
Exploring the Voice of Ecological Consciousness in Mamang Dai's The Legends of Pensam and Indira Goswami's The Man from Chinnamasta.

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Abstract:

We live in a mysterious universe filled with great forces of life and death, creation, destruction, cycling and recycling of natural laws. Nature provides not only for material growth but supports our spiritual growth within us. So, nature holds forth a meaning and value to us. But in modern times, environment is becoming bad to worse. Unsustainable human activities and other human centredness threatens human existence which in turn brings great destruction to all the life forms in the universe. Thus, this inequality between human and nature is deeply connected with inequalities in human society. As all cultures are rooted in nature, therefore there requires an exploration of return to values, beliefs and ethics that connects human beings with natural environment against inequalities. This aesthetic value holds all life together and makes it collectively meaningful. The spiritual understandings of the value of nature guide people to develop moral responsibilities towards nature. Mamang Dai, a prominent novelist from North east India is known for her strong ecological concerns. She addresses on the impact of development on tribal communities and reflects on traditional beliefs and animism. Indira Goswami, another writer from North East India mostly focuses on the interconnectedness of women, animals and nature and explores the patriarchal structures that perpetuate their exploitation in her writings. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to explore the eco-consciousness which is crucial for sustainable future in selected fiction of Mamang Dai and Indira Goswami.

Key Words: Nature, Inequalities, Spirituality, Moral responsibility, Eco-consciousness

Introduction:

Due to the advent of colonisation and christianization in a land like India with its heterogenous multi ethnic culture and huge populations with diverse perceptions, people here suffer from environmental crisis and economic gap. The postcolonial writings from India's Northeast very clearly represent the voice of those in northeast India who could not stand for themselves in the colonial period. They had to depend on the west to express themselves

culturally. Dr. H. Vanlalhruais in 'Voices from the Margins: Revealing the Marginalisation of the North East India' talks about the different projections of North East India that "Discourse on the concept of North East by mainstream officials, scholars, medias and social scientists have always been an enterprise implicit in the agenda of India's nationalism. The term North East was invented by the colonialist to identify a geographical area, later on adopted by Indian officials, intellectuals and medias for administrative and other suspicious political reasons. The term certainly requires scrutiny in the light of contemporary political situations" (289). So, in the postcolonial period through their powerful writings, the northeast writers represent themselves and tell their own stories of loneliness, war and show their love and consciousness for ecology of their lands. Thus, literature became an important medium for them to create a place and space for themselves and acquire an identity of their own.

Ecological consciousness is one of the dominant feature of the northeastern literature. Like the poetry of the Romantic age of English literature, their poetry is return to nature. It revives pantheism and says that nature is divine. Their literature enshrines the basic Indian culture and values of nature to be compassionate to nature and to live in harmony with it. Some of the creatures of nature are worshipped and linked to deities of God. They believe that their sanctity purifies the whole environment. Just as the pantheistic poet, Wordsworth who is concerned more with the spiritual than the external beauties of nature that he finds under the sensuous manifestation of nature, northeast writers spiritualises and intellectualises nature. But modernization and industrialisation in this marginalised region has made human beings to forget the ageold bond they share with nature. Moji Riba in her literary piece 'Rites, in passing' rightly says that "With progress and modernity, changes in the traditional belief systems and lifestyle have become inevitable" (2). This has compelled the writers of this region to be conscious about the future of both nature and civilisation. They have become one in transition amidst great diversity in the face of modernity. Thus, the eco-cultural conscious tone finds, expression in the northeastern writings. For example, there are myths and legends relating to nature among the tribal communities of Northeast, i.e. the Aos of Nagaland believe that when a people dies, the soul takes the shape of a bird or an insect. This concept exist among the tribal natives of Nagaland in their traditional myths and legends. This human- nature relationship, the oneness of the human beings with the nature is best expressed in the following lines of the Nagaland writer, Temsula Ao:

They are chanting prayer
But I watch a lonely hawk
Soaring Amidst the swirling blue
Wings darken
The whiteness
Of the rushing clouds ('The soul bird', 1-7)

Ecology which is the relationship of the living and non-living to their environment has gained immense popularity in the recent year as people have become more concerned about the deteriorating environment and co-system owing to its moral concern. The troubled

relation between anthropocentrism and eco centrism has led to the emergence of environmental ethics where moral or ethical dilemma is always there. Aldo Leopold in his essay 'The Land Ethics' extends how one perceives nature as resources, as morality is related to human participation in environment. He says: "There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is... an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity." (238- 239). Peter Barry in Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory says that nature does not really exist but actually it is an entity which affects us and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it. Thus, the world of humanity and ecology is reciprocal. Nature and humans construct one another. Moreover, the outlook of nature is a manifestation of humans. For example, the trees are not trees for us once we learn its electromagnetic and optical side. On the other hand, cultures depend on its natural surroundings. Both are dependent on each other. As both need one another, so moral consideration of nature is always important because preserving, or degrading nature seems affect humans. In Chapter 4 'Motherhood in Indian Epics' in the thesis titled Motherhood in the Indian epics (2007), Smriti A Prasad writes "There is a beautiful invocation to Earth in the Ma'at Book of Shadows.

Hail the Mother of Earth, Grand Mother of all.

Hail Earth, the daughter of Heaven!

Earth, whose life blood is the salty sea.

Whose bones are the mighty mountains.

Whose belly is pregnant with life!

So, like every ancient culture, Earth was considered to be the primal mother by the ancient Hindus as shown in the Indian Epics. Man was born by her grace and in death, found refuge in her. The many fruits, crops and ores were her gifts to her children. Some tribes refused to till her for fear of injuring her. The cyclical movement of seasons, the growth and decay of the vegetation, gave the initial idea of the death and resurrection. Gods, and the seed of religion was planted in the ancient minds. The earth is still respected as mother, who showers us with her bounties but sometimes as an angry mother punishes us with storms and earthquakes, volcanoes and such to remind us that we are crossing the line and we are not invincible. The disasters that earlier flourishing culture had to face, are waiting to happen if we do not treat her with respect. And so the cycle of creation and dissolution will continue. (85-86). There is another example in the same chapter : " Water in all myths is perceived as the feminine principle from whose womb all is created. The Devi Sukta says, My origin is in the Waters, in the ocean Thence I am spread through all existing worlds and even touch the heaven with my forehead. (97)

Nature has some innate significance that it bears within. There is this chain of life and dependency wherein no entity can be taken in isolation. Ecological evidences shows that everything depends on everything else in an inter-web of culture-nature totality. We see many contributions of culture for preservation of environment. In Chapter 4 titled

‘Motherhood in Indian Epics’ of the thesis Motherhood in the Indian epics(2007) ,Smriti A Prasad writes “ In Atharva Veda (10/10), we get a glimpse of the divine nature of the cow: “The cow alone is called Immortality, the cow alone is worshipped as death.

The cow became this universe, gods, manes, Asuras and seers ”

The gods live by cow, and also the man lives by the cow;

The cow is this whole world as far as the sun looks down.”

In the Indian Epics there is mention of Sagarmanthan by the Gods and Demons to procure the amrita from the milky ocean. Many auspicious objects came out and one was Kamadhenu, the wish fulfilling cow. This set the tone in the epics of the divine nature of the cow”(93). Thus, it shows the interrelationship between nature and culture. Bibhash Choudhury in ‘ Colophon – Writings From North East India’(2022) rightly comments that “creation myths are crucial in creating the ambience for the sense of belonging, an essential factor in the gelling of individuals through camaraderie that finds a common ground in culture(39)”. So, he calls for a “more adaptive understanding” (47) “when it comes to seeing the cultural heritage through the prism of identifiable myths and legends of people (47)”. Culture is shaped by nature and in turn influence how humans interact and perceive the natural world. As mentioned in ‘The role of Culture in Environmental Sustainability’ about culture’s important role in our society that “culture explains how natural resources are appreciated by the society (264).”

Deep Ecologists are critical of the Western man who are responsible for the radical divorce between nature and himself . They advocate that the postmodern man may have to learn from the old, archaic ways of the less civilized humanity who lived with nature without being too anthropocentric. In the article ‘Deep Ecology : Contemporary Bioethical Trends’, Sandra Mijac and Goran Slivsek “ Deep ecology are manifested in its basic statement about the concept of intrinsic values, which states that every part of nature is valuable in itself and not because of higher goals(human for instance).In that regard, humans are not part of nature and not its highest achievement.....Naess equalizes all the organisms in the biospheric community and their equality is a consequence of a relational interconnection, which gives them an intrinsic value (132)”. The traditional Indian doctrine of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam for example, literally means that all of creation is one family. It is the manifestation of the Great Chain of Being. It is the realization that each and every object of nature is a part of the intricate web. But due to tremendous change in human beings' attitude towards nature , this spiritual ecology advocates the restoration of the age-old values of honouring the ecosystem so that instead of domination of nature by human beings both of them co-exist peacefully and with perfect harmony. This widening of the self surely brings a radical change to human understanding. So, this spiritual ecology or eco mysticism which is based on a sacred relationship with earth & all beings irrespective of caste, class etc. defines a path for self realization and can be a great source to overcome the present problems.

The voice of ecological consciousness is observed in some fictional works of

Northeastern region. This paper investigates the voice of eco mysticism as the voice of ecological consciousness in the two select narratives of the region: Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* & Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta*. Emphasizing the need for a balance between human -animal environment, the two narratives mainly have focused the useless destruction of animals and ecological balance by a class of people.

Mamang Dai is a celebrated writer in English of Arunachal Pradesh. Her novel *The legends of Pensam* has a strong ecological concern. The Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh has a rich cultural and ecological heritage. The Adi practice, an animistic faith that is constructed around forest ecology. For them, faith is everything. Their faith in nature prompts coexistence with the natural world. So, these value systems which are presented from an ecological point of view crucial for the tribal world so that it can be a conscious way of asserting an identity of the marginalised people whose voices have been suppressed due to the changes of modernity. Dai starts the book with the story of a boy Hoxo who considers his birth to be his ultimate blessing. He was carried by one Lutor to his village after returning from his work on a road project by the migluns (British). Hoxo plays a key role in the stories that describes tribal beliefs and the modern development that throw their lives into confusions. The earlier pristine environment has faced degradation due to modernity and ecological crisis. It is described very vividly in the novel :
The river cuts through our land as before in its long journey to the sea. In spring the red flower still blaze against our sky. But the old people now, the few of them alive, turn slowly in their sleep as the fires burn down to a heap of ash. In the middle of the night a bird swoops low and calls out in a wild, staccato note. The thatch rustles.! the bamboo creaks. The darkness is full of breath and sighs. (30)

Mamang Dai through her ecological description in the stories has assorted an identity of Arunachal Pradesh and its tribes by associating the tribal life with nature. Green is the revival ultimate resort they find from their confusions of their lives. Thus, the novel advocates the revival of tradition i.e. the age old bond between the human and the natural world as a way of retaining the identity of the tribal communities in this age of globalisation. In the chapter 'Small Histories recalled in the season of rain' there is the description of the impact of the globalisation in the natural order when the British decided to build the still well road along the mountains. Due to the cargo trucks and bulldozers, the jungle burst into flame as the mountain tops were blown off. The narrator describes that no other road in the world had taken as high a toll of human lives as this one; it has been dubbed a 'man-a-mile road'. But when Jules came, he talks about the forest management though he belongs to the same white race and says that we didn't value what we had & seem too eager to sell out everything to anyone who came with a little money. Hoxo, who have faith in his roots support him that there had existed a green and virgin land under a just rule. He adds "Everything good and bad, was inevitable. We need courage and faith in the face of change". Thus, through new ecological virtues, Jules and Hoxo protest against degradation of nature. The changing scenario of the world at present has brought radical changes to the environment

and even to the life-style of the tribal people. There seems to be a cultural hegemony in the name of globalisation which has pushed these people to the margin. There seems to be confusion in their traditional world and they are at a loss in this new world. Identity crisis, sense of alienation and loss have started disturbing these people. Going back to their roots of origin is the key to their resistance against these winds of changes. Worshipping and preserving nature, living in complete harmony with nature would help them to restore an identity in this period of transition and crisis. Mamang Dai believes that an eco mystical way of living is the only solution to these problems. Through this living, one finds ultimate peace and harmony with the sacredness of all the creatures of earth as they accept life as a blessing which is the eco mystical way of living. We can note such a eco mystical experiences in nature in the following lines in the third section of the novel 'The Scent of Orange Blossom':

Nothing was complete. But there was comfort in looking at the green hills and the river that she had crossed to become Kao's wife. Together, they would raise a family, guard their land and live among their people observing the ancient customs of their clan. Surely these were enough gifts for one lifetime. (120)

There is another description of how nature is a source of spiritual significance where individuals experience unity with the cosmos, which is found in one of the most remarkable stories of the collection. When the relationship between Nenem and David, a British officer posted in the region leads to a passionate union, she decides not to leave her roots and go with him. She says: "No one dies of love. I loved him, and now I am enough on my own. She marries Kao from her own land and feels complete with her nature. And at the end, when their village is ravaged by floods and has no more place to stay, she could not take the pain and drowns herself in the river, with the nature. Kao in his patient stillness believes: Time will move on and to survive in one piece all one needs is the ferocity of a lion or the heart of an angel (120)". Thus pain creates creativity to redefine oneself in nature. In another story 'Pinyar, the Widow', Pinyar after the death of her husband finds resort in nature far from the crowd. Another story in the novel describes that one Kalen, who suffers from malaria, happened an unusual thing with him. In order to retouch his vigour, he likes to identify himself together with the monkeys of the forest and found himself amongst them. Bodak had the misconception that Kalen might be thinking of how monkey meat was good for the blood of a malaria patient.

The biodiversity of the Northeast region, with a rich flora and fauna has been presented again and again in Goswami's writings. Indira Goswami's novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* is a story about Chinnamasta Jatadhari, a hermit who leads a protest movement against the ritual of animal sacrifice and is supported by some strong-willed youth like Ratnadhar, Bidhibala and Dorothy Brown, a British lady who comes to Kamakhya in search of peace of mind. In the novel, these three vigorous personalities raise a voice of protest, with a conscious ecological sense, against the ritual of animal sacrifice before the goddess Kamakhya. Thus, the novel has a strong ecological perspective as it talks about the

disturbance on the ecological balance due to the ritual of animal sacrifice.

The peaceful co-existence of human beings and animals, an enviable feature of Northeast India, and their mutual congenial relationship have been expressed in her writings. This eco mystical ideal is a significant feature of her writings. This has consciously been explored by the writer to assert a distinctive identity of the region through its ecology: Seuli flowers cast forth distracted fragrance to soften the raw odour of butchered flesh. A hushed whisper of dewdrops brushed the Kendur shrubs, the round flat outenga leaves that snakehooded them, the ripple leaved ashoka, the vast khokam.(1)

Thus, the overall ecology has been explored in the novel which shows the writer's conscious ecological sense. There are many references to the ecology of the region that portray people's love and respect towards nature. The following description of a particular spot in the majestic Brahmaputra is suggestive of eco mystical tone:

He looked back at the mighty Brahmaputra- just where it veered off its course, to take the shape of a sacrificial machete. The waters had receded around Urvashi an island in the river, revealing carvings of Vishnu in his half-lion form, the Narasimha avatar. A strip of sand also lay exposed, like the pelt of a white goat laid out to dry after the sacrifice. (17)

Goswami also shows her reverence for nature by a parallel comparison of nature with women. She talks about the exploitation of women in patriarchal structures which suggest the violation of the natural order. In the novel, the treatment of a 'drunken husband' towards his wife and the language he uses for her are very much suggestive of the plight of women in a male-dominated society.

The man, pounced on her, and grabbed her by the hair, hurling abuses. "You bitch! You should be pounding the paddy at home. How dare you come to this charlatan who has abducted a foreign woman. You whore!.(27)

This is the description of a futile attempt of a woman who had come to seek help from the hermit Jatadhari to mend her drunken husband's waywardness. Thus, Goswami shows that violence against women can also be seen as violence against nature. The violence against the natural order is also emphasised by the novelist by referring to the practice of animal sacrifice. In the novel, Goswami ponders over a debate against this issue of animal sacrifice where she advocates a new one that supports offerings of flowers instead of animal blood before the altar. This redefining of one's identity through new rituals to celebrate sacredness and oneness in nature is an eco-mystical concern. Her ecological concern is well reflected in the novel when the novelist argues that the animal sacrifices is to be abandoned. The novelist takes her own stand through the words of Jatadhari. Describing his initiation as an ascetic and oneness with nature, Goswami illustrates his frightful closeness to nature.

Poisonous serpents had nested in his matted locks. Wild birds had perched on his arms. As Jatadhari is respectful of all creatures, he could

not bear the sight of blood at the goddess' abode. His voice of protest advocating peaceful co-existence of all the creatures is the voice of that ecological consciousness. Creation is a blessing for him. Man is god's creation. Man has many on thing to learn from animals. Only when men animals live in harmony will the world become a paradise. (180)

He even goes to the extent of offering his own blood to abolish the system of animal sacrifice as one of the priests, the chief follower of the ritual asks · "You have asked why dumb animals should be dragged to the altar. You have said that if it is blood that is required, devotees should offer their own. Haven't you? (185)

Feeling compassionate and oneness with all creatures, reverence for the sacredness of nature and return to it are thus the last facet of eco-mysticism after the realisation that creation is a blessing and suffering will be a continuous process unless one finds an alternative to creativity i.e. faith in the sacredness of nature. As Mamang Dai too supports that faith and courage is a great necessity in the face of change. That is all we can do. In this era, anthropocentric ideals has been shifted to eco centric principles due to human beings' growing sense of awareness for protecting the ecology of the planet. In her novel, Goswami describes people like Dorothy Brown and others who comes near Jatadhari in the jungles and with birds and animals to attain a sense of absolute peace for their sufferings. This is the basic rule of eco mysticism. Nature, besides being treated as the mother of benevolence, Goswami also bestows a sense of wonder in nature according to the traditional faith. Since ancient times, people worship natural objects because they think nature has also an evil part in it. To get rid of the evil, they show respect to nature through worship. Thus, through myths and legends Goswami treats nature as an abode of mysticism or holiness through which one can realise oneself to live in complete harmony or sacred relationship with the earth &all beings. Mamang Dai too describes in her novel the deaths of people caused by displeased nature or spirits. Thus, the final peace is possible if the individual is able to be one with and accept other living and non living entities as part of the same existence as one self. In this northeastern region of India, there has an intimacy between humanity and environment as the ethnic communities live in deep contact with nature. Religion and culture has a deep history in this part of the land of India, as much as oppression, domination and resistance. But degeneration of the ecological values and in turn their traditional values due to modernisation has been the great concern of the age. Environmental ethics and ecological consciousness has attained great momentum recently. Preservation of the rich eco-cultural heritage of Northeast India will be a great aid in retaining the exclusivity and identity of the region. It has been the subject of literature since ancient times. It was not only Western romantic age texts that were greatly inspired by nature, but also in Northeastern literature there is an evidence of description of interdependence between man and nature, between the physical and the spiritual. The narratives mentioned above has a great ecological concern. So, nature holds forth a meaning and value to us.

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