



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI  
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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**SHORT ABSTRACT**

Writing in English from Northeast India is gradually emerging as an interesting and promising body of literature and makes for an exciting research area, because of inherent literary excellence as well as its correlations to the numerous socio-political issues of the region. From an analysis of the available literature in the area it has been found that the poetry in English written in Northeast India has not received enough attention in terms of full-length academic studies. This work is an attempt to make a systematic study of the contemporary poetry in English produced in the Northeast, with a focus on works of selected poets. The study has focused on the poetic works of Anjum Hasan, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang, Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, Mamang Dai, Mona Zote, Robin Singh Ngangom and Temsula Ao, although works written in English by several other poets have also been taken up for study. Moreover, English translations of works in other languages by several other poets from the region have also been taken up for discussion.

Northeast India has generally occupied a marginal position in the Indian imagination. Speaking particularly in the context of Assam, Yasmin Saikia notes, "The problem of Assam's positionality within the Indian union was confounded by the politics of location to which was added a religio-cultural complication" (*Assam and India* 9). Historically, the region has never been too closely associated with the rest of India until the advent of the British. It seems to have more in common with East and Southeast Asia than the rest of India. Thus, the region is quite different from the rest of the country in almost every aspect. This becomes an impediment for the assimilation of the region within the greater Indian nation, in spite of the multi-cultural and inclusive nature of the country. This complex relationship extends to the literature of the region too. However, at times it is its distinctiveness that becomes the strength of the region, especially in cultural terms. Kailash C. Baral remarks, "Marginality becomes a defining trope that signifies this literature's location as well as its reception by mainstream critics" ("Articulating" 5). When we look at the literature of the Northeast, stark contrasts with the literature from the rest of the country become visible. The poets Robin Singh Ngangom and Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih speak of the singularity of the poetry they write when

compared to the works of the Bombay poets. They claim that the poetry they write is emotional and politically engaged and contrasts with the intellectual, differently crafted poetry of the Bombay poets. Robin S. Ngangom, who writes poems in Manipuri and English declares, "I believe in the poetry of 'feeling', which can be shared, not cerebral, intellectual poetry which is inaccessible, and which leaves the reader outside the poet's insulated world" ("Poetry in the Time" 169). Moreover, the restive political situation in the Northeast is another reason why the poetry of the region takes on an overtly political character, making it yet more different from the poetry of the rest of the country. Ngangom and Nongkynrih believe their kind of poetry flows from the situation in the Northeast and have argued that the expressive concerns of the writer from the Northeast cannot be the same as that of a writer from elsewhere in India:

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 perforce master the art of witness. (Ngangom and Nongkynrih eds. xii).

This study has undertaken a close analysis of the poetical works in English from the region, along with a few English translations of poems written in other languages. The analysis is facilitated by critical perspectives drawn from postcolonial theory, especially subaltern studies. Critical studies on the concepts of nationalism, sub-nationalism and identity politics have shed light on parts of the work. Drastic socio-cultural upheavals brought about by colonialism as well as protracted violence throughout the postcolonial period have turned the societies of Northeast India into deeply scarred collectivities. Poetry from Northeast India is coloured by this deep undercurrent of trauma found among its societies. The study therefore borrows perspectives from contemporary explorations in the field of trauma studies to examine the traumatic undertones in the poetry from the region. It has also made use of theoretical insights from various areas of gender studies, with particular focus on the relationship between gender and war. Perspectives borrowed from eco-critical studies have also facilitated the study at certain points. Extensive readings in relevant spheres of the history, politics, economy and anthropology of the Northeast region as well as nearby areas have informed the work with a holistic understanding and multi-disciplinary perspectives. The work has also been facilitated by personal interviews conducted with a couple of the poets under study - Desmond Kharmawphlang and Mamang Dai, which have been added as appendages to the thesis.