

## AN ECO-CRITICAL READING OF THE SELECT POEMS OF MAMANG DAI AND TEMSULA AO

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The study analyzes and contrasts the eco-critical strategies used in the poetry of the two contemporary Indian poets, Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao who belong to the Northeast Region in India. It examines how the poets describe the natural environment and the connection via language, images and ideas. The paper contends that although their poems are eco-critical, their methods vary in scope, diction and cultural setting. It also highlights how these two poets showcase environment in their lasting pieces through a comparative analysis and emphasizes on the value of eco-literature in addressing environmental concerns. The article contributes to eco-criticism by examining the connection between literature and the environment and highlights how literature can influence people's views on environment to promote ecological consciousness. It also offers insights into how modern Indian poets use their works to raise awareness on ecological problems and address environmental issues.

**Keywords:** eco-literature, eco-criticism, human-nature relationship, environmental issues, cultural context, environmental degradation.

Eco-criticism is a young branch of literary analysis which makes a connection between literature and the environment. Lawrence Buell's in his book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*(2005) states, "Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." As the worries about climate change and environmental degradation have become increasingly pressing, the field has become more well-known in the present day. Eco-literature can potentially be a potent instrument for solving environmental problems and for influencing environmental attitudes.

The study compares and contrasts the eco-critical strategies used in the poetry of the two contemporary Indian poets who belong to the Northeast region is Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao. Both the poets refer to the Northeast area of India in their writings, which is well-known for its diverse biodiversity and local cultures. Since the 1990s, eco-criticism has expanded as a topic of study. Environmental justice, environmental ethics, and various literary and environmental topics have all been studied by experts in this discipline. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, "eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (1996, p. xviii) in his book titled *Eco-criticism: The Essential Reader*. The goal of eco-criticism is to discuss literature's role in tackling the pressing environmental concerns of our day.

Eco-criticism has attracted more attention recently in India. India has a long history of nature literature, and modern Indian authors are becoming more concerned with environmental concerns. According to Divya Kumari's observation in her paper titled "Eco-criticism and Indian English Literature: A Survey of Critical Trends," "Indian English literature has provided a new space for nature writing and ecological consciousness" (2018, p. 20).The modern Indian poets, who use their poetry to discuss environmental concerns condemn how human activity affects the natural world.

Arunachal Pradesh, a state in India's Northeast, is home to the modern poet Mamang Dai. Her poetry includes the themes of nature, culture, and identity while drawing on the region's rich cultural and natural past. The natural beauty of the terrain is depicted by Dai in her poem "River", and she says how human activity cause damage to its physical beauty. She adds:

The river is dying  
because we have forsaken it  
polluted it, dammed it,  
changed its course. (Dai, 2016)

The poem serves as an example of Dai's eco-critical perspective, that aims to draw attention to the effects of human activity on the natural environment. Dai often uses ancient tales and myths to explore nature and culture. Her works are strongly influenced by indigenous knowledge and ecological practices.

Another modern Indian poet who hails from the Northeast is Temsula Ao. Themes of identity, culture, and the effects of modernization on indigenous populations are all explored in Ao's poems. In the poem, "Pristine," Ao describes the pristine beauty of the countryside and how it is endangered by environmental deterioration. She pens:

What happened to the pristine hills,  
and the clear blue streams and rivers?  
Dying and decaying,  
polluted by industrial waste and chemicals. (Ao, 2017)

The poem exemplifies Ao's eco-critical attitude which exposes how modernism and industrialization affect the environment. As an Ao Naga tribe member, Ao's art is influenced by her tribal experiences. She often uses traditional tales and cultural rituals to examine identity, colonization and its effects on indigenous populations.

Indigenous cultures in the Northeastern area of India are well renowned for their rich biodiversity but are also under threat due to environmental deterioration and cultural erasure. The area has seen extensive resource exploitation, including mining, dam building and deforestation. The local populations, whose livelihoods and cultural traditions depend on the region's natural resources, have felt the effects of these operations in their lives. Dai and Ao's poetical works are influenced by their experiences as indigenous people in the Northeast, and their poetry exhibits a strong connection with nature and a dedication to environmental justice. Through their works, they want to support the upkeep of traditional ecological knowledge and practices and to increase public understanding of the effects of human activity on the environment.

With researchers examining the connection between human activity and the natural world in various literary genres, the study of literature and the environment has recently attracted a lot of interest. The study of eco-criticism, which began in the 1970s, aims to understand better how literature addresses environmental concerns and raises environmental consciousness via literary analysis (Glotfelty, 1996). Eco-criticism has been a developing subject of study in Indian literature, with researchers examining how Indian authors address environmental challenges in their writings (Kapadia, 2013). Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao's

works are located within this wider corpus of eco-critical literature. Their poetry provides a distinctive viewpoint on environmental challenges encountered in Northeastern India.

Mamang Dai's dedication to environmental justice and a strong connection to the natural world are both evident in her art of writing. She has written extensively on the region's indigenous inhabitants and effects of modernization on the environment. In the poem "The Hills Speak", she states:

The hills speak of desecration  
of barren slopes and rocks  
of plundered streams and forests  
of people lost and displaced.

Dai emphasizes the effects of human activity on the environment and the local populations' traditional means of subsistence via her literature. In her opinion, the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem in the area depends on the preservation of traditional ecological knowledge and practices, which are also emphasized in her work.

Temsula Ao's pieces examine identity, remembrance, and cultural preservation issues and incorporate tales and customs of the Ao Naga tribe. She addresses the effects of colonialism and modernization on native populations and the environment in her poems. Ao underlines the effects of human activities on the ecosystem and the disappearance of conventional ecological knowledge and practices. Her commitment to protect indigenous customs and traditions, which she regards as crucial to the long-term sustainability of the ecosystems in the area is evident in her works.

The poetry of Dai and Ao emphasize the value of ecological awareness and the need to address the environmental problems experienced in India's Northeast. Their study also highlights the benefits of literature for preserving traditional ecological knowledge and practices, and the need for environmental sustainability. The reading of Dai and Ao in the light of eco-criticism offers a helpful framework for comprehending their works and to examine their concerns toward the environment. By placing it within the wider perspective, it is understood how their poetry bring out the traumatic conditions of nature in the wake of urbanisation in the Northeast area of India.

The study compared the eco-critical strategies used by Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao to protect the environment in the troubled environmental times. The emphasis on the effects of human activities on the environment and indigenous populations in India's Northeast is the central concerns in the poetry of Dai and Ao. They emphasize how industrialization and modernization have contributed to the destruction of the environment and the disappearance

of traditional ecological knowledge and practices. In "The Hills Speak," a poem by Dai, she says:

The hills speak of the bloodshed  
of the violence and the greed  
of the rich and the powerful  
of the poor and the weak.

It emphasizes how economic expansion affects the environment and the local populations' quality of life. The behaviour of the humans and its effects on the environment and local populations' traditional ways of life are highlighted. The utilization of conventional cultural activities and images to explore issues of identity and cultural preservation is another commonality between Dai and Ao's poetry. Dai insists on the value of conserving indigenous ecological knowledge and practices by drawing on folktales and cultural activities. In the poem "The Bamboo" she states:

The bamboo whispers secrets  
of the ancient ways and laws  
of the land and the people  
of the stories and the songs.

This highlights the importance of traditional ecological knowledge which is essential for the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem in the area. The preservation of indigenous customs and traditions, which Ao regards as crucial for the long-term sustainability of the area's ecosystems, also comes through in her poems. She states in "The Forest," one of her poems:

The forest once a home  
to spirits and beasts,  
Now silent and forlorn  
a victim of our greed.

The illustration shows the negative effects of modernity on indigenous cultures and traditional ways of life. Despite these parallels, the poetry of Dai and Ao also displays distinctions in their writing styles and cultural backgrounds. Dai's poetry, written in a more combative form, highlights the pressing need to solve environmental challenges. In the poem "The Hills Speak," she states:

The hills speak of resistance  
of the courage and the will  
in the struggle for survival

of the fight to live and thrive.

This visual underlines the need for action and resistance in light of environmental destruction and cultural erasure. While emphasizing on the value of memory and cultural preservation, Ao's poetry is distinguished by a more thoughtful and contemplative approach. In the poem "The Bamboo", she states:

The bamboo whispers memories  
of the songs and the dances  
of the times and the places  
of the stories of the past.

The above lines emphasize on how crucial memory and cultural preservation are important to the long-term sustainability of the ecosystems in the area.

To conclude, the study of Mamang Dai and Tamsula Ao's select poetry illustrates how literature treats the subject of environment in the context of environmental issues. The poets warn us of the ecological hazards and the devastating and disastrous effect on natural environment and indigenous populations in India's Northeast. They want to preserve ancient ecological knowledge and practices and promote environmental consciousness through their artistic pieces. The poets, though the Northeast India is multicultural today, place the cultural and historical background of the Northeast within the wider framework of eco-criticism and Indian literature to feature the distinct tribal culture.

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