mother with this consolation:

“ Mother,” he had said,  
 “listen to the river,  
 As long as it roars  
 You will know that I live.”<sup>18</sup>

Here, “symbolically, Ren is asking later generations to listen to the sound of his people’s life.”<sup>19</sup> According to the poet, the sound of his people’s life and their way can only be voiced through one’s mother tongue. That is why, he feels that writing in it would help the sound of his people’s life grow stronger. Through his mother tongue, he would be able to reach out to his own people and impart their past culture and tradition through his

writing, there by, helping them in preserving it. However, Nongkynrih also continues to write in English.

Many places in the region have names associated with myths and legends linked to them. Nongkynrih speaks of the gorges of Sohra or Cherrapunjee which is associated with the legend of *U Thlen* or *Thlen*, a supposedly man-eating, blood-sucking serpent who is still alive:

Where the serpent's death throes  
cut deep wounds into the land  
lie deep gorges like fiendish mouths  
yawning for desperate victims<sup>20</sup>

According to the legend, the gorges of Sohra or Cherrapunjee were caused by the death-throes of the Thlen which once supposedly stalked its wilderness. Its death-throes were so powerful that they made deep cracks in the land creating the famous gorges known as Ka Riat Mawriew.

In his poems, Ngangom evokes the spirit of the waterfall associated with the legend of Ka Likai:

We passed weeping stones  
silent faces of stone wrinkled with pain  
and a young wind scouring the gorge.

I descend the broken course  
of a shrivelled stream to the green pool  
sunk by the waterfall.<sup>21</sup>

Ka Likai was a young widow who had a girl child. She remarried a man who later murdered her child out of jealousy; cooked and served her the flesh of the child. After discovering this heinous act, Ka Likai jumped to her death from the edge of this waterfall.

One notices the process of acculturation that has taken place in the region over the years. There is the “Aryan-Hindu influence over non-Aryan non-Hindu tribal stocks, leading eventually in a great many cases to integration, assimilation and absorption of the erstwhile tribal elements”<sup>22</sup> into a non-tribal complex. This is reflected in the considerable volume of folklore present in the region, that have been Hinduised and Sanskritised; some of them are associated with the great Indian epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Chandrakanta Murasingh, says this of himself:

Death is my ultimate glory  
For I am the last-born of *Hidimba*<sup>23</sup>

Here, the poet refers to Ghatutkach, the son of Hidimba, princess of the Kachar Kingdom now Cachar district, and Bhim in Mahabharata. He

laid down his life for the Pandavas in the battle of Kurukshetra. Muringh wants to portray Ghatutkach as a victim of Krishna's politics. In the battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Karna of the Kauravas wanted to kill Arjuna. In order to save him, Krishna put Ghatutkach in the front instead of Arjuna. He was killed subsequently. The people of North East India are likened to Ghatutkach the unwary victim, who have always been exploited by politicians from the mainland India.

Monarchy was an institution that thrived in the past. It is recalled in ambiguous tones of unresolved feeling, for it is associated with conflict and misrule for many poets. Nilmani Phookan mentions one such Ahom King named Gaurinath in one of his poems:

Keep both the doors open

Gaurinath is arriving<sup>24</sup>

Gaurinath was a cruel king of medieval Assam who had an illicit relationship with his maid. He remembers the sexual exploitation of the king which resulted in a revolt. Helpless women have always been victims of such man in power, a fitting comment for many present atrocities committed against women.

In another poem, Phookan talks about a rebel named Bhotai who was supposedly killed by the Ahom King:

Hey are you awake

It's me your Bhotai

from under the hyacinth flowers<sup>25</sup>

Bhotai was a rebel who disapproved of autocracy. He is an inspiring figure for the present generation and his voice is heard by others today.

The enchanting love stories of the past are reflected in poets like Ngangom who makes use of Khasi myths in his poems:

none remembers the passing of Manik Raitong

and how he planted his bamboo flute

for earth to play music in spring.<sup>26</sup>

He narrates the story of Manik Raitong, who was orphaned early in life. He had an illicit affair with the king's (*syiem*) wife. When the King knew about the affair, he ordered U Raitong's death. He was an accomplished musician before his immolation. U Raitong drove his bamboo flute into the earth. It is believed that the bamboo flute took root there. He speaks about another love story, that of Khuman Khamba and Thoibi from Manipur.

It was Khuman Khamba of Manipur  
 who told Thoibi that he belongs  
 to one woman in all the land,  
 ...<sup>27</sup>

These poets celebrate love traditions that are still popular among the people of the region.

The peaceful coexistence of man and beast is an aspect that is often spoken about as being a part of the idyllic life. Mamang Dai presents one such relationship in her poem:

The tiger runs swiftly from my father's house  
 calling my name.  
 Brother ! Man Brother !  
 Have mercy for our destiny.<sup>28</sup>

According to the Arunachali belief, man and tiger were brothers. The killing of a tiger amounted to the killing of a man and the rituals associated with it are rigorous. Similarly, when a man is attacked or killed, strict rituals are performed to select a man to lead the hunt to find the tiger. The poem has a deeper meaning. It delivers a social message against the destruction of the ecology.

Chandrakanta Murasingh talks about a monkey who take a woman for his wife. He tricks her into marrying him by taking away her clothes while she was bathing in the stream. They have a child named Tote:

A *chong* full of fish for Totema to bring,  
 Days on end did I spend  
 Gazing into the water of the spring  
 Getting used to life by waterside.<sup>29</sup>

Here, the poet tells us how the monkey tries to please his wife by bringing fish for her but his effort is in vain as the woman can never love the monkey. In another poem Murasingh talks about how the monkey was later killed by the wife:

It's the near one, and the dear one  
 Who edges me towards the broken plank of the *tong*<sup>30</sup>

The woman pushes him from the *tong* (tribal hut on stilts ) by tricking and killing him. The monkey is symbolic of an uncivilized world. The poet speaks about the incompatibility of the two worlds - civilized and uncivilized worlds. These two worlds are poles apart and are incompatible with each other.

Nilmani Phookan draws his images from one of the folktales. He talks about Tejimala:

As if I've heard it first  
so lonely

Where are you from, o boatman  
My mind's got transfixed  
on the damson leaves<sup>31</sup>

Tejimala was killed by her stepmother while the father was away from home on business. She turns into a rose plant and blooms on the river bank. As the father was returning home in a boat after six months, he sees the flower and as he was about to pluck them for his daughter, the plant speaks to him, unveiling her identity. The grief and loneliness of Tejimala is captured by the poet through words of grief and shock.

Rituals, traditions, dances and festivals form an important layer in the poetry of this region. Rituals are performed on different occasions and have a "pronounced roles to play" in folk religion as is the assertion of "identity".<sup>32</sup> Mamang Dai describes the rituals performed during funerals:

When the singing rises

death itself will cease.

Blue beads in your hair will turn you.<sup>33</sup>

Here the poet explains the strengthening of ties through women who tell stories and men who sit near the dead. They sing songs of lamentation recalling childhood and youth, as the relatives of the deceased fasten beads and sacred twine to their hair and wrists. In the same way, Temsula Ao mentions a ritual, the 'genna' which is practiced in Nagaland on many occasions:

Next I erected the circle of 'genna'

Around the still and bloody duo<sup>34</sup>

While returning from his jhum fields, the man comes across a doe and her new born and without a thought kills them with his spear. He grieves for his action, "Grief engulfing my suddenly / Tired body, I stood there numb". He hurriedly covers it with wild grass to mark his shame, asking for Nature's forgiveness. Then, he erects the circle of 'genna' around them in order to keep people away from the place. 'Genna' signifies a place that is unclean, sacred or tabooed, a prohibited area.

Dances and festivals of the region have meaning located deeper than the show. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih talks of the 'Weiking' festival and sees its relation to the social:

Weiking ! Weiking!

Spring is back, begin your whirling motions

and let our life live on.<sup>35</sup>

Mamang Dai also talks about the dance called Tapu which is performed by men during the time of community fencing:

That dying is not so hard

if the image survives.

When the wind is young

sow celebration,

seize the branch of lightening,

dress the thorn wood stem

for conception.<sup>36</sup>

Today this is viewed as a "war dance performed to exercise malevolent spirits, but once there was a belief that women who had borne no son could put on male attire and join the dancers in the hope of conceiving a son".

In yet another poem, she refers to the “ponung” dance of the Adis performed by the young girls of the village for many days and night during the festival of “solung”:

We danced so long  
we broke all our bracelets  
to please a fancy.<sup>37</sup>

The poet tells us how the girls dance to the chanting of the priest recounting the legend of birth and creation. On one particular night, the young dancers who travel the road are instructed to stay awake and be alert as a misstep may spell illness or early death.

The overwhelming presence of nature in the poetry of North East India is heard in the “river with its magical voice, the twin gods of water and mist, the land heavy with memories, the forest that lingers...”<sup>38</sup> Poets like Mamang Dai turn back to nature for soul searching reasons that are known only to her:

The sun brands the eastern mountains.  
the flash of summer revealed  
intricate nature,  
divinity in trees,

A river of stars.<sup>39</sup>

Though myth and nature sometimes form the core of their poetry, they are never used as vehicles of escapism for in “losing their way, completely in the violent cultural changes of times, there is born a desire in them to rehabilitate the past as high culture”,<sup>40</sup> and to forge a renewing relationship with nature. Though they seek solace in their past and in nature, these are used to help them confront their present:

I know, from faces that I meet  
 in this lives that have crumbled  
 that the past lives in these eyes  
 that the jungle shows, sometimes.<sup>41</sup>

These poets resurrect the beauty of their land as Nongkynrih does when he recalls the beauty of Cherrapunjee, his native place:

The ears had listened to the furies of the waterfalls,  
 the music of the trickling streams,  
 and screened by the fog  
 those remain my Cherra's only reality.<sup>42</sup>

The fog reminds him of the past beauty of Cherrapunjee, with its ‘cedar-dotted hills’, the place where he grew up and is filled with its memories. He expresses his sadness to see his land become barren:

And this is Cherra,  
with shreds of the beautiful past  
but going bald all the time<sup>43</sup>

Temsula Ao laments the abuses heaped upon her land:

Alas for the forest  
Which now lies silent  
Stunned and stumped  
With the evidence  
Of her rape.<sup>44</sup>

Disappointed at the environmental degradation that has taken place in the region, the disappearance of forests and its barrenness all over the region, they recall the virgin forest of the past with their tall trees that seem to be “Unpenetrated/ Even by the mighty sun”.

Poets like Nilmani Phookan make use of nature images to convey messages encoded in poetry. In his poem, ‘Mating Music’, he describes love and union in terms of nature:

In the woods  
 deep in the woods  
 a crane calls

Open out both your arms  
 let a swarm of stars sink  
 into the aroma of your hair.<sup>45</sup>

He describes the chaos and anxiety that is prevalent in society at present, caused by violence through by using images like uprooted trees and smashed houses which can be the result of a violent storm:

The trees seem uprooted  
 in waters  
 of that mad tusker  
 smashing houses...<sup>46</sup>

Living close to nature, poets from this region elicit the sounds of nature like the “Woodland notes of the birds, / Melody of the flute floating from the hut on stilts” and “Bark of the deer from the northern hills” which “the cool wind carries all the time”.<sup>47</sup> Anupama Basumatary describes the setting of the sun through metaphors:

You know well  
 how the crimson lass  
 enters the blue house  
 opening the cloudy door<sup>48</sup>

The picture of the setting sun as a crimson lass and the sky as the blue house with a cloudy door into which the lass enters is an evocative presentation of nature's best moments. These lines also emphasise again and again the sense of rootedness that these poets keep alive within them. Thus, they are always trying to recapture nature in their poetry. In yet another poem of hers, she speaks about the smell of the earth, thus:

In the *gamosa* of my peasant father  
 A raw earthy smell  
 Still lingers!<sup>49</sup>

Even long after the monsoon, she can still smell the earth in her father's 'gamosa'. The lulling sights and presence of nature is a dimension of life that many poets have struggled to express.

These poets also have great attachment to their land and their ties are strong:

There are ties

we do not talk about.

I confuse you with my penance,

but there are the secrets

of my clenched heart.<sup>50</sup>

Mamang Dai elaborates upon the ties that she has for her land. Even when she is far away, she recalls rivers, summer rain and the years spent there.

Echoes of it in Thangjam Ibopishak's poetry reveals a deep love for his land:

Manipur, I love your hills, marshes, rivers,

Greenfields, meadows, blue sky.<sup>51</sup>

And in another poem he says:

I love

these fields, pastures, hills

lakes, and green woods of Manipur.<sup>52</sup>

In their poetry, the land is inextricable from everything that gives them meaning. It forms the subject of their daily lives. Its influence is felt at all times:

The woman stirs the ash- heaps on the hearth

Urging the smoldering embers to fine and light

To begin her morning chores. ~

Temsula Ao presents to the reader a village morning, at a time when a woman usually starts her day. She gives a vivid description of the activities of villagers, especially of woman at the start of the day.

The simple life of a farmer is clearly depicted in Anupama Basumatary's poem:

During the monsoon when the ploughs  
 The field or when he reaps the paddy  
 On an autumn noon and walks with  
 On the village path with the sheaf  
 Of paddy on his shoulder  
 He keeps on humming the notes  
 Of some country song<sup>54</sup>

The poet portrays the contentment and happiness that a farmer derives from his land.

Even, the taste of their food brings poetry to the palette. Their poems are laden with exotic culinary items:

Those days I picked the upside down snails  
 from the stalks of growing grain

and fill my creel till the neck.<sup>55</sup>

Basumatary likes to remove their shells and watch the tongues recoil before she boils them.

They talk about village women “traipsing down the dirt road,” “farmer ploughing under the summer sky”, “damsels planting saplings” and “rustling wind from the meadows”.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the poetry of North East India consists of the mosaic of myths and legends, rituals and dances, festivals and cultures, traditions and people that make their poetry dense with meaning. Nature images and metaphors derived from this mosaic give their poetry a sense of rootedness and belonging for they go back into the past to emerge better able to understand their present.

Intimately interwoven into their poetry is this sense of history that is animated by their deep interest in their own myths and legends. These are the other realities that they are bent upon preserving through their poetry. One sees that these poets are also conscious of themselves as being the interpreters of the natural landscapes of their homeland, whose poetry captures the essential beauty of the land, when that beauty is almost on the brink of being wiped out.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup>J.B.bhattacharjee, "North-East Indian Perspectives in History," North-East And The Indian State: Paradoxes of a periphery, ed. P.S.Datta (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, 1995)12.
- <sup>2</sup>Mamang Dai, "On Creation Myths and Oral Narratives," ed. Geeti Sen, The North-East: Where the Sun Rises When the Shadows Fall, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- <sup>3</sup>Mamang Dai, "North-East Poetry"Muse India the literary ejournal, Jul-Aug 2006, 27 March 007 <<http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>
- <sup>4</sup>Mamang Dai, "Obscure Place," Indian Literature XLIX.4 (2005):85.
- <sup>5</sup>Patricia Mukhim, "Where is the North-East?" ed. Sen, The North - East 181.
- <sup>6</sup>Dai, "On Creation Myths and Oral Narratives," ed. Sen, The North-East 6.
- <sup>7</sup>Robin Ngangom, "The Quest As Beginning," Words and the Silence (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1998) 22-23.
- <sup>8</sup>Dai, "Images," River Poems (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publications, 2004)31-32.

<sup>9</sup>Verrier Elwin, introduction, Myths of the North-East Frontier of India by Elwin (Shillong: T. P. Khaund, 1958) XXII.

<sup>10</sup>Dai, "Images," River Poems 31-32.

<sup>11</sup>Elwin, introduction, Myths of the North-East Frontier of India XXIII.

<sup>12</sup>Elwin, "The Creation of the World," Myths of the North-East Frontier of India 7.

<sup>13</sup>Dai, "Birthplace," River Poems 79.

<sup>14</sup>T Ao, "Stone People From Lungterok," Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the North-East, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 213.

<sup>15</sup>Temsula Ao, "Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective," Between Ethnography and Fiction: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Questions in India. eds. T .B. Subha and Sujit Som (New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2005) 161.

<sup>16</sup>Ngangom, "To the Blind, the Deaf," Time's Crossroads (Hyderabad Orient Longman Limited, 1994 )58-59.

<sup>17</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, " The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity," India-Poetry International web, 1 March

2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.ppp?obj\\_id=6285&x=1](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.ppp?obj_id=6285&x=1)>

<sup>18</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, “Ren\*,” Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih, and Ngangom 158.

<sup>19</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, “The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity,” India-Poetry International web, 1 March 2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.ppp?obj\\_id=6285&x=1](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.ppp?obj_id=6285&x=1)>

<sup>20</sup>Nongkynrih, “Cherrapunji In The Fog,” Indian Literature 190<sup>th</sup> ser. XLIII.2(1999)47.

<sup>21</sup>Ngangom, “At Noh Ka Likai’s,” Time’s Crossroads 60-61.

<sup>22</sup>Birendranath Datta, “Dimensions of Contact Among Tribal and Non-tribal Populations in North- East India: Reflections from Folklore,” The Turbulent North-East (New Delhi: Akshar Publications, 1996) 11.

<sup>23</sup>Chandrakanta Murasingh, “As I Am,” trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems (Agartala: Smt. Shima Pal, 2005) 63.

<sup>24</sup>Nilmani Phookan, “Keep Both the Doors Open,” trans. Krishna Dulal Barua, Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007) 73-74.

- <sup>25</sup>Phookan, "The Trees Seem Uprooted," trans. Nirindra Nath Thakuria, Unpublished poem.
- <sup>26</sup>Ngangom, "Spring at Ri Bhoi," Time's Crossroads 22.
- <sup>27</sup>Ngangom, "Khamba of Moirang," Words and the Silence 28.
- <sup>28</sup>Dai, "Man and Brother," River Poems 50-51.
- <sup>29</sup>Murasingh, "The Python's Call From The Tong-Deserted," trans. Dr. Bamapada Mukherjee, Select Poems13.
- <sup>30</sup>Murasingh, "Forgetting," Indian Literature 197<sup>th</sup> ser. XLIV.3 (2000)31.
- <sup>31</sup>Phookan, "As if I've Heard it First," trans. Nirendra Nath Thakuria, unpublished poem.
- <sup>32</sup>Saswati Biswas, "Preservation of Tribal Culture in North-East India - How strong is the Non-tribal?" Tribal Studies in North East India (New Delhi : Mittal Publications, 2002 )37.
- <sup>33</sup>Dai, "Let No Tear\*," River Poems 46-47.
- <sup>34</sup>Temsula Ao, "The Spear," Poetry from Nagaland (New Delhi: Savio Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2005)141-143.
- <sup>35</sup>Nongkynrih, "Weiking," Khasia in Gwalia ed. Nigel Jenkins (Port Talbot Wales: Alun Books, 1995)
- <sup>36</sup>Dai, "Tapu," River Poems 42-43.

<sup>37</sup>Dai, "Song of the Dancers," River Poems 19-20.

<sup>38</sup>K. Satchidanandan, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the North-East by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) Cover.

<sup>39</sup>Dai, "River Poems," River Poems 57-58.

<sup>40</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity", India-Poetry International Web 1 March 2005, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.ppp?obj\\_id=6285&x=1](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.ppp?obj_id=6285&x=1)>

<sup>41</sup>Dai, "The Balm of Time," River Poems 57-58.

<sup>42</sup>Nongkynrih, "Cherrapunjee In the Fog," Moments (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publications, 1992)19.

<sup>43</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: I," Moments (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publications, 1992) 22-23.

<sup>44</sup>T. Ao, "Lament For Earth," Songs That Tell (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publications, 1998) 45-47.

<sup>45</sup>Phookan, "Mating Music," trans. Nirendra Nath Thakuria, Chandrabhaga 2<sup>nd</sup> ns (2000): 104.

<sup>46</sup>Phookan, “The Trees Seem Uprooted,” trans. Nirendra Nath Thakuria, unpublished poem.

<sup>47</sup>Murasingh, “Memoirs of the Woods,” trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems 11.

<sup>48</sup>Anupama Basumatary, “You Know Well,” trans. Pradip Acharya, unpublished poem.

<sup>49</sup>Basumatary, “Dream,” trans. Arunabha Bhuyan, unpublished poem.

<sup>50</sup>Dai, “Ties,” River Poems 14-15.

<sup>51</sup>Thangjam Ibopishak, “Manipur, Why Shouldn’t I Love Tour Hills, Marshes, Rivers, Fields, Open Spaces,” trans. Robin S Ngangom, Anthology eds. Nongkynrih, and Ngangom 88-89.

<sup>52</sup>Ibopishak, “Roaming The Villages At Evening,” trans. Robin S Ngangom, Indian Literature 179<sup>th</sup> p21-24.

<sup>53</sup>Temsula Ao, “A Village Morning,” Songs from Here and There (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003)12-15.

<sup>54</sup>Basumatary, “The Farmer,” trans. Arunabha Bhuyan, unpublished poem.

<sup>55</sup>Basumatary, “Snails,” trans. Pradip Acharya, Anthology eds, Nongkynrih and Ngangom 19.

<sup>56</sup>Basumatary, "An Evening in Our Village," trans. Pradip Acharya, unpublished poem.

### **Chapter 4: Confronting the Paradox**

The poetry of North East India consists of the paradoxical realities of violence and myth, past and present, love and bloodshed, cultural and political dilemmas. Even as they talk about contemporary evils, they must go back to their myths and legends as their poetry reveals the “complex terrain of everyday negotiation where nature and politics, the physical and the cultural, are inextricably engaged”.<sup>1</sup> They take their poetry into areas that are distinctively associated with the kind of experiences that are unique to them. On one hand it brings the gunshots and the bloodstained faces of the region “within earshot distance”, while on the other hand, “it takes us right into the hearts of the people, their dreams and desires, myths and memories and long struggles through history”.<sup>2</sup>

Their journeys into the past bring out the realities of the cruel present that they have to live in:

Childhood took place  
among fairies and weretigers  
when hills were yours to tumble  
before they housed soldiers  
and dreaded chambers of torture.<sup>3</sup>

Some poets prefer to believe that the past is far better than their present, “Our past, we make believe, is pristine/ Even as we reaped heads and took slaves.”<sup>4</sup> They return to their childhood years with nostalgia:

How we hunted small-game in the rice fields,  
and covered every land of Imphal on bicycles,  
making passes at almost every girl!

Ngangom recollects his childhood when he roamed about freely in his homeland without fear. Reality for him has, however, changed completely:

I hear a wicked war is now waged  
on our soil, and gory bodies  
dragged unceremoniously  
through our rice fields...<sup>5</sup>

Similarly too, Nongkynrih speaks about the “strange sounds” that crowd his town disturbing his sleep as he wakes up often startled “by raucous azaans, jangling bells, / wild ululations, weird conch-shells” which seem to drown out:

birds warbling, cicadas whining, crows cawing,  
chicken yapping about the yard...

He misses his childhood and his past comes flashing back in remembered songs and ghostly ancestors getting ready to go to fields:

Out of that restlessness the past rises from dimly  
remembered songs and I watch my ghostly ancestors  
...<sup>6</sup>

Though they are steeped in the lore of the land they are also aware that their land is plagued by insurgency. This is brought out by Nongkynrih in his poem ‘Waking Sounds’:

How chaste were the hills! How strangely,  
Divining lovely that morning when guns  
were dispensing panic and lusting bullets  
bent on seeking blood.<sup>7</sup>

He is woken up at dawn by the deafening “bursts of gunfire”. Nature remains a mute spectator to the violence and wanton bloodletting in the region.

Ngangom confesses that his poetry “springs from the cruel contradictions”<sup>8</sup> of a land which boasts of its talents in the theater, cinema, dance and sports but at the same time, entrusts corruption, AIDS, terrorism and drugs to children. Thus :

I abandoned my forward-looking native people  
 who entrusted terror, drugs and  
 a civilized plague to children.<sup>9</sup>

The poet left his native land when he was fifteen. He is locked in a dilemma peculiar to many people of the region, whether to rejoice and forget what he considers to be a decaying land or be nostalgic about it.

Thangjam Ibopishak speaks of his homeland as the land of the half-humans: "...the nameless citizens the nameless representatives govern the land/of the half-humans. Because whether to give human names to the/ head or to the body - no one can decide ..."<sup>10</sup>The image of "half-human", conveys a picture of the degradation that has crept into a society that is now described as the land of "perpetual internal strife"<sup>11</sup> hitting the headlines almost everyday. This image evokes a candid picture of the degradation of the land and its people. According to the poet, people have stopped acting like humans, they live decadent lives that bring no profit to anyone.

In another poem, he mentions the militants in the guise of fire, water, air, earth and sky that come to kill him:

...They can create men; also destroy men at

whim. They do whatever they fancy. The very avatar of might.<sup>12</sup>

They come looking for him in his house but the poet chooses to escape death as he is fastidious about it. He wants only to be killed by an Indian bullet as, “the patriotic authenticity of the bullet is more important than the death it will bring.”<sup>13</sup> In a state like Manipur, terrorists wreak havoc according to their will.

Chandrakanta Murasing talks about a land infested with terrorists :

I know, the airsprouts fire now in your city,

The fire burns in ecstasy.

Vehicles do not move without armed escorts.

No food is cooked without adding tears.<sup>14</sup>

He talks about the intensity of terrorism in the region and how it has affected the day to day life of people. The land is now flooded with misery. Further, words like “ Attention! Fire!” used frequently by terrorists and the army alike have forced their way into his own tongue, needing however, no translation. But, he believes in the sanctity of his land, “Yet they cannot touch my Garanti’s vision,” and according to him, no one can touch its body.

In another poem, the poet makes an ironic comment at those people who violently protest against the government without any response from it, “...the words are so cheap and so much in supply,/That no Government pays any heed to them.”<sup>15</sup> But word is his prime weapon and he asserts his right over “the one word”, “marking an active stance of resistance against forces that crush, erase and rewrite histories”<sup>16</sup>:

I can say it to the gun.

I can go into its barrel, and then, pour out

Humming in a folk-tune,

I shall want to say that one word only.<sup>17</sup>

He wants those people who have taken up guns to listen to the hearts of the people instead of making them suffer.

Mona Zote reflects upon her degraded society through the voice of a woman named “Ernestina” in her poem ‘What Poetry Means to Ernestina In Peril’:

*I like a land where babies  
are ripped out of their graves, where the church  
leads to practical results like illegitimate children and bad  
marriages*

*quite out of proportion to the current population, and your  
 neighbour  
 is kidnapped by demons and the young wither without complaint  
 and pious women know the sexual ecstasy of dance and peace is  
 kept  
 by short men with a Bible and five big knuckles on their righteous  
 hands.  
 Religion has made drunks of us all. The old goat bleats.  
 we are killing ourselves. I like an incestuous land...<sup>18</sup>*

This is the reality that one has to confront in a society. In another poem, 'Gunrunning', she says that she will "leave words too" and be "a gunrunner"<sup>18</sup>, thus, bringing out the weariness that she feels at having to put up with violence and blood all the time.

Nini Lungalang also speaks of the social tensions that seem to hold the people ransom. Thus :

My neighbours quarrel  
 over a strip of land  
 that runs between  
 their ancestral plots;<sup>20</sup>

She reflects upon the fact that fighting even for a small piece of land seems to be a natural phenomenon. She gives voice to these social and political tensions and comments upon the materialism that has overtaken society in general.

In an age of conflict and violence, a poet like Phookan takes refuge in the legend of the protective Da-Parvatiya:

Ageless

Those two women

At the gate of *Da-Parvatiya*

In a gesture of welcome<sup>21</sup>

Da-Parvatiya is a tiny hamlet near Tezpur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. It has the remains of a temple in the Gupta style which has a relatively undamaged door-frame with two river goddesses on either side. These goddesses seem to welcome everyone and are like a refuge for the poet. He chooses to believe in them rather than in bullets that have done enough damage to his land.

When things go out of control in his homeland, Nongkynrih questions the existence of the God who “presides over lives”. People seem to lose faith in God when “...shots and howls take up the morning sounds /

blood and the cortege, the morning scenes”. In this kind of situation, “faith” wavers and is as undependable as it is described in the following lines: It

... comes and goes,  
comes with the festivals,  
goes with the terrorists<sup>22</sup>

Ironically it is only when festivals come again that people’s faith in God seem to be revived.

Assam is portrayed to be burning with violence and hatred. In his poem ‘Nobody is Here’, Phookan reflects upon the violence through images of “wrenching and wresting of dogs and foxes” and “bones and abdominal organs” :

In the flames of violence revenge hatred  
Burns the ominous night  
In the wrenching and wresting of dogs and foxes  
The bones and abdominal organs of the country<sup>23</sup>

He asks people to open their eyes and take stock of a land which is in flames.

However, even as their land is swollen with violence and corruption, they take refuge in a past consisting of their myths, legends,

traditions and rituals. In ‘A Day In Cherrapunjee’ Part I-V, Nongkynrih talks about the beauty of his native land and the myths associated with it. In ‘A Day In Cherrapunjee: II’, he tells about the Dainthlen Falls, where according to the Khasi myth, the *thlen* or serpentine master was killed and cut into pieces, “how the evil Thlen was killed / in the very spot”.<sup>24</sup> In ‘A Day In Cherrapunjee-III’, he talks about the Noh Ka Likai Falls which is named after Likai, a woman who jumped to her death in that spot after unknowingly eating her daughter: “And that was how / this waterfall got its name”.<sup>25</sup> In the next poem, he talks about the myth of Mausmai falls: “And these are the Mausmai falls, / whose name Sngi Thiang gave / with her death”.<sup>26</sup> Sngi Thiang, was forcibly separated from her lover and married off to a man she did not love. Later, she committed suicide at this spot. Khoh Ramhah is another myth that tells of a giant who terrorized people and was later killed by them, “They killed him, / feeding his gargantuan mouth / with *jasnam* mixed with glass, / ground to powder”.<sup>27</sup>

Repeatedly, one finds that these poets resurrect their myths and legends, gods and goddesses in their poetry:

Yes, I believe in gods.

In the forest of good and evil,

spirits of the river,  
and the dream world of the dawn.<sup>2</sup>

as a sacred guiding force in their lives.

In 'The Voice of the Mountain', Mamang Dai speaks about the people of her region who still follow tradition even in a fast changing world:

The other day a young man arrived from the village.  
Because he could not speak  
he brought a gift of fish  
from the land of rivers.  
It seems such acts are repeated:  
We live in territories forever ancient and new,  
and as we speak in changing languages

...<sup>29</sup>

A Gift as a way of showing gratitude is a part of a tradition that her people diligently try to preserve even in a fast growing world. It goes back to a past that, for the poet, must be remembered in order to be revered and hence kept alive in one's memory.

Poets like Ibopishak want to fly away from an artificial world to the world of Nature:

I also want  
 To swim the expanse of colour  
 To frolic in abandon,  
 To race with the wind's fitful gusts  
 Imitating the birds of your woods.<sup>30</sup>

For a while, they wish to forget their worldly responsibilities and seek solace in Nature. They express grief at the destruction of nature:

The barren hills  
 that bear the pockmarks  
 of mining and foolish people  
 that burn and cut at will,  
 look as unremarkable  
 as half-naked little brats.<sup>31</sup>

Anger is a significant emotion found in their poetry used as a tool to speak out to people. They talk about rivers which have been polluted by people:

The bomb  
 And the bleaching powder

Have left her with no tomorrow.<sup>32</sup>

People have brought immeasurable damage to nature leaving their own future at stake. They have become greedy and savage. This is the reason why Nongkynrih feels the need to save his land:

Maybe, 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.<sup>33</sup>

He wishes to liberate his land from the clutches of people who destroy it. In spite of it all, however, nature is able to redeem itself. These poets still believe in "...nature's staunch imperishable / organic image of unity"<sup>34</sup> and still get tranquility, peace and contentment from it. They feel that the "unspeakable beauty"<sup>35</sup> of their land is still felt everywhere. Temsula Ao also lashes out against the indifference of her people:

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.<sup>36</sup>

showing how man's apathy towards nature has turned it into a desert. In 'December Rain', she tells us how rural folks unlike the urban people unquestioningly accept nature:

Farmers say

Heaven sends this rain

So the straws in fields

Will rot to increase

The next year's yields.<sup>37</sup>

They believe in the fact that everything happens for some good reason even though it may seem unnatural.

To quote Jayanta Mahapatra, "the miseries of contemporary dilemmas are apparent"<sup>38</sup> in the poetry of North East India. This is specially reflected in its persistent search for identity. Some have had to leave their lands because of the ethnic cleansing that has taken place in some parts of the region. This has become an all consuming passion for poets like Ngangom. A deep sense of loss is thus felt:

But I need a homeland

where I can recognize myself

just a map or even a tree or a stone,  
 to mark a spot I could return to  
 like a pissing animal  
 even when there's nothing to return for.<sup>39</sup>

Having been torn away from his native land that has involved a deep rift in his personal life, there is a sense of exile in his poetry. In 'The First Rain', he describes the pain of being uprooted from his homeland:

I'm the pain of slashed roots  
 and the last rain is already here.  
 I'll leave the cracked fields of my land  
 and its weeping pastures of daybreak.  
 Let wolves tear our beloved hills.<sup>40</sup>

His fear and anguish is apparent in his poetry. In yet another poem, he asks people to protect their identity and not to abandon their roots. Thus:

Do not say you have refused  
 the gift of your soul,  
 abandoned the sad refrain  
 of the *duitara* waiting  
 to be mended.<sup>41</sup>

He has a deep desire to put down roots and to come to grips with his own identity. As he does so, he assimilates the cultures of both his native land and his adopted land making thereby a multicultural commitment for himself. He is often called an “outsider turned insider”.

The desire to preserve ones identity is also reflected in Mamang Dai’s poetry that ‘remembers’ :

...the river’s voice:

Where else could we be born,

where else could we belong

if not of memory

divining life and form out of silence<sup>42</sup>

In going back to the natural world and its myths, there is an inevitable sense of loss. They can understand their present only by going back to the past. In an attempt to do so, Nongkynrih describes what the identity of a Khasi tribe entails:

A *Khasi* is a man, who once a year,

sport a muga-mulberry turban,

an eri shawl and is seen *en grande tenue*

at *Weiking* or *Pomblang*.<sup>43</sup>

He sees the Khasi man embodied thus and giving importance to his festivals like Weiking and Pomblang and also to the teachings of his great ancestors.

A deep sense of loss pervades in their poetry. They write about loneliness lurking in the hearts of human beings:

In the hope of achieving something  
Every man is only losing himself.<sup>44</sup>

Anupama Basumatary speaks about a selfish ambition that results in great loneliness. In 'Sculptor', she talks about the silences of women:

Wearing a stone-dress  
and jewellery of stone  
  
I could not speak  
with my lips of stone.<sup>45</sup>

Women's muteness in suffering has been described and likened to the woman sculpted in stone. The sense of loss and quest for identity maybe observed in Nini Lungalang, thus:

' Let not this moment pass too soon!'  
  
The pain of loss clutches the instant,

...<sup>46</sup>

Who feels an acute sense of loss as time passes by. She cries out like a child again.

Most of the poets from North East India feel threatened that “outsiders” may swamp their identity, tradition and culture. This fear surfaces in their poetry. They blame them for distorting their culture:

They dislodged me from my moorings

They tore me from her side

They chipped and chiseled

They gave me altered dimensions.<sup>47</sup>

Using the chipped monolith as an image, Temsula Ao tells us how the ways of the hill people have been changed by outsiders who come from far off places to influence them. She feels that her people have not been allowed to grow and have been made to deny their real selves.

They talk about the influence of the West and how their boys now “...sit on terraces / with their dolorous guitars...” Before the white people came, all of them worshipped the same gods and goddesses. But with their coming they brought in the kind of conflict that is familiar even today: “...religion to divide us, before politician-priests/ who laboured for their own redemption, / mouthing the name of god among benighted heathens”.

That was the time of weretiger, before  
 temples and churches, time of the free thinking  
 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.<sup>48</sup>

They lament upon the decimation of their culture and blame their own  
 people for that:

But what is this wound we opened ourselves  
 and drew blood where no blood was?  
 who brought this unrest of dialects,  
 this alien concert of songs and dances amongst us  
 who honoured the same vegetation gods  
 and poured mutual libations of rice-wine?<sup>49</sup>

There is the desire to once more sit back in a smoke-laden long  
 houses, sling the birds of technological time and not be ashamed of their  
 tribal ways. Similarly, there is the lament of the influence of Western  
 culture on people:

Like them we shed our ways  
 and having shed them we find  
 no spring to bring the flowers back.<sup>50</sup>

People in the poet's native land follow an alien culture, "like flowers, only strangers /and strange ways have come / to bloom in this land".

Using *gudak* (their delicacy) as a metaphor for their culture, Chandrakanta Murasing portrays the exploitation of tribal culture by "outsiders". Thus :

O, look the *gudak* is getting overdone !  
 It's scorched!  
 The burnt smell spirals around  
 With wisps of smoke in the idle wind.<sup>51</sup>

He feels that the outsiders are eating the very existence of the tribal people in their own land. The name 'gudak' has spread in a negative way. In another poem, he tells us how his people have lost their lands because of their short-sightedness:

You don't have an inch of land left,  
 All is lost bit by bit  
 In a distress sale to pay

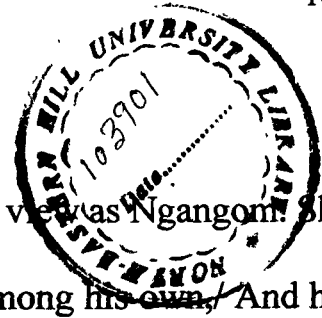
For the cure of this man's myopic vision.<sup>52</sup>

Here he refers to Bengali dominated Tripura and of the fact that tribal people being simple, are not aware of their exploitation and have lost everything. Ibopishak too speaks about the invasion of the land by "outsiders" who have taken away all their fields and lakes:

The fields our ancestors bequeathed us  
no longer belong to us;  
The village lakes which fed us,  
the fish-tanks, the canals,  
the village woods we nurtured  
are no longer the villager's;<sup>53</sup>

They have seized everything from them and the simple villagers have nothing except the wind, the sunlight and the blue sky.

Corruption and materialism have also taken hold of society in the region. Talking about materialism, Ngangom says that "poetry can never be an ally of this numbing materialism or a party to mindless violence. Materialism, wherever it abounds, begets a particular kind of terrifying alienation, for the simple reason that we forfeit our ability to love when we place commodities above our fellow men. And someone who cannot love is



always alone.”<sup>54</sup> Lungalang seems to share the same view as Ngangom. She talks about how a man has become “...a stranger among his own. / And his home, a space between walls”. Thus, showing one how materialism has created alienation. The stature of a man in this materialistic world according to her is “a terse of equation of his bank books”.<sup>55</sup>

People have become blind to human values being lost in the “tightening noose of riches.”<sup>56</sup> They seek only pleasures and have become insensitive to the feelings of others.

In his poem ‘Selling Bhagavan’, Iboishak makes an ironic comment on materialism by saying that his wife only “wants money, gold too”<sup>57</sup> which he cannot afford.

Through the use of irony and satire, these poets ridicule the people for their corruption and materialism:

You say with all my acquired learning  
a mechanic, a clerk, class III officer  
earn much more than me...<sup>58</sup>

Education becomes meaningless in a corrupted region where government officials like a mechanic, a clerk and class II officers earn much more than those people who are more educated and placed in higher ranks.

Politicians are a source of constant irony and satire. They are busy with nothing else except “ laying a stone here / cutting a ribbon there ”<sup>59</sup> and showering praises on the dead elsewhere. As Murasing says in his poem ‘Panic’, these politicians dread the “fire”<sup>60</sup> emitted by the people. They panic when people protest against them out of hunger and frustration. They “...give an inch and take a foot / and their promises are the latest jokes.”<sup>61</sup>

However even in a land filled with violence, bloodshed, hatred, revenge and corruption, nature’s presence is felt even in the face of sure destruction:

The haunting *madhavi* fragrance escapes the rustle of spring,  
It is acrid with the smell of gunpowder<sup>62</sup>

Poets like Phookan persistently long for renewal and search for a better world, “ I have seen several times / the sighing hand of his / among countless hands.”<sup>63</sup> Even though destructive forces seem to have been let loose in the world, he still has immense faith in humanity. He urges people not to look at life in a negative way but to be positive:

No do not tell me  
we shall never arrive

No water in the river

No fire in the water<sup>64</sup>

In his poem 'Dancing Earth', the earth dances in "desperate torment", "indignation" but ultimately in ecstasy. The poet believes in the survival of humanity against all odds. Even though he knows that his voice is nothing more significant "than the chirping of crickets" but he still asks people to celebrate life for what it is :

Stones being hard water being cold

Fire burning

Peacocks spreading their florid feathers<sup>65</sup>

Confronting the paradox has always been a challenge for the poets of this region. They articulate the contradictions and speak about them in order to be able to make sense of the senselessness around them where "tradition rubs shoulders with modernity, folk rhythms jostle uneasily with the western pop, virgin forests stand a mute testimony to the debauchery of urban life, and recalcitrant nativism co-exists with the 'otherness' of the outsiders".<sup>66</sup> They succeed to the extent that they are able to recognise and accept the realities of a conflicting world.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Arundhati Subramanian, "Chandrakanta Murasingh," India-Poetry International Web 1 March 2007, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2716](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2716)>.
- <sup>2</sup>Rana Nayar, "Poetry From The Troubled Zone," Kavya Bharati 15 (2003) 125-131.
- <sup>3</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "A Libran Horoscope," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 43-44.
- <sup>4</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "The Strange Affair of Robin S Ngangom," The Desire of Roots (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006) 65-71.
- <sup>5</sup>Ngangom, "Homeland I Left," Words and the Silence (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1998) 10-11.
- <sup>6</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, "Hiraeth," Kavya Bharati 15<sup>th</sup> ser. (2003) 58.
- <sup>7</sup>Nongkynrih, "Waking Sounds," The Journal of The Poetry Society (India) 16.1-2 (2005) 21.
- <sup>8</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007 <[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup>Ngangom, "The First Rain," The Desire of Roots 78-80.

<sup>10</sup>Thangjam Ibopishak, "The Land of The Half-Humans," trans. Robin S Ngangom, Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast, eds. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Robin S Ngangom (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 93-94.

<sup>11</sup>Arundhati Subramanian, "Thangjam Ibopishak Singh," India-Poetry International Web 1 March 2007, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=6290](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=6290)>.

<sup>12</sup>Ibopishak, "I Want to be Killed by an Indian Bullet," trans. Robin S Ngangom India-Poetry International Web 1 March 2007, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=6316](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=6316)>.

<sup>13</sup>Tarun Bhartiya, "Liberal Nightmares: A Manual of Northeastern Dreams," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 November 2007 <[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/02\\_tarun\\_bhartiya.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/02_tarun_bhartiya.pdf)>

<sup>14</sup>Chandrakanta Murasingh, "Translation," trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems (Agartala: Smt. Shima Pal, 2005) 59.

<sup>15</sup>Murasingh, "The One Word I Must Say," trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems 63.

- <sup>16</sup>Arundhati Subramanian, "Chandrakanta Murasingh," India-Poetry International Web 1 March 2007, 27 March 2007 <[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2716](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2716)>.
- <sup>17</sup>Murasingh, "The One Word I Must Say," trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems 63.
- <sup>18</sup>Mona Zote, "What Poetry Means to Ernestina in Peril," The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall ed. Geeti Sen (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 66-67.
- <sup>19</sup>Zote, "Gunrunning," Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 203.
- <sup>20</sup>Nini Lungalang, "Dot," Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 229-230.
- <sup>21</sup>Nilmani Phookan, "Poems," trans. Hiren Gohain, Anthology eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 52-56.
- <sup>22</sup>Nongkynrih, "But Faith Comes and Goes," Moments (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1992) 10.
- <sup>23</sup>Phookan, "Nobody is Here," trans. Krishna Dulal Barua, Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007) 85-86.
- <sup>24</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: II (Dainthlen)," Moments 24-26.

- <sup>25</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: III (Likai)," Moments 27-31.
- <sup>26</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: IV (Sngi Thiang)," Moments 32-34.
- <sup>27</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: V (Khoh Ramhah)," Moments 35-37.
- <sup>28</sup>Mamang Dai, "The Balm of Time," River Poems (Calcutta: writers Workshop Publication, 2004) 57-58.
- <sup>29</sup>Dai, "The Voice of the Mountain," Indian Literature 228<sup>th</sup> ser. XLIX.4 (2005) 87-88.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibopishak, "Assam," New Frontiers 2.1 (2000) 70-71.
- <sup>31</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: II (Dainthlen)," Moments 24-26.
- <sup>32</sup>T. Ao, "Lament For Earth," Songs that Tell (Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1988) 45-47.
- <sup>33</sup>Nongkynrih, "Lawshotun," Chandrabhaga 10<sup>th</sup> ns (2004) 47-48.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibopishak, "Meghalaya," Indian Literature 211<sup>th</sup> p.90-92.
- <sup>35</sup>Nongkynrih, "A Day In Cherrapunjee: II (Dainthlen)," Moments 24-26.
- <sup>36</sup>Temsula Ao, "The Bald Giant," Songs from Here and There (Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003) 1-2.

- <sup>37</sup>Ao, "December Rain," Songs of Many Moods (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1995) 55-56.
- <sup>38</sup>Jayanta Mahapatra, "Foreward," Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom XII.
- <sup>39</sup>Ngangom, "Poem for Joseph," The Desire of Roots 74.
- <sup>40</sup>Ngangom, "The First Rain," The Desire of Roots 79-80.
- <sup>41</sup>Ngangom, "Your Name Protects," The Desire of Roots 50.
- <sup>42</sup>Dai, "The Missing Link," River Poems 11-12.
- <sup>43</sup>Nongkynrih, "Identification," Indian Literature 221<sup>st</sup> ser.XLVIII.3 (2004) 28-29.
- <sup>44</sup>Anupama Basumatary, "An Evening on the Bank of the Ganges," trans. Arunabha Bhuyan, Anthology, eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 21-22.
- <sup>45</sup>Basumatary, "Sculptor," trans. Shoneet Bijoy Das, Anthology eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 20.
- <sup>46</sup>Nini Lungalang, "Nocturne," Anthology eds. Nongkynrih and Ngangom 227-228.
- <sup>47</sup>Ao, "Prayer for a Monolith," Songs from Here and There 3-5.
- <sup>48</sup>Ngangom, "To a Woman from Southeastern Hills," The Desire of Roots 18-20.

- <sup>49</sup>Ngangom, "From The Land Of The Seven Huts," Words and the Silence 19.
- <sup>50</sup>Nongkynrih, "Only Strange Flowers have Come to Bloom," Indian Literature 186<sup>th</sup> ser. XLII (1998) 53.
- <sup>51</sup>Murasingh, "Gudak," trans. Prof. Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems 21.
- <sup>52</sup>Murasingh, "O, Poor Hachukrai," trans. Dr. Bamapada Mukherjee, Select Poems 33.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibopishak, "Roaming The Villages At Evening," Indian Literature 179<sup>th</sup> ser.21-24.
- <sup>54</sup>Robin S Ngangom, "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1April 2007 <[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03\\_robin.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06-turbulence/03_robin.pdf)>.
- <sup>55</sup>Lungalang, "Going Home," Anthology, eds.Nongkynrih, and Ngangom 228-229.
- <sup>56</sup>Ngangom, "The Lost Generation of Manipur," Words and the Silence 26-27.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibopishak, "Selling Bhagavan," trans.Robin S Ngangom, Indian Literature 224<sup>th</sup> ser.XLVIII(2004).
- <sup>58</sup>Ngangom, "Values," Words and the Silence 64-65.

- <sup>59</sup>Nongkynrih, "Diary of a Newsman," Chandrabhaga 1<sup>st</sup> ser. (2000)77-78.
- <sup>60</sup>Murasingh, "Panic," trans.Prof.Saroj Chaudhuri, Select Poems 37.
- <sup>61</sup>Ngangom, "Racial Progression," Words and the Silence 20-21.
- <sup>62</sup>Murasingh, "Forest-1987," trans.Bamapada Mukherjee, Anthology, eds.Nongkynrih,and Ngangom 254.
- <sup>63</sup>Phookan, "Poem," trans.Nirendra Nath Thakuria, Anthology, eds.Nongkynrih, and Ngangom 59.
- <sup>64</sup>Phookan, "The Dancing Earth,"trans Hiren Gohain, Indian Literature 224<sup>th</sup> ser. XLVIII.6(2004)54-58.
- <sup>65</sup>Phookan, "what were we talking about,"trans. Krishna Dulal Barua, Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan 93-95.
- <sup>66</sup>Rana Nayar, "Poetry From The Troubled Zone," Kavya Bharati 15<sup>th</sup> ser.(2003)125-131.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The contemporary poetry of North East India provides insight into a region that is lush, with verdant forests, hills, valleys, rivers, and waterfalls. Myths and folklore tell of “ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors”.<sup>1</sup> The other aspect of its poetry reflects the terror and grief of warfare and tragedies of wasted lives that have taken over the region. This poetry is also pregnant with images of violence, corruption, politics as also of the countryside, rhythms of village life and its rich cultural heritage. Mamang Dai constantly brings out this double-edged aspect of poetry, “we wade through gutted entrails slippery with blood, and we run through the green bamboo crushing earthworms and frogs, living amidst death and resurrection all at the same time”.<sup>2</sup>

Poets from this region grapple with the changes that have taken place in their land and also with the violence that has been associated with it. As Robin S Ngangom says, “hostile forces have often compelled poetry to burrow deeper into itself, it has retreated into its shell of obscurity and isolation. In such precarious times, writing poetry is always a defiant gesture that poets make against power and money, insensitivity and terror”.<sup>3</sup>

He talks about his homeland, Manipur, which has become ugly with corruption, drugs and AIDS. People have lost the old values but he hopes for the birth of a meaningful poetry that will transform them. Ibopishak too, speaks about his state Manipur and confesses that he is always caught up in issues like “violence, fear, moral dessication and political turmoil”<sup>4</sup> besieging his land.

Since, North East India has been synonymous with militancy, poets from the region cannot remain silent when they are witness to horrifying incidents. Their poetry has always reflected the chaos that has erupted in the region. They talk of people who live in constant fear, who sometimes are unable to express their feelings freely due to the terrorism that prevails over all of them. Chandrakanta Murasingh 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”.<sup>5</sup> He tells us how common people are caught in the crossfire between the two. He feels that “guns” will not bring any solution.

They speak of innocent people being killed in fake encounters and also of others who have had to flee to jungles to escape from the torture of the Indian Army. They sympathise with the young who join rebel groups

but make waste of their lives. They enunciate conflicts and analyse the ideologies of people who want to maintain their identity; critiquing a society in poetry that sees everyone as being “victims” where there can be no “winners”.<sup>6</sup>

These poets also talk about the corruption and materialism which are prevalent in the region. Money rules the region and everything is bought and sold, including honour. However, against all odds some of these poets still believe in the survival of humanity. Poetry for some of them “is the voice of humanity” and “each poem is a human moment... Moment of inexpressible joy and sorrow, culminating in a silent but sure regeneration of awareness”.<sup>7</sup>

The injustice that prevails in the region finds expression in the use of irony and satire. Politicians are ridiculed for the vices that create instability in the region. People are warned of the social dangers that lie ahead. Their poetry gives one a picture of a troubled-torn region that is “weighed down by acute security-related dilemmas”<sup>8</sup> and which has a “keen political edge, reflecting a zeitgeist of mounting unease and menace - a feature typical of contemporary writing from the Northeast”.<sup>9</sup>

Women poets like Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalang and Mona Zote also raise their voice against the violence, conflict and turmoil that has engulfed the region. Their concern for the problems that confront their society may be seen in the agony, the sense of loss and the quest for identity that identifies their poetry. Anupama Basumatary talks of loneliness lurking in the heart of a human being. These are sensitive areas of concern that connect these women poets with one another.

Alongside these themes of violence, corruption and politics, the poets from the region also use myths in their poetry. Rooted in their past, their land and people, they talk of their origin and creation myths, traditions, rituals, festivals and dances. They also talk of their ancestors and compare the past with the cruel present. They identify places that are linked to myths. They draw stories from their legends and use them as themes in their poetry. These deal with tragic love affairs, relationships between human beings and animals and characters tragically touched by fate. They also talk of their gods and goddesses, their kings and chiefs who ruled them in the past.

As has already been discussed in the preceding chapter, there is a sense of rootedness in many of the poems written by the women poets from North East India:

The history of our race  
begins with the place of stories  
we do not know if the language we speak  
belongs to a written past<sup>10</sup>

Mamang Dai goes back to the past to trace the origin of her race as she searches for identity. Temsula Ao uses the past to highlight the present. Both use myths and legends as themes that enable them to situate themselves and their people in their history.

Above all there is an overwhelming presence of nature in their poems. A poet like Anupama Basumatary “gives us a feel of alien realities,”<sup>11</sup> her sensitivity to nature being “moulded by a childhood spent in rural Assam among her Bodo brethren”.<sup>12</sup> These poets talk about a village life, sunset, a farmer or a cowherd. In his book, ‘Strangers of the Mist’, Sanjoy Hazarika poses such questions: “which other area has such beauty among its people and its environment?...which other area can match it in the sheer raw power of nature: whether it is the Brahmaputra that resembles

a great sea during its rain-swollen, flood-hungry days; or the force of its gales and the grace of its waterfalls, the lushness of its forests and bamboo thickets. And the solitude of its spirit found in the midst of the mountains”<sup>13</sup>. The unfailing images of beauty tell of their green hills and valleys, waterfalls and rivers. But the poets express sadness and disappointment to see the destruction of nature and the land turning barren, even as rivers are being polluted. They vent their anger at those who are the cause of destruction.

The erosion of tradition and culture is a worrying aspect of the poets’ insight into everyday life. The alien culture that has infected the region causes them to look back at their past with nostalgia. The “outsiders” who have suppressed them and outnumbered them are the object of scorn and disillusionment in much of their poetry. Nongkynrih speaks about the urbanization of a town that now emits strange urban sounds. The degraded social conditions of the present juxtapose with the mythical perfection of the past. These form a significant dimension of poetry that moves backwards and forwards in time, in order to establish a pattern of thought and understanding. The presence of nature does not outweigh the images of violence that erupts in their poetry. Rather these poets reveal an innate

ability to understand the true nature of things, thereby taking an unambiguous stand against violence and yet refusing to idealise the past.

According to Nilmani Phookan, all “art aims at developing the full sensibility of man. It is poetry’s function also to humanise. The creative power in man, his capacity to realize truth in experience, the subtle sense of right and wrong, the expansion of the human consciousness, to freshen the impulses, to make imagination create as well as see into the nature of things - all this can be achieved through poetry”.<sup>14</sup> This is true in the case of poets from North East India who insist upon making themselves heard.

Poetry from North East India thus reflects two opposite worlds – the world of myth and nature on one hand and the world of violence and bloodshed on the other. These poets have skillfully manoeuvred their poetry through these paradoxical worlds. While caught up in issues like insurgency, corruption, political turmoil and conflict that have taken over everyday life, their poetry also reveals the beauty of natural landscapes and the enduring quality of their myths and legends. The coexistence of these paradoxical worlds in their poetry is a strong motif that identifies them as being poets of this region, consciously writing about the rifts that divide and

control them. Though they are rooted to their land, yet their poetry has a universality that communicates itself to all readers.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Sanjoy Hazarika, Stangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India's Northeast(New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt.Ltd,1995)xvii.

<sup>2</sup>Mamang Dai , “ North East Poetry,” Muse India the literary ejournal , Jul-Aug 2006 , 27 March < <http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>

<sup>3</sup>Robin S Ngangom , “ Poetry in a Time of Terror ,” Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence2006, 1 April 2007 [http:// www.sarai.net/publication/readers/06-turbulence/03robin:prof](http://www.sarai.net/publication/readers/06-turbulence/03robin:prof)>.

<sup>4</sup>Arundhati Subramanian,“Thangjam Ibopishak Singh,”India-Poetry InternationalWeb,1March2005,27March<[http://india.internationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?objid=6290](http://india.internationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?objid=6290)>

<sup>5</sup>Arundhati Subramanian, “Chandrakanta Murasingh,” India-Poetry InternationalWeb1March2005,27March<[http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?objid=2716](http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?objid=2716)>

<sup>6</sup> Tamsula Ao, These Hills Called Home Stories from a War Zone (New Delhi: Zubaan Penguin Pubs.)x.

<sup>7</sup>“Capturing the Essence of Humanity in Poetry,”

BipuljyotiSakia’sHomePage7Oct2007,17November2007

<<http://www.geocities.com/bipuljyoti/author/nilmoni.html>>.

<sup>8</sup>Jaideep Saikia, ed.prolegomena , Frontier in Flames by Saikia(New Delhi : Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd , 2007)xix.

<sup>9</sup>Arundhati Subramanian , “Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih ,” India-Poetry InternationalWeb,1March2005,27March2007

<[http://India.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=6289](http://India.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=6289)>

<sup>10</sup>Mamang Dai, “Obscure Place,” Indian Literature XLIX.4 (2005):85.

<sup>11</sup>Pradip Acharya, “The Renaissance of Elegy: Assamese Poetry, 1975-95,” Indian Literature 177<sup>th</sup> ser.XL.1(1997):7-9.

<sup>12</sup>Sudipta Bhattacharjee , “ An ode to the east wind,” Telegraph 8 Dec (1995).

<sup>13</sup> Hazarika , Stangers of the Mist xx.

<sup>14</sup>Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, “An interview with Nilmani Phookan,” India-Poetry International Web, 1 March 2005, 27 March 2007

<[http://India.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=2710](http://India.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=2710)>

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Nongkynrih, Kympham Sing, and Robin S. Ngangom, eds. Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast. Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003.

Ao, Temsula. Songs from Here and There. Shillong: NEHU Publications, 2003.

Songs of Many Moods. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1995.

Songs That Try To Say. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1992.

Songs That Tell. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 1988.

Dai, Mamang. River Poems. Calcutta: Writers Workshop Publication, 2004.

Department of English, Nagaland University, ed. Poetry from Nagaland. New Delhi: Savio Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2005.

Jenkins, Nigel, ed. Khasia in Gwalia. Port Talbot Wales: Alun Books, 1995.

Lungalang, Nini. Mourning Years. Dimapur: Write-Publications, 1992.

Murasingh, Chandrakanta. Select Poems . Agartala: Smt. Shima Pal, 2005.

Ngangom, Robin S. The Desire of Roots. Cuttack: Chandrabhaga

Original Publication, 2006.

Time's Crossroads. Hyderabad: Orient Longman

Limited, 1994.

Words and the Silence. Calcutta: Writers

Workshop Publication, 1988.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. Moments. Calcutta: Writers' Workshop

Publication, 1992.

The Sieve. Calcutta: Writers Workshop

Publication, 1992.

Phookan, Nilmani. Selected Poems of Nilmani Phookan. Trans.Krishna

Dulal Barua. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007.

**Secondary Sources:**

Ahmed, Mehtabuddin, and Prosenjit Chowdhury, eds. The Turbulent North

East. New Delhi: Akshar Publications, 1996.

Ao, Tamsula. The Hills Called Home Stories from a War Zone. New Delhi:

Zubaan Pubs, 2006.

- Biswas, Prosenjit, and C. Joshua Thomas, eds. India's North-East: Meaning, Metaphor and Methods, Essays of Concern and Commitment. New Delhi: Regency Publication, 2003.
- Datta, P. S, ed. North East And The Indian State: Paradoxes of a Periphery. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1995.
- Dai, Mamang. Legends of Pensam. New Delhi: Penguin Books Pvt.Ltd,2006.
- Doty, William G. Myth: A Handbook. London: Greenwood Press, 2005.
- Elwin, Verrier. Myths of the North-East Frontier of India. Shillong: T. P. Khaund, 1958.
- Hazarika, Sanjoy. Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India's Northeast. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 1995.
- Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007.
- Phukon, Girin. Politics of Regionalism In North-East India. Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1996.
- Saikia, Jaideep, ed. Frontier in Flames: North East India in Turmoil. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2007.
- Sen, Geeti, ed. The North-east: Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall.

New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Sengupta, Sarthak. Tribal Studies in North East India. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002.

Subha, T B, and Sujit Som, eds. Between Ethnography and fiction: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Questions in India. New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2005.

**Articles:**

Acharya, Pradip. "Discerning Voices." Indian Literature 212<sup>th</sup> ser.XLVI.6(2002):70-74.

"The Renaissance of Elegy: Assamese Poetry, 1975-1995." Indian Literature 177<sup>th</sup> ser.XL.1(1997):7-9.

Barua, Sanchet. "North East: does agony of the people matter?" Meghalaya Guardian 30 Aug. 2007.

Barua, Sanchet. "N-E can destabilise India more than Kashmir." Shillong Times 2 July 2007.

Bhattacharjee, Sudipta. "An ode to the east wind." Telegraph 8 Dec. (1995).

Dai, Mamang. "The Voice of the Mountain." Indian Literature 228<sup>th</sup> ser. XLIX.4 (2005) 87-88.

Dai, Mamang . “Obscure Place.” Indian Literature XLIX.4 (2005):85.

Das,Manoj. “Tribals in Indian Narratives.” Indian Literature: Sahitya Akademi’s Bi-Monthly Journal XLVIII No. 3 (2004).

Deka, Harekrishna. “Reading Nilmani Phukan’s Poetry.” Indian Literature 147<sup>th</sup> ser.XLVI.6(2002)146-151.

Ibopishak, Thangjam. “Poem.” trans. Robin S Ngangom, Indian Literature 156<sup>th</sup> ser.p26.

Lyngdoh, A H Scott. “Bridging the gap with North-East.” Shillong Times 30 July 2007.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Singh. “Forebodings.” NEWFrontiers 1.1 (1998)49.  
 “The Parking Lot.” Telegraph 4 Sept. 1994.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. “The Colours of Truth.” Indian Literature 221<sup>st</sup> ser.XLVIII.3 (2004): 25.

“Rain Song 2000.” Chandrabhaga ns (2004)  
 49- 50.

“Waking Sounds.” The Journal of the Poetry Society (India) 16.1-2 (2005): 20.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. "Play of the Absurb." Kavya Bharati (2003):

53- 54.

"Hiraeth." Kavya Bharati 15<sup>th</sup> ser. (2003) 58.

"Waking Sounds." The Journal of The Poetry

Society (India) 16.1-2 (2005) 21.

Ngangom, Robin S. "Northeast Literature and The Art of Witness." New

Frontiers: A Journal of the North East Writers' Forum 2.1 (2000).

Nayar, Rana. "Poetry from the Troubled Zone". Kavya Bharati 15 (2003):

125-131.

Phookan, Nilmani. "The Dancing Art". Indian Literature 224<sup>th</sup> ser XLVIII.6

(2004): 54-58.

"Mating Music." trans. Nirendra Nath Thakuria,

Chandrabhaga 2<sup>nd</sup> ns (2000): 104.

Sharma, Ramachandra. "On Translating Poetry." Indian Literature: Sahitya

Akademi's Bi-Monthly Journal XLIII No. 2 (1999).

Zote, Mona. "Rez." Indian Literature 233<sup>th</sup>ser.L.3(2006)23-25.

Mamang Dai . " North East Poetry." Muse India the literary ejournal Jul-

Aug 2006 , 27 March < <http://www.museindia.com/showcont.asp?id=286>>

Bhartiya, Tarun. "Liberal Nightmares: A Manual of Northeastern Dreams." Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006 1 November 2007  
<[http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06\\_turbulence/02\\_tarun\\_bhartiya.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/06_turbulence/02_tarun_bhartiya.pdf)>

"Capturing the Essence of Humanity in Poetry," Muse India the literary ejournal 7 Oct 2007, 17 November 2007 <<http://www.geocities.com/bipuljyoti/author/nilmoni.html>>.

Ngangom, Robin S. "Poetry in a Time of Terror," Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence 2006, 1 April 2007 <http://www.sarai.net/publication/readers/06-turbulence/03robin:prof>>.

Refer to India-Poetry International Web for Arundhati Subramanian's articles on the poets.

### **Interviews:**

Ao, Tamsula. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2007.

Basumatary, Anupama. Personal interview. 14 July 2007.

Dai, Mamang. E-mail interview. 4 July 2008.

Murasingh, Chandrakanta. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2007.

Ngangom, Robin S: Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2007.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. Personal interview. 26 Sept. 2007

Phookan, Nilmani. Personal interview. 13 July 2007

Zote, Mona. Telephone interview. 10 Mar. 2007

**BIO-DATA**

NAME: NAZINA CHANGME W.MOMIN

DEGREE: M.Phil

DEPARTMENT: ENGLISH

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: The "Uneasy Coexistence of Paradoxical Worlds" in Contemporary Poetry from North East India.

DATE OF ADMISSION: 14 August 2006

COMMENCEMENT OF DISSERTATION: March 2007

**APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

1. BPGS: 26 April 2007

2. SCHOOL BOARD REGISTRATION NO.: 265

DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION 26 April 2008

EXTENSION One semester

*Solter Nyein 14/7/08*  
HEAD

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

NEHU LIBRARY  
Acc. No. 102901  
Date 22-4-09  
Class  
Sub. Head  
Enter by  
Transcribed by