



COURSE CODE: MAEGD 404

COURSE NAME: INDIAN LITERATURE
IN ENGLISH II

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND
ONLINE EDUCATION
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

MASTER OF ARTS

**ENGLISH
BLOCK I**



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MAEGD 404: Indian Literature in English II

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BLOCK I

**MODULE 1: INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING
FROM NORTH EAST INDIA**

**UNIT 1: ARUP KUMAR DUTTA: *THE KAZIRANGA
TRAIL*: CHILDREN'S FICTION AS A GENRE**

UNIT 2: POLITICS AND POETRY

**ROBIN NGANGOM: “A POEM FOR MOTHER”,
“NATIVE LAND”**

**KYNPHAM SING NONGKYNRIH: “WHEN THE PRIME
MINISTER VISITS SHILLONG THE BAMBOOS WATCH
IN SILENCE”**

**DESMOND KHARMAWPHLANG: “THE CONQUEST,
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INTRODUCTION: BLOCK I

MEG-404: Indian English Literature II is intended to be a comprehensive study on the English writing by Indian writers, Novelists, poets and non-fictional writers.

Block I: Indian English Writing from North-East will focus primarily on the writings from North East India. The north eastern part of India referred to as North-East is also considered as one among the world's biodiversity heritage sites. Literature produced from this region explore the vibrant hues that lay in the culture of this region and at the same time dwell upon the reality and concerns of the people of this beautiful expanse of India.

Since 2008, the North East has been in focus due to many reasons. The main reason for the importance given to the literature of North- East region is that –politically and geographically, they are strategically positioned. The literature of the North-Eastern region of India explores the vibrant hues that lay in the culture of this region and at the same time addresses the reality and concerns of the people of this beautiful region of India. The bodies of poets that emerged during 80s embodied the spirit of the period – new ideas, sense of rebellion, fight for recognition and identity.

In Block I we have included a cluster of authors enriching the rich heritage of the land. This module will discuss fiction, as well as select poets of repute from different states of North East India.

Unit 1: Arup Kumar Dutta: *Kaziranga Trail: Children's fiction as a genre* will enable you know one of the authors of repute Arup Kumar Dutta and his novel *The Kaziranga Trail*. It is a novel that belongs to the genre of children's literature. The novel takes a contemporary topic concerning the wildlife conservation in the context of indiscriminate killing of rhinos in the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary. The author conveys a very strong message about the importance of protecting the environment and the damage humans are causing to it by their greed-driven actions.

Unit 2: *Politics and poetry* will introduce the learner to some of the finest poets of North East India. With its complex background and multifaceted cultures and histories, literature from North-East has formed a genre of its own. We have a number of poets who write in their mother tongue, especially in Khasi, Assamese and Manipuri. With colonization, English made its entry as a second language and this has tremendously

influenced the life and literature of the region. Poets like Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond Kharmawphlang and Robin Ngangom and their the theme of “uprootedness and the sense of loss and longing” are some of the familiar themes of the North-East poets which we will come across in many of the works of the writers mentioned above.

The reading of this units will certainly create a growing interest amongst the learners for further study of other branches of North East writing.

MODULE I: INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING FROM NORTH-EAST

UNIT 1: ARUP KUMAR DUTTA: THE KAZIRANGA TRAIL: CHILDREN'S FICTION AS A GENRE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The challenges of the post-colonial world have produced an explosion of new writing in English. This diverse and powerful body of literature has established a specific practice of postcolonial writing in various cultures, and has challenged both the traditional canon and dominant ideas of literature and culture. The north eastern part of India referred to as North-East is also considered as one among the world's biodiversity heritage sites. Literature produced from this region explore the vibrant hues that lay in the culture of this region and at the same time dwell upon the reality and concerns of the people of this beautiful expanse of India.

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- familiarize yourself with the North-East English literature
- have some information about Arup Kumar Dutta's biographical sketch

- understand the context of the novel
- comprehend the story of the novel
- familiarize yourself with various other aspects associated with the novel

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO NORTH EAST ENGLISH LITERATURE

The word ‘North-East’ is an umbrella term used for the eight states of north-eastern part of India comprising of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura. Each state of this region is a mosaic of diverse culture and unique traditions rooted to its land and nature. To an outsider it is an exotic world of the indigenous people located in the periphery of India which often remained unexplored and unexplained.

Looked at from the geopolitical and ethno-political mirror, there are many contradictions. At one level they may be considered as the Nature lovers Paradise. At another level they are considered as a region where ethnic conflict has become a part of daily life. Just as one might imagine a cartographer trying to negotiate with a definite demarcation of the map of this region, the literary map of this state will have to negotiate with its zigzag curves among the valleys and hills to come to a definite platform. The diverse ethnic groups have their own stories, histories, legends and their culture and tradition and religious practices. In short, one cannot think of any common concept of the nation’s state community or a homogenisation.

Literature reflects the colour and contours of the culture from which it generates. To understand the poetry from the North-Eastern states, one has to understand its several dimensions where ethnicity, culture and identity get entwined in all form and structure. The lyrics of their poems may show individualistic style and flavour but their contents and subject matter are eschewed with the aromas of collective consciousness. The polyphonic voices from these regions have their distinct ethnic identities.

Before the arrival of the British, Assamese was the lingua franca used for communication in many of the north-eastern states. With the patronization of the colonial rulers, English language made its formal entry as a second language and this has tremendously influenced the life and literature of the region. English language has spread its tentacles to farthest nook and corner of India.

In the states like Arunachal, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland; English is used as the first language due to the absence of formal script in their mother tongues. In Arunachal, the first generation of writers are Lumar Dai and Yeshe Dorjee Thongsi mostly wrote in Assamese because they had their education with Assamese as the medium of instruction unlike the new generation of writers who prefer to write and express in the global English language. The first generation writers still hold on to the old world where tradition and values had their prime place and opposed the dominant literature of the nineteenth century which believed in the ideals and principles of modernity.

The state of Assam too has scores of writers who have made their mark in the field of North East English Literature especially in poetry. We have Amaresh Datta who has two volumes of poetry- *Captive Moments* (1971), *Times Harvest* (1996). Lakshira Das's *Between Births* (1990). Dayananda Pather has a volume titled *Coral Island* (1998). Bhupathi Das has written *May I* (1998) and *Life and Beyond* (2004). Rupanjali's *All Things Passing and other poems* (2005) was well received by the readers. Rajendra Bhandari, from Sikkim, a well-known poet whose contribution to literature is praiseworthy, has produced three volumes of poetry collection titled *In the Veils of Cold Wintery Nights* (1979), *The Words: These Lines* (1986) *Perishable and Imperishable* (1998).

In Nagaland, literature existed mostly in oral form. Most of the literary output in modern times comes from rich oral traditions of different Naga groups. Through the years the literary scenario of the Nagas has gone through a sea change with the intrusion of unstable political climate where insurgencies played havoc in the state. The various militant groups demanding for a separate land were in constant war with the Indian government and the army. The literary output during this period reflects the experiences of those turbulent times. Authors like Easterine Iralu, Nini Lungalang and Temsula Ao address these traumatic experiences. Both prose and poetry, in context and content, herald the age of machine guns, curfews and strikes which seeped into their literary endeavours like fog in the onset of winter evenings. In spite of many complexities in which the society existed, literature from Nagaland comes from a blend of tradition and modernity.

With its complex background and multifaceted cultures and histories, literature from North-East has formed a genre of its own. There are a number of poets who write in their mother tongue, especially in Khasi, Assamese and Manipuri. But it has come to practical realisation that the poets who write in English find wider audience. There are a good number of poets who made their mark in the mainstream literature through their writings in English. While it is always a matter of pride to produce our literature in our own language, the changing scenario at the global level demands that the writers are also conscious of the professional and academic development. There will always remain a shadow of doubt that this second language will replace the first language; but the writers from North-East have made their marks in writing in English with élan. Many of their works have garnered wide readers from across the globe. They are, in many ways, ambassadors of the varied culture and tradition of North-East. Works of Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Anjum Hussain and Easter Iralu are read and admired in many foreign countries. Though these writers use English language as a medium of their works, they are not influenced by the Eurocentric ideas and literature. Rather, they manipulate the English language to their advantage to speak of their culture, tradition and unique lifestyle. Their oral literature is richly rooted in their native place and people, which showcase originality of style and technique. These writers collectively raise their voice for asserting their place and their identity which are yet to be accepted and included in the mainstream literature.

Since 2008, the North East has been in focus due to many reasons. The main reason for the importance given to the literature of North- East region is that –politically and geographically, they are strategically positioned. The echoes of negligence and the stepmother attitude of the central government and the mainstream writers to dislodge and isolate the North Eastern writers also has become an important issue of debate and discussion. The assertive nature of their work in trying to forge their identity as writers from North-East has created a space for many literary endeavours. Writing from this region is diverse in their themes and treatment of subject and technique. Most of them write in their regional languages- stories, legends and oral literature which are rooted to the land, culture and traditions of the people. The subject matter in their writings includes the politics, ethnic problems and terrorism in the area.

Writers from this region also show traces of discontent and struggle for a space among the mainstream writers.

In the beginning of the 1980s there was the emergence of a young group of poets whose writings reflected the conflicting political and ethnic clashes in the region. This group of poets tried to capture the imagination and experience of the time. Their writings reflected the spirit of the period-new ideas, sense of rebellion, fight for recognition and identity and meaningful question about life. This group of poets was called “Shillong Circle of Poets” as they were all living in Shillong.

Forum like the *The North- East Forum* for the English studies was established in Guwahati in late 1990s and *North East Writers Forum* was found mainly by some college teachers consisting of creative writers from this country devoted much of their time and energy in invigorating the art of poetry in English in the region. Some of the well-known poets from North East are Temsula Ao from Nagaland who produced much ethnographic laden work, based on folklore studies poems and Naga tradition and myths. Her publication includes volumes of poetry such as *Songs that Tell* (1998), *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from the Poet and Other Life* (2007). Easterine Kire Iralu, another poet from Nagaland also writes on issues relating to her homeland. Desmond L. Khamrawphlang, a Khasi poet and a folklorist from Meghalaya, wrote basically about his native land and indigenous culture and tradition. Easter Syiem, another established poet from the same place is also a folklorist whose poems depict myths and legends. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is another poet. His poetry volumes include *Moments* (1992), *The Sieve* (1992) and *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011). Robin Sing Ngangom is yet another poet who made a niche for himself as a poet. He is a Manipuri poet based in Shillong. His published volumes are *Words and the Silence* (1988), *Times Crossroads* (1994), *The Desire of Roots* (2006). Anjum Hasan, a well-known poet, now based in Bangalore is a poet from Shillong. She has published a volume of poetry titled, *Street on the Hill* (2006). She has also published a volume such as *Ludlum in my Head*. Ananya S Guha is a poet born and brought up in Shillong is a prolific poet. His works include- *In this My Land* (1986), *What else is Alive* (1997). Paul Lyndoh, another bilingual (English and Khasi) poet from Shillong has published a collection of poetry

titled *Flood Gate/ KaKhyrdop*. Almond D. Syiem is also a Shillong poet whose poetry provides a bird's eye view of the magical ecology of the Hills and valleys of North East. Indari Syiem Warji (1967) also from Shillong explores the nostalgic royal traditions and cultures of Meghalaya in her poems. Mamang Dai is a poet from Arunachal Pradesh, a writer who is well known and accepted by the mainstream writers along with Anjum Hassan. Her thematic concerns are woven around the natural beauty, rooted in the culture, belief and traditions of the Adi community in particular and Arunachal in general. Some of her poems also reflect the uncertainties of the emerging new world under the impact of globalisation and reflects a sense of undercurrent tension between the new and the old world. Her poetry collection *River Poems* is about the life and activities of the Adi community living by the banks of river Siang which connects Singpho River in Tibet and Brahmaputra in Assam. Her other literary works include *The Legends of Pensam*. She draws a vivid imagery of the mystic and snow-capped dawn lit mountains, the green forest and the stories and the legends of her tribe through the symbolic image of a river. Her poems like the "Linking" seem to hold those memories of the glorious past and the fear of losing them with the intrusion of the modern life.

We also have poets from Mizoram. They are Mona Zote and H. Ramdinthari. Their writings centre on the panoramic beauty and the enigmatic landscape of Mizoram which conjures up nostalgic feelings of the land and its people. Irom Sharmila is an emerging poet and an active activist from Manipur. Her English translation of poetry collection titled *Fragrance of Peace* is infused with passion and patriotism. Her poems reflect her desire for peace and development in Manipur which eluded the state for a long time as it reels under terrorism and ethnic clashes.

1.3 ARUP KUMAR DUTTA: LIFE AND WORKS

Arup Kumar Dutta is a well-known writer from Assam. He is known for his contribution to children's literature. Some of his popular works are – *Unicornis: The Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros* (1991), *Hammer Blow* (1996), *The Kaziranga Trail* (1978), *The Blind Witness* (1983) and *The Lure of Zangrila* (1986).

Arup Kumar Dutta was born at Jorhat, Assam in 1946. He graduated and post graduated from Delhi University with honours in English. He worked as a teacher at JB College, Jorhat, before becoming a full time writer. His novels have been translated into many foreign languages like German, Russian, Japanese, Czech, Hungarian and Italian. His novels such as *The Kaziranga Trail* and *The Blind Witness* have been made into feature films.

Arup Kumar Dutta is considered as a great story teller who has created powerful and convincing imageries with his brilliance in narration. His works like *Cha Garam: The Tea Story* (1991) traces the origin of tea (which is believed to have been discovered in China) and how its plantation became an economic asset all across the globe. It also describes in detail the ways in which the British exploited the production of this beverage to their economic advantage in India. In his *The Brahmaputra* (2001), he gives the reader an understanding of the essence of this magnificent river which originates from the Himalayas and how it affects the life of the people around. The work throws light on the ever evolving nature of the people living by the river. The river in short remains an active participant, an observer in the history of civilization through the centuries. The myths, the legends, the stories and histories have a melting ground in the North Eastern states with their varied culture and traditions. The river is a silent recorder of the changes and developments through the history. The book chronicles the story of the Mughal invasion of Assam across Brahmaputra, the invasion of the English, the development of tea gardens and other projects like the Saraighat Bridge and other various works on the river Brahmaputra. *The Blind Witness* is a story about a boy named Rama and his gruelling experiences with people who treat him as a helpless being as he is considered to be a physically handicapped person. It presents being handicapped as an alternative for courage and the differently-abled exhibits his talents to overcome the disadvantage. The term 'handicap' today is discouraged by most and has been replaced by words like 'differently abled'.

1.4 READING THE KAZIRANGA TRAIL

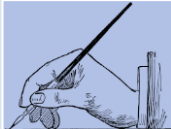
The Kaziranga Trail (1978) is considered as one of the finest young adults' fiction from India. *The Kaziranga Trail* is a beautifully narrated story about Dhanai, Bubul, Jonti and their pet cow elephant named Makhoni who

helps the boys to nab the rhino poachers. The story gives us a wider picture of how this endangered animal has become the target of the merciless poachers and through the story, the writer vouches for building a common consciousness to preserve the Rhino which has become an endangered animal. The one horned Rhino is also considered Assam's pride and, Kaziranga has been in focus at the national and international level because of this gentle animal. The plot develops through the adventurous events as the story unfolds leading to a fitting climax.

Dutta with his skilful narration includes detective and mystery elements which comes alive through the character of the children in the course of the story. The boys are familiar with the surroundings as they are born and brought up near the sanctuary. Dhanai is the son of a tourist Department Mahout. Bubul and Jonti are the twin sons of the village headman. In the course of the story, the reader is made conscious of the role played by the pet elephant Makhoni around which the characters indulge in the adventurous discovery of the illegal poaching. It is during those days when the boys went out for leisure trip across Kaziranga riding on Makhoni that they come upon a dead Rhino with its horn removed by the poachers. They report this to Mr. Neog, the District Forest Officer, in-charge of wildlife, who makes plans to nab the horn smugglers. The situation comes to such a pass that the detective children can hardly wait for Mr. Neog's return from Guwahati to nab the gang of poachers. So they devise their own plans to catch the gang involved in the illegal activity by putting their own lives into great peril. When Mr. Neog returns, he is given a briefing by his anxious wife who fears for the lives of the children. To his dismay and disappointment, Mr. and Mrs. Neog realize that one of their own staff members was working in nexus with the smugglers. Dutta while developing the story gives the reader a native flavour of the region by his use of Assamese words and vocabulary. The names of the characters like Makhoni, Dhanai, Jonti and Bubul are typical Assamese names. Assamese words like "beel", "dao", "dor", "mama", "chowkidars" and "boh" have also been used. The story also sends out an important message about the evil of the killing rhinos by the antisocial elements for their horns. Down the years the number of rhinoceroses has been decreasing in Kaziranga due to the mindless killing by the poachers. So the story of *The Kaziranga Trail* becomes a powerful voice against poaching and for wildlife conservation. It reminds the reader and the government to save this

endangered species from extinction. And the writer has judiciously managed to highlight this message through the characters how the illegal business of trading in rhino horns is run right in the heart of Kaziranga wildlife sanctuary. And the story ends with the nabbing of the culprits along with the forest officer, Mr. Phukan. Dutta, in *The Kaziranga Trail* echoes the message of the importance of preserving our wildlife to the society.

The story telling skill of the author brings the narrative to a logical and satisfying conclusion following an uncomplicated structure and lucid pattern. Secondly, the novel voices ecological concerns by echoing that every species in the natural world should be preserved to maintain a balance in the ecosystem. The focus on rhino poaching as an illegal trade gets its voice heard through the book which becomes the central message to the reader and the general public. Thirdly, the author through this adventurous story set in the backdrop of Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary brings to the fore the local conditions and culture through the characters. The story of the novel is voiced through the child protagonists who are otherwise regarded as minor and often side lined. However, in *The Kaziranga Trail* children and their adventure are the main focus which adds mystery and enigma and sustains the interest of the readers in the book.

	CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
1. Brief on some of the prominent writers from North-east India.	
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2. Mention some of the important works of Arup Kumar Dutta.

3. What uniqueness do you see in the novel *The Kaziranga Trail*?

1.5 SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL THE KAZIRANGA TRAIL

The novel begins with a gut wrenching brutal scene of cutting of the horn of a trapped rhinoceros by hacking at the animal's snout with a *dao* (a sharp cutting weapon with a long blade) when it is alive by the poachers. Three village boys Dhanai, the son of a mahout, who works in the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary on duty of taking tourists on elephant rides, and the twin sons of the village headman Bubul and Jonti. Dhanai has his pet elephant Makhoni. The three boys belong to a village set in the outer periphery of Kaziranga. They know the forest like the back of their hand since they are born and brought up there. These three boys go into the forest on a pleasure trip, riding Makhoni, the cow elephant, to have a bath in the river. They discover the carcass of the rhino without the horn killed by the poachers the previous night. The children become detectives and search for clues before the impending rain destroys all

evidence of the crime. They first notice that there is a human footprint on the rhino droppings. The impression of the human footprint clearly shows that the right leg big finger of the person is missing. Dark clouds hovered over their heads and it can rain any moment now. So they rushed back to inform about the incident to the District Forest Officer in charge of wildlife Mr. Neog whom the boys called as Neog *mama* (maternal uncle). The DFO Neog *mama* has earned a reputation for himself as an honest and efficient officer. When the boys told him about the carcass of a rhino without its horn Mr. Neog felt disturbed that it is the fifth rhino killed by poachers in the last two months. He sets out to survey the place by himself and to decide the future course of action. He summons his forest range officer Mr. Phukan. Mr. Phukan after getting the information of the rhino carcass from the boys gets irritated and asks questions to the boys as to how did they find the carcass of the rhino and whether they have the proper permission to enter the sanctuary. The boys were taken aback by such rude behaviour of Mr. Phukan. Mr. Neog interferes and softly reprimends Phukan for his hostile attitude to the boys.

The party consisting of Mr. Neog, Mr. Phukan the head ranger, and the three boys reach the site of the killing of the rhino. After reaching there they search for some more clues. First, they try to find out the temporary shelter the poachers have built for them while waiting for the prey. Jonti finds the poacher's shelter and goes into survey and to his surprise he finds Phukan already there before him. The investigating team tries to ascertain whether the gang of poachers are local or they are outsiders. Soon it is discovered from the remains of the food that the poachers' party is not from outside the state rather it is very much a local group as the food left are all local items like fish in mustard curry and *til pitha*, a local sweet. From the search three more vital clues are found first, that it is a group of poachers consisting of local villagers; second, that the gang of poachers consisted of six members as the number of cups and plantain leaves left behind indicate; the third, that the leader of the group has the big toe of right foot missing. They wind up the survey and return. The suspicion gained ground that an outside party recruits these local poachers to kill rhinos and there must be a local link who acts as the coordinator between the poachers and the outside party.

That night Dhanai gets a warning letter not to poke his nose in others' matter and forget about the man with the missing toe. The three boys get surprised that how can anybody know so quickly that they have been discussing the man with the missing-toe. Applying the theory of deduction they conclude that the mole is none other than Phukan. What reinforced their suspicion is that he was found inside the poachers' shelter much before the survey team did. How could he know that about the location of the poachers' shelter home?

As the boys suspected Phukan to be mole of the poachers in the department they decide to keep a vigil on the activities of Phukan that night. They find that Phukan is going to the tourist lodge to meet somebody. In a daring feat of eavesdropping, Dhanai peeps into the room and discovers that Phukan is meeting with a person in the tourist guest house whom he addresses as Mr. Bose, who happens to be the kingpin of this rhino horn trade. Phukan puts on the table five rhino horns that he has collected from the poachers to give to Mr. Bose for a price. Dhanai understands from their conversation that Phukan has agreed to supply Mr. Bose a total of six rhino horns but he has collected only five so far and Mr. Bose is very unhappy with him for not providing him all the six horns as agreed upon. Mr. Bose says that he would not give Phukan any amount now and he would have to be content with the advance he had given him. The rest of the payment would be given only when he delivers the sixth horn. Phukan loses his temper at these words of Mr. Bose and soon follows an altercation between them and when Phukan puts the five rhino horns back in the bag and wants to leave saying that he would sell them to another buyer; Mr. Bose whips up a revolver and orders Phukan to keep the horns where they are. He threatens Phukan of exposing his nexus with the poachers by writing to his superiors. Phukan yields at this threat of Mr. Bose as he has no other alternative to save himself. Mr. Bose insists on the sixth horn as agreed upon and Phukan agrees to meet the gang of poachers to tell them to collect one more horn. Phukan tells Mr. Bose that he would have a meeting with the gang of poachers at an abandoned bungalow in the forest and let him know of the decision by the next day. When all this was happening between Phukan and Mr. Bose Dhanai was peeping from a hole in the roof and was shocked to know the role of Phukan in the poaching of rhinos in the Kaziranga

Wildlife Sanctuary. He is more concerned about the scheduled meeting between Phukan and the poachers

He meets his two friends, Bubul and Jonti, and all three rushes to Neog *mama*'s place to tell him of this new and important development. But Mrs. Neog tells them that Neog *mama* has left for Guwahati to attend an important departmental meeting. The boys now have to do something on their own since Neog *mama* is no more here to guide them. They have clearly two tasks at their hand—one to stop Mr. Bose from leaving with the rhino horns, second to nab the poachers along with Phukan from their meeting place at the old and abandoned bungalow. The three boys held a conference in their tree-house. The first plan is to inform the villagers about the meeting and surround the bungalow and catch them. But this involves spreading the secret among the villagers and this may even reach the poachers through a mole among them and as a precaution they may cancel the meeting. Mr. Bose must be stopped at any cost along with the five rhino horns. The boys planned that the extract of a local berry which can act as a purgative and mix it with the food of Mr. Bose so that he reaches hospital and his return gets delayed. As per the plan the twins, Bubul and Jonti go to the guest house and trick the bearer and mix the purgative in the food of Mr. Bose. He suffers from severe stomach disorder and is admitted to the local hospital. One of the plans of the boys has become a success. The return of Mr. Bose is now delayed by at least 48 hours. Their next task is to deal with the poachers who are coming to the haunted bungalow in the forest for the scheduled meeting with Phukan.

The boys come back to Mrs. Neog to get some news about the return of Neog *mama*. Mrs Neog has tried to contact her husband but has not been successful yet. The boys did not disclose their plan to Mrs Neog even when she insisted on but just hinted her that 8 O clock, and the haunted bungalow in the forest. Mrs Neog thought a lot about these hints at night and suddenly felt that the boys are about to have an encounter with the poachers which would be fatal for them. She informs Phukan to take care of the boys and tells him about the plan of the boys that they are going to the haunted bungalow in the forest at 8 o clock. Phukan is quite taken aback as to how this secret information reached the the boys. He becomes very nervous when he comes to know the plan of the boys. He starts brooding over the fact that how the boys could know of it. If

they know of the meeting then they must be knowing about his nefarious deeds. He now thinks of a plan to neutralise the boys so that his identity as well as his nefarious deeds remains a secret from everyone concerned.

On the other hand, oblivious of Mrs Neog's mistake of telling the secret to Phukan the three boys Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti riding Makhoni went into the forest on their campaign against the poachers. Only Bubul and Jonti are armed with a knife each hanging from behind their neck and under the shirt. They moved cautiously around the bungalow but as the gang of poachers are already intimated about their arrival beforehand, they (the poachers) pounced on them capturing Jonti and Bubul and Dhanai somehow managed to flee from the place riding Makhoni. The whole plan of capturing the poachers turned upside down. The boys become the prey from being the predators. There is chaos in the poachers' camp as they discover that one of the boys has escaped their clutch. The leader of the poachers Muniya organizes a chase to catch Dhanai. They chased Dhanai in a jeep. Bubul and Jonti were put in the same jeep along with the other members of the poacher's team and they headed towards the house of Mrs. Neog.

Mrs. Neog finally gets to talk with her husband who is now in Guwahati. She narrates the story of the boys and implores her husband to return as soon as possible. Dhanai is being chased by the poachers. The poachers did not want him to escape so they threw two long blade knives aiming at him but they miss him narrowly and one of the knives gets lodged in the body of the elephant, Makhoni. The poachers cannot use guns because it would make a sound and villagers may wake up.

Bubul and Jonti are in the custody of the poachers. Their hands were tied behind their backs and there are two guards guarding them. Both of them, with great difficulty untied their hands by using the knives they had carried at the beginning of their campaign. They set themselves free from the clutch of poachers. Dhanai on the other hand gave a slip to the poachers by hanging onto the branch of a tall tree while the poachers were chasing the elephant. Finally, Dhanai reaches Mrs. Neog's house and soon falls unconscious. When he regains his senses he narrates the whole story of their campaign and the events so far happened with them. He also reveals the role played by Phukan in the poaching of rhinos in the park. Mrs. Neog is dumbfounded and shocked beyond

belief after hearing Phukan's involvement with the poachers and repented for handing over the boys to the devil without knowing Phukan's real intention.

Phukan along with his poacher companions reach Mrs. Neog's house with the plan of raiding the place and kill Dhanai so that no proof of Phukan's involvement could be left. They found that all the doors and windows are tightly fastened even in this summer season. When they are about to raid the house by cutting the telephone connections first, the sound of Mr. Neog's vehicle could be heard. The leader of the poacher retreated as they cannot attack Mr. Neog for the position and reputation of an honest and upright forest officer he has built around him. Phukan rues his fate that now the boy would expose him before the DFO and he is as good as dead. He exhorts the poachers to attack and kill the boy. Suddenly the attitude of the poachers towards Phukan change. The leader of the poachers realises that it is only Phukan who knows them as poachers, neither Dhanai nor the other two boys know who really the poachers are. It is only Phukan who recognizes them and if there is any danger to them of getting exposed it is only from Phukan. So they decided to kill Phukan to destroy the proof of their being poachers. The leader of the gang of poachers Muniya, stabs Phukan with a long blade knife and Phukan slumps in the front seat of the jeep.

The DFO Mr. Neog after hearing the whole story immediately organizes a rescue party and also rushes to the hospital to meet the doctor where Mr. Bose, the kingpin of the poaching syndicate, is being treated. The doctor thinks since Mr. Bose is a tourist from outside the state the DFO is worried about his health but when Mr. Neog told him the truth about Mr. Bose and his involvement in the poaching business of rhino horns he is surprised. Mr. Neog moves into the forest bungalow with his rescue party but does not find Bubul and Jonti there. An injured Phukan waiting for his death lies in the front seat of the jeep. The memories of his past life quickly flits through his mind. A repentant Phukan wants to make amend for his misdeeds of the past and decides to help the rescue party about the present whereabouts of the two boys still under the custody of the poachers. So, he somehow drives the jeep with his remaining power and reaches Mr. Neog.

When returning from the abandoned bungalow, Mr. Neog comes across a grievously injured Phukan coming driving a jeep. He stops and pulls

Phukan out of the jeep. Phukan tells him that the boys are hidden in the shelter home of the poachers and after the confession he breathes his last. This information of Phukan was very vital. The rescue party immediately heads towards the poachers' shelter home. By the time the rescue party of Mr. Neog reached there Bubul and Jonti had already released themselves from their imprisonment and were simply remaining there waiting for their chance to escape outside. The rescue party surrounds the shelter home and starts firing. A fierce gunbattle ensues between the poacher's gang and the rescue party. One of the poachers is hit and gets killed similarly one of the rescue party guards too is hit and collapses. Bubul and Jonti escape and jump into a ditch nearby the shelter home during the gun battle. The poachers are no match to the rescue party and one by one they surrender by throwing their guns and raising their hands above their head. By now a crowd of villagers have gathered at the scene. Muniya attempted to escape from the scene through the *beel* only to encounter the wrath of a rhino.

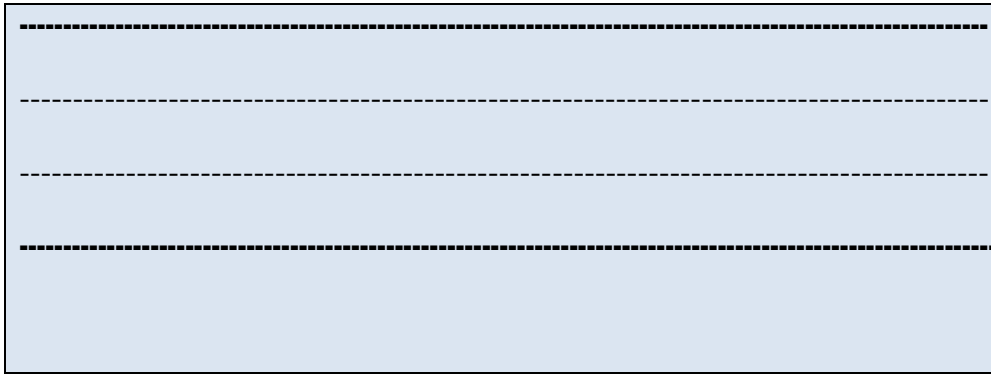


CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What information did the boys collect about the poachers after surveying the scene of crime?

2. How did the boys plan to nab the poachers in the absence of Mr. Neog?

3. How did Phukan die at the end?



1.6 THE KAZIRANGA TRAIL AS A MORAL FABLE

A fable is a short narrative, prose or verse, that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behaviour; usually, at its conclusion, either the narrator or one of the characters states the moral in the form of an epigram (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams and Harpham). The novel *The Kaziranga Trail* can be read as a moral fable as the characters in this novel are presented as embodiment of a certain idea or concept or as simply good or evil. Dutta clearly delineates the characters of the novel as belonging to two distinct groups-- good and evil. The DFO Neog *mama*, his wife Mrs. Neog, the three boy protagonists Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti clearly belong to the group of good characters. In contrast Forest Ranger Phukan, Mr. Bose, the rhino horn trader, and the group of poachers led by Muniya represent the evil. The group representing evil epitomise certain evil characteristics like brutality to animals and excessive greed for money at the cost of the environment. On the other hand, the group belonging to the good characters represent good qualities like humanity, fellow feeling, concern for the animals and the environment. These two groups of characters symbolising opposite principles of good and evil are confronted with each other and it is this confrontation that constitutes the focus of interest in the novel.

Since the characters in the novel *The Kaziranga Trail* represent a particular moral abstract, they are therefore like the *dramatis personae* in a morality play. There is clearly an allegorical intention behind the character portrayal, especially the three boy protagonists of the novel play the role of environment protectors trying to save the wildlife from the marauding poachers. However, one striking feature separates it from a moral fable or a morality play. It is a well observed fact that the characters in a morality play

represent a moral abstract like good or bad, while in this novel the characters in addition to their function as symbols of certain good or bad qualities are also individuals in their own rights. However, the fact that the characters are distinctly presented as good and evil and act accordingly. The end of the novel too conveys moral lesson that crime does not pay. All the evil characters indulged in the brutal business of poaching and cruelty to animals meets their end in a manner that satisfies the collective consciousness of the readers. There are thus strong grounds for calling this novel a moral fable or a morality play with the characters functioning partly as individuals but chiefly as symbols representing a moral abstract and the conclusion of the novel conveying a moral lesson.

1.7 CHARACTERS

In the novel *The Kaziranga Trail* the novelist Dutta portrays two distinct groups of characters—good and evil. The three boys, Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti, their friend the District Forest Officer Neog *Mama*, his wife Mrs. Neog, and the pet elephant Makhoni belong to the group of good characters who represent the qualities that confirms to the norms of humanity. In contrast the group of poachers, ranger Phukan represent the evil aspect of humanity. Although the characters of the novel are embodiments of moral concepts they are also individuals. Dutta with great skill presents this detective and mystery novel with three boy protagonists playing the lead role. This genre makes it sure that the character of the three boys act as individuals taking independent decisions at critical moments. When the boys suspect the forest ranger Phukan they take the decision to follow him to the tourist guest house. When it is revealed to them that the poachers have scheduled to congregate at the haunted bungalow in the forest it is again the boy's own decision to make their own plan to catch them and stop Mr. Bose from escaping from Kaziranga. Thus the characters are individualized though they represent a moral quality.

The poachers are presented as epitomes of evil with no human quality like kindness or feeling for the suffering animals. They inflict grievous injuries on the helpless rhino and leave it to die a slow and painful death and they do this brutal act just for their greed for money. When the boys encounter them in the haunted bungalow inside the forest they do not hesitate to kill the boys just

for their own individual safety. The poachers led by the ring leader Muniya are presented as out and out evil characters without a trace of human quality in them. Crafty Phukan by participating in their crime becomes an epitome of evil too. Dutta portrays his evil characters as purely evil without a trace of human qualities and his good characters as embodiments of moral values. There is no middle way of representing characters as half good or half bad. However, the character of Phukan, the forest range officer is an exception. Towards the end of the novel Phukan on the throes of death realises his folly and wants to make amends by telling the rescue party about the location of the two boys taken as hostages by the poacher gang. Just before he breathes his last he helps the rescue party led by DFO Mr. Neog in locating the hostage boys. This change of heart of Phukan almost at the end of his life evokes pity and sympathy in the readers for this villain who despite a forest official responsible for the safety of the wild animals of the park connived with the poachers. He deservedly dies a dog's death. The evil characters meet their end in a most befitting way confirming to the concept of poetic justice of Aristotle that good is rewarded and evil is punished.

The novelist, Dutta restrains himself from presenting his characters as sentimental beings. Although the three boy protagonists Dhanai, Bubul, and Jonti belong to poor families of the village their poverty or their social class is never highlighted in the novel, what are highlighted are their courage, wit, and the pragmatic knowledge of the world. The boys are presented as detectives out to save the wildlife from brutal poachers. Dutta by presenting them as detectives strikes a great balance between their role as saviours of wildlife and children at the same time. The children are presented not only as courageous and enterprising heroes who do not hesitate to risk their lives to bring the criminals to book are, in quite contrast to the poachers, have a great heart for the animals. When Makhoni, the elephant, gets injured by the poachers throwing of knives, Dhanai applies a common herb available in the forest on her wound. This act is an example of his concern for the animal.

Of the evil characters it is Phukan who reclaims a trace of humanity by realising his grave mistake that being a protector of wildlife he aligned with the poachers to satisfy his greed for money and ultimately met a violent death. Coincidentally Phukan dies an identical death at the hands of the leader of the

poacher gang Muniya like the rhino at the beginning of the novel—slow and painful. A most suitable death to a person who has been responsible for perpetuating brutality and cruelty on the rhinos by employing the inhuman criminals. However, the manner of his repentance and subsequent death evokes pity and sympathy in us for him. However, all other characters are presented as black or white, good or evil.

The characters of the young adults Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti are not portrayed by Dutta as supermen or characters endowed with some supernatural power, rather they are presented as ordinary neighbourhood boys caught in a situation and they react to that situation in a positive manner. As a result the reader does not have shut his sense of logic and sense of proportion to enjoy the novel. All the actions of the young adults Dhanai, Bubul, and Jonti looks to happen within the limits of probability as they walk into the world of the adults as children, completely unnoticed. Their shadowing of Phukan, peeping into the tourist guest house and eavesdropping the conversation between Mr. Bose and Phukan all become possible because as children they just have the liberty to walk into the world of the adult. This gives the novel a touch of realism that there is nothing improbable or incredulous happening in the novel. ***

The characters in the novel are drawn from the ordinary lot of people the author observes in his day to day life. The characters drawn from the ordinary walks of life present the culture and life style of the people, their intimacy with the nature, their sympathy towards animals.

1.8 PLOT

Dutta keeps the plot of the novel simple. The action of the novel is set to roll with the killing of the rhino by the poachers. The killing of the rhino is the exposition of the plot. The three boy protagonists discover the carcass of the rhino the next day and the adventure story begins. The three young adults take it upon themselves to nab the culprits and save the wildlife of Kaziranga. The dangerous adventure of the three boy detectives forms the structure of the novel. Dutta successfully keeps the narrative fast paced and full of suspense to sustain the interest of the reader. The plot of the novel revolves around the conflict between the three boy protagonists, endowed with the quality of saviours of nature, and the antagonists in the form of the poachers and their

associates. This conflict between the forces of good and evil acts as the glue to the plot of the novel. The novel begins with the heart wrenching scene of the killing of the rhino. The boys try to expose the nexus between the forest official, rhino horn trader and the local poachers and set out on a dangerous mission. Events follow one another in a very fast paced manner and the narrative reaches its climax with one of the antagonists Phukan who has aligned with the poachers despite being a forest official gets killed and the other poachers too are caught after a gun battle at the end of the novel. The novel ends on a perfect climactic note with all the antagonists suitably punished. The novel has been divided into 14 sections and each section pushes the plot ahead towards the climax. The narrative is replete with suspense, and thrill. Dutta constructs the plots of the novel around the social or personal events and issues of contemporary life. Wildlife conservation, concern for animals and the damage done to nature by human greed are the contemporary social issues the novel highlights.

1.9 ECOCRITICISM

‘Ecocriticism’ was a term coined in the late 1970s by combining ‘criticism’ with a shortened form of ‘ecology’--- the science that investigates the interrelation of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams and Harpham). Thus ecocriticism or environmental criticism explores the relation between literature and the biological and physical environment. Ecocriticism attempts to focus on the devastating effect of all pervasive environmental degradation caused by human activity. In the novel *The Kaziranga Trail* Dutta highlights his concern for the wildlife conservation through the portrayal of characters acting as champions of wildlife protection. Dutta focuses on the ecological problem of illegal and indiscriminate killing of one-horned rhinos by poachers in the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary. The inhuman brutality these innocent animals are subjected to evokes a disgusting and heart breaking feeling in the reader at the same time makes the reader aware of this disturbingly gruesome and sordid tale of illegal rhino horn trade. The novel makes a detailed presentation of the *modus operandi* of the clandestine rhino horn trade and the persons involved in it. The three boys shown as the protagonists are the


inhabitants of the nearby village of Kaziranga. They are very familiar with the topography of the area and the most important quality they possessed is that they are animal lovers. There is ample evidence of their concern for animals in the text as they take it as a solemn duty to bring the poachers to book as the mission of their life. They risk their own lives to expose the nexus between the forest official and the poachers. The love and concern for animals comes to the fore when Makhoni, the pet elephant, gets injured in the campaign to nab the poachers, Dhanai applies a locally available herb on her wound. This proves that the boy has a very intimate relation with the elephant.

The characters in the novel are distinctly presented as good and evil. Good characters are those who are concerned with environment and wildlife protection and evil characters are those who are enemies of the environment and destroyers of wildlife. Dhanai, Bubul and Jonti, the three boys on a mission to save the rhinos and catch the criminal poachers, the DFO Mr. Neog and Mrs. Neog his wife are the champions of environment protection. On the contrary Forest Ranger Phukan, the leader of the poachers Muniya and his gang are the antagonists, the destroyers of the environment. The clash between these two forces of good and evil constitutes the main structure of the novel with the forces of good finally coming out triumphant over evil at the end. The conflict in the novel is between forces protecting the environment and forces indulged in destruction of the environment. The triumph of the protectors of environment over the destroyers at the end makes it an environmental novel. The author describes the pristine beauty of the natural scenery of Kaziranga appealing to the sensory perception of the reader. Passages like the one quoted here confirm to the tenets of nature writing.

Before them lay unbroken stretches of elephant grass and low shrubs.
A few tall trees with large leaves broke the monotony of the landscape.
Usually, the sanctuary is alive with sounds, the twittering of birds, the chirping of crickets and the occasional grunt of a rhino. (P-9)

The author attempts to depict the cultural life of people living around the Kaziranga sanctuary as a community having a great sense of concern for wild animals. Though the fact that the poachers too belong to the same area does not bear the author's contention; however, it can be presumed that the poachers

among the village population are few and are an aberration. The cultural ethos of the area has inculcated the ideals like protection of environment and wildlife in the protagonists of the novel. The author's ecological ideas very conspicuously get reflected in the inner self of the good characters in the novel. Dutta's involvement with nature and wild life can be seen throughout his writings. The characters of the novel bring to focus the failure of the human society to preserve the environment and put an end to the destruction caused by their actions to the ecology. The novel conveys a very strong message about the urgent need to conserve the wildlife and protect nature from the greed of human beings.

	CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
1. How does <i>The Kaziranga Trails</i> bring into focus the failure of human society to preserve the environment?	
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1.10 SUMMING UP

Arup Kumar Dutta's *The Kaziranga Trail* is a novel that belongs to the genre of children's literature. The ecological concerns of the author are narrated through the adventurous story of three boys who take up the mission of exposing the nexus between forest officials and the poachers endangering their

own lives. The narrative of the detective story is thrilling and fast paced. The climax brings in the downfall of the antagonists acting as destroyers of nature in a befitting manner. Dutta is a great story teller and while telling the story of the three boys mission to save the rhinos of Kaziranga he uses a number of Assamese words like *Mama*, *beel*, *dor*, etc to give the story a local touch. The narrative of the story is simple and the characters are portrayed as normal human beings without any supernatural endowments unlike in other popular children's literature. To sum up *The Kaziranga Trail* is a story about a contemporary topic concerning the wildlife conservation in the context of indiscriminate killing of rhinos in the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary. The author conveys a very strong message about the importance of protecting the environment and the damage humans are causing to it by their greed-driven actions.



1.11 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Present a note on the English writers from North-East India.
2. Discuss *The Kaziranga Trail* as a novel in the context of wildlife conservation.
3. Present an illustrative note on the art of characterization in *The Kaziranga Trail*.
4. What is 'ecocriticism'? How can the principles of 'ecocriticism' be applied to this novel?



1.12 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 2: POLITICS AND POETRY: ROBIN S. NGANGOM, KYNPHAM SING NONGKYNRIH AND DESMOND L KHARMAWPHLANG

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Robin S. Ngangom: Life and Works

2.3 Reading the poems of Robin Ngangom

2.3.1 'A Poem for Mother'

2.3.2 'Native Land'

2.4 Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih: Life and Works

2.5 Reading the poems of Nongkynrih

2.5.1 'When the Prime Minister Visits Shillong the Bamboos Watch in Silence'

2.6 Desmond L Kharmawphlang: Life and Works

2.7 Reading the poems of Kharmawphlang

2.7.1 'The Conquest'

2.7.2 'Letter to a Dear Friend'

2.8 Summing Up

2.9 Assessment Questions

2.10 References and Recommended Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial world has produced a powerful body of literature in various cultures which has challenged both the traditional canon and dominant ideas of literature and culture. The literature of the North-Eastern region of India explores the vibrant hues that lay in the culture of this region and at the same time addresses the reality and concerns of the people of this beautiful region of India.

The 1980s saw the emergence of a group of young poets whose writings reflected the conflicting political and ethnic clashes in the North-East region. Their works embodied the spirit of the period – new ideas, sense of rebellion, fight for recognition and identity. These poets were collectively known as

“Shillong Circle of Poets” as they were based in Shillong. Later in the 1990s, the *North East Forum* for the English studies and the *North East Writers’ Forum* were founded mainly by college teachers consisting of creative writers from the country who devoted much of their time and energy in invigorating the art of poetry in English in the region.

With its complex background and multifaceted cultures and histories, literature from North-East has formed a genre of its own. We have a number of poets who write in their mother tongue, especially in Khasi, Assamese and Manipuri. With colonization, English made its entry as a second language and this has tremendously influenced the life and literature of the region. Although first generation writers like Lumar Dai and Yeshe Dorjee Thongsi mostly wrote in Assamese, the new generation of writers prefer to write in English with the realization that the English language finds a wider audience. While it is always a matter of pride to produce our literature in our own language, the changing scenario at the global level demands that the writers are also conscious of the professional and academic development.

Some of the well-known poets from the North East are Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire Iralu, Desmond L. Khamrawphlang, Easter Syiem, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Robin Singh Ngangom, Mamang Dai and Anjum Hasan. Temsula Ao who is from Nagaland produced much works based on folklore and Naga traditions and myths. Easterine Kire Iralu, another poet from Nagaland also writes on issues relating to her homeland. Desmond L. Khamrawphlang, a Khasi poet and a folklorist from Meghalaya has written about his native land and indigenous culture and tradition. Easter Syiem, another established poet from the same place is also a folklorist whose poems depict myths and legends. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is yet another well-known poet from Meghalaya. His poems are about his rootedness to his culture, to his native place, his concern on environmental changes, the dilemma of infiltration, and satire on his native ministers. From Manipur, we have Robin Singh Ngangom, a poet who has made a niche for himself. Ethnic conflict and terrorism, the experience of the turbulent period in the conflict-ridden state of Manipur is the recurring theme in many of his poems. Anjum Hasan, a well-known poet, now based in Bangalore, is from Shillong. She has published a volume of poetry titled, *Street on the Hill* (2006). Mamang Dai, a poet from

Arunachal Pradesh thematises her poems around the natural beauty, rooted in the culture, belief and traditions of the Adi community in particular and Arunachal in general.

The theme of “uprootedness and the sense of loss and longing” are some of the familiar themes of the North-East poets which we will come across in many of the works of the writers mentioned above.

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be introduced to the English poetry from North-East India. On the completion of this unit you will be:

- acquainted with a brief history of North-East writings in English and its major poets.
- familiar with the life and works of the poets: Robin S Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and Desmond Kharmawphlang.
- able to analyse and understand the thematic concerns and stylistic features of the selected poems.
- able to understand the socio-political and cultural contexts of North-East English literature.

2.2 ROBIN NGANGOM: LIFE AND WORKS

Also known as the Nissim Ezekiel of North-East India, Robin S Ngangom is an ethnic poet. He was born in 1959 in Singjamei, a small hillock in Imphal, the capital city of Manipur. His early separation from home due to his studies carved an indelible longing for home which can be abundantly seen in his writings. His rootedness to his home, culture, people and society can be easily traced from his poems. Neruda, Arghezi, Lorca, Albert Camus, Jack Milosz, among others, are said to have influenced Robin and his writings. He has translated many Manipuri poems which deserve to be acknowledged. He writes in English and has published three volumes of poetry – *Words and the Silence* (1988), *Time's Crossroads* (1994) and *The Desire of Roots* (2006). We will discuss two poems in this unit, “A Poem for Mother” from his volume *Words and the Silence* and “Native Land” from *The Desire of Roots*.

Most of Robin’s poems are about his personal feelings, his views of the contemporary situations of his native place. He is always in search of a

legitimate voice, therefore, he believes in “the poetry of feeling which can be shared, as opposed to mere cerebral poetry”. With this statement, he can be considered as a sensualist and can be compared to the English Romantic poets. The poem “The Desire of Roots” is full of sensuous images. His use of language according to the needs of the subject matter is laudable. With equal vigour he manages to demonstrate the conflicting political scenario in his state and North-East in general.

2.3 READING THE POEMS OF ROBIN NGANGOM

2.3.1 ‘A Poem for Mother’

The poem is a dedication to the poet’s mother or “Palem Apokpi”. The central concern of the poem is an expression of nostalgia that envelopes the poet’s heart and mind. The poem is very much autobiographical and desire for home and the growing distance between his past and his present is established in the first four lines itself.

Palem Apokpi, mother who gave birth to me,
to be a man how I hated leaving home
ten years ago. Now these hills
have grown on me.

A parallel can be drawn with Robert Browning’s poem “Home Thoughts from Abroad” where the poet expresses his desire to be in England in the month of April, the best season of the year. While Browning evokes pleasant memories of England when he was away in Italy, in Robin’s poem, there is a sense of melancholy, nostalgia and regret. Having left his hometown, the poem is also symbolic of his real life situation as he has adopted Shillong as his hometown. The lines “these hills/ have grown on me” is a direct reference to the hills of Shillong where he resides.

The expectation of his mother to see him achieve great things in life becomes a junction in his memory lane. He made a decision to leave his native land.

But it is not that I’ve forgotten
what you have come to mean to me.
Only I deserted much and left
so little of myself for others

to remember me at home.

The same melancholy tone stretches to the concluding stanza, but the poet makes an attempt to find some comfort by apologizing to his mother for abandoning her dream for him and not fulfilling his obligations as a son.

I'm sorry Palem,
I've not inherited anything
of your gentle ways or culinary skills.
Forgive me, for all your dreams
of peace and rest during your remnant days
I only turned out to be a small man,
with small dreams and living a small life.

“A Poem for Mother” is a poem of great regret and remorse. The poem hides nothing from the title. Manipur, the place Robin hails from is a matriarchal society where mothers play a huge role both in the private and public spaces. The sentiments that the poet shares in this poem is private and at the same time very universal. Every mother and child relationship stretches to a distance once adulthood arrives life begins anew with new jobs and new responsibilities. Sometimes relationship and dreams are compromised, but memories and nostalgia linger on and this is what Robin has tried to capture in this poem.

LET US STOP AND THINK



- In Meitei language, Palem means “mother” and Apokpi means “one who gives birth to”. It is used in the sense of addressing to one’s mother lovingly.
- In Manipur, there is a system of market run by mothers/married women only. Mothers play an important role in Meitei society and many of them are often the bread earners of the family. The poem in general can be understood as a tribute to all mothers.

2.3.2 ‘Native Land’

The poem ‘Native Land’ is about the poet’s native place, Manipur and the shocking state of lawlessness and chaotic political conflicts that are prevalent in the state. Manipur is a state where the Indian Armed Forces misuse the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) frequently creating havoc in the name of law and order. In the midst of strikes and “hartals”, the ordinary citizens become the victim. The poem opens with rather shocking lines.

First came the scream of the dying
in a bad dream, then the radio report,
and a newspaper: six shot dead, twenty-five
houses razed, sixteen beheaded with hands tied
behind their backs inside a church...

The poet says that there is no sense of accountability on the part of the government whom the poet considers as partners in butchering the innocents. This passivity from the government frustrates the poet which is echoed in the lines –“I burnt my truth with them/ and buried uneasy manhood with them.” The gory images of bullet ridden dead bodies and abandoned children in the burning huts evoke a tragic reality. Many women become widows having lost their husbands in these battles of ideological conflict.

I ceased thinking
of abandoned children inside blazing huts
still waiting for their parents.
If they remembered their grandmother's tales
of many winter hearths at the hour
of sleeping death, I didn't want to know,
if they ever learnt the magic of letters.

The poet highlights the deteriorating state of affairs that persists due to persistence of corruption in the government. The last stanza describes a defeatist attitude where the speaker's sensitivity towards the problem of terrorism and corruption has reached to a saturating level when his understanding of “justice” becomes blurred.

I did mutter, on some far-off days:
“There are limits”, but when the days
absolved the butchers, I continue to live
as if nothing happened.

Robin Ngangom's poem, “Native Land” uses the flexibilities of the free verse which enables him to give space for varieties of expression without the rigor and restriction of rhetorics. In his own words the poet avoids using “verbal wizardry or woolly aesthetics”. By using free verse the lines come across as an outburst of the emotions. We can also trace a hint of satire, but it is never clear whether he is neutral regarding the state of affairs in his homeland because of the concluding lines “I continue to live/ as if nothing happened”.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What does the poet want to say to his “Palem Apokpi” in “A Poem for Mother”?

2. Do you think the poet regrets leaving behind his native place and his mother in “A Poem for Mother”?

3. What are some of the disturbing scenes you see in the poem “Native Land”?

2.4 KYNPHAM SING NONGKYNRIH: LIFE AND WORKS

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is a bilingual poet from Shillong who writes in Khasi and English. Most of his poems reveal his deep attachment to his native land, its culture and tradition and his concern for ecological perspectives. Through his poems he registers his protest and pangs over the erosion of culture and tradition due to the emergence of technology and also due to the intrusion of outside elements and disturbances caused by

underground activities. In fact, the major theme in his poem is about the unique indigenous culture and traditions which are deeply rooted in nature. He has published three volumes of poetry in English – *Moments* (1992), *The Sieve* (1992) and the *Yearning of Seeds* (2011) and three in Khasi – *The Season of Wind* (2002), *The Ancient Rocks of Cherra* (2002) and *Remembrances* (2002).

He works as a Deputy Director of publications at North Eastern Hill University in the state of Meghalaya. He edits the University's Newsletter, NEHU – the official journal and was awarded "The Fellowship for Outstanding Artist" by the Government of India in 2002. He is also the first recipient of North East India Poetry Council award. Some of Nongkynrih's poems have been translated in Welsh, Swedish and several Indian languages while others are included for MA programmes in English in the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi and Nagaland University.

The poet's versatility can be seen from the varieties of techniques he uses in his poems. Kynpham is satirical and irony pervades all his writings. He possesses an enviable lyrical gift, and his poems are widely read. Despite having a wide exposure, he remains rooted in the native soil of the Khasi Hills. In raising an articulate voice for what he fears might be his "vanishing tribe", he speaks not only for small, endangered peoples everywhere, but for our common, damaged humanity in all its transience and vulnerability.

2.5 READING THE POEMS OF KYNPHAM SING NONGKYNRIH

2.5.1 'When the Prime Minister Visits Shillong the Bamboos Watch in Silence'

The poem is about the tenuous political relation that exists between the poet's native place and the central government. Whenever the Prime Minister visits his city, boycott is enforced by the insurgents and everywhere there is uneasy silence. The poem highlights the problems of militancy, political and ethnic conflicts in the North-East region. It is made clear in the opening lines that the people of the region is not enthusiastic about any political visits from the central government and so the bamboos replace their role:


When the Prime Minister
planned a visit to the city
bamboo poles sprang up from pavements

like a welcoming committee.

Only some corrupt ministers welcome him and later do not discuss the problems in detail. Neither the Prime Minister nor the representative local politicians are interested in internal affairs of the region. Such is the situation ridiculed by the poet.

He came like a threat
and scam-stained ministers
were in a cold sweat.
But he left like a defused bomb.

The varied images give voice to different types of satiric expressions. The sense of marginalization and alienation from mainstream politics is linked by the images in the poem. The North-East, in many aspects, is still a peripheral space and this is evident in the attitudes of the politicians. The use of free verse in the poem penetrates the reader with a flow of irony in every turn. But the *coup de grâce* of the poet's indictment against the irresponsibility towards the problems of the region comes in the closing two lines when he writes, "Only the bamboos watched in silence/ too used to the antics of men."

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS	
	1. What does the bamboo stand for in the poem?
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
2. Do the people of the land welcome the Prime Minister?	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
3. How will you put in your own words the relationship between India and Shillong?	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

2.6 DESMOND L. KHARMAWPHLANG: LIFE AND WORKS

Desmond L. Kharmawphlang was born in Shillong in 1964 and brought up in Assam and Meghalaya. The conflict between past and present and their juxtaposed realities are present in his poetry which is sensitized deeply by his love for folk traditions, the oracle of the past, the folk narrator and the oral tradition. This gives his poetry a strong Romantic element which is mythologized with an innate charm of the small town, small loves, wishes and desires. Contemporary socio-cultural concerns of Meghalaya, the cultural past and environmental changes are the main subjects in his poetry.

As a bilingual writer, he translates from Khasi to English and vice-versa, and has so far published three collections of poems in English – *Touchstone* (1987: Shillong), *Here* (1992: Ranchi) and *Homecoming* (1996). Desmond is a poet and folklorist. He has represented the country in numerous conferences outside the country notably in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, Norway, the United States, Finland and Greece. He is on the Executive Board of the Belief Narrative Network of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and is also the Vice President of the Indian Folklore Congress. Desmond resides in Shillong, Meghalaya and is the Professor and Head of the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies of the North-Eastern Hill University.

2.7 READING THE POEMS OF KHARMAWPHLANG

2.7.1 'The Conquest'

"The Conquest" is a poem about Shillong, the hometown of the poet. It describes the changing face of the town through the years - from its pristine and peaceful existence where the folks lived in harmony to the chaotic situation and changes brought about by the invasion of the British. The poet laments the loss of tradition and culture of the indigenous people due to foreign influence. He also voices his protest over the intrusion of other culture and practices that

has affected the lifestyle of the Khasi, resulting in the waning of their own unique identity. In the first stanza the poet expresses his fondness for his native land, the native air and the energy he experiences which gives him a sense of rootedness.

I never get tired of talking about my
Hometown
In summer the sky is pregnant,
Swollen with unborn rain.
Winter arrives, with a tepid sun
Touching the frozen hills, the dream-
Boats on lakes.

There is a sense of nostalgia about the past glory where men and women and people from Shillong went beyond the borders for trade and commerce, a practice which was destroyed by the arrival of the British who used their power of money and machine to subjugate the people. With Shillong as their hill station, their religious agenda of spreading Christianity was very much visible on the horizon.

Later came the British
With gifts of bullets, blood-money
And religion
A steady conquest to the sound of
Guns began

The fourth stanza expresses a sense of relief with the end of British rule and the possible return of peace. The images of freedom and peace come alive with choice of lines such as “The sweet smell of wet leaves again”. The fifth stanza is a reflection on how the poet experiences “not the same anymore” feelings about his surroundings in general and Shillong in particular. The lines “There came those from the sweltering Plains/ From everywhere” indicates the exodus of people from other states who have settled in Shillong and are the remnants of some of the ethnic clashes in the history of Meghalaya. If carefully read, one can note a sense of sarcasm in the tone of the final lines, “One of them told me, you know, / yours is a truly metropolitan city”. The word “metropolitan” provokes one with contradictions and deprivation of the indigenous culture and tradition. Through his poem the poet expresses apprehension of losing his indigenous culture and tradition, his rootedness and the unique identity of the Khasi people thereby generating a powerful feeling of nostalgia.

The poet uses free verse in the given poem. The language of the poet is satirical and critical of the destructive changes that has taken place in his native place. Kharmawphlang dexterously exploits the complicities of the time with his choice of words and vocabulary. He mingles history and geography to enhance his viewpoints on the deterioration of his State in the name of development and modernity.

2.7.2 'Letter to a Dear Friend'

The central theme of the poem "Letter to a Dear Friend" is corrupt political leaders and their plight about developmental programmes in his native land. The poem takes the shape of a written communication (a letter) and there is thus a sense of genuine intimacy and concern revealed as the poet shares his thought on his native state of Meghalaya. In exchanging ordinary pleasantries of the day, the poet indirectly makes the addressee understand the reality of his deteriorating health and with a personal note, the poet reports information about the changing shapes and colours of the surrounding hills and rivers of his place brought about by human actions.

Here, I am well, I am older,
Sadder, perhaps, the seasons loaning
Us another day. Our limbs and
Songs are getting weary all the time.
But I am grateful for small mercies.
You ask me about our hills....well,
They are still there....the stones
And rivers too...they are being pimped for tourists and lately,
In many places disemboweled

Among other things, the poet is also bitter about the deteriorating political situation of his state. Corrupt politicians make empty promises to the poor who are often fooled to vote for the "fools parading as leaders". The crudity of the lines confirms the poet's aberration for the political leaders who mislead the society when he says:

They are a peculiar breed, the leaders---
They have an eel for a tongue,
A mint for a brain.

The language of the poet is satiric in tone as the poet registers his protest on the destructive changes which have enveloped his home state. In making an

effort to brief his friend, the poet also in the course of signing off his letter throws hints about the death and destruction caused by acid rain as a result of the uranium mining in the region. In the concluding lines the poet takes up the responsibility of keeping his friend abreast of the impending future events as if a revelation is being expected. The speaker self-consciously acknowledges himself as a witness, a recorder of bitter things, a recurring theme in the literature of many North-East poets.

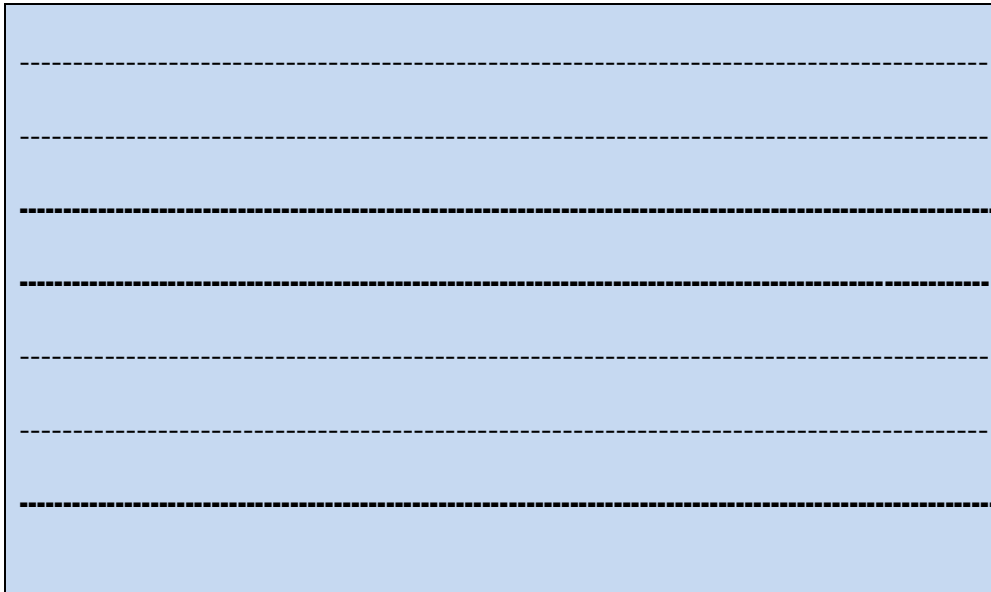


CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are some of the imageries which give the reader the idea of conquest in “The Conquest”?

2. What kind of rare mineral is mentioned in the poem “Letter to a Dear Friend”? How does this natural resource become a political debate and discussion?

3. How does the poet manage to draw a bigger picture of a socio-political problem in a “Letter to a Dear Friend.”?



2.8 SUMMING UP

Upon reading the prescribed poems in this unit we will now be able to conclude that the body of writing from the North-East, poetry in particular, glorify the picturesque natural vistas and the rich heritage of culture and tradition. However, there is also a reflection on the often-disturbed political situation, ethnic clashes and the intrusion and influence of globalisations. This uprootedness from their rich glorious past creates a sense of alienation which comes out strongly in the writings of the North-East. The hostile political climate after Independence has led to relocation of geographical boundaries and identities of belonging to a nation state. Representation of the numerous internal conflicts, with many tribal groups and organisations taking up arms to assert their dominance on their language, culture and settlement, have always been the endeavours of writers from the North-East. Many prose and poetic works of North-East Literature deal with what Tilottoma Misra specifies: “The invasion of an alien culture that lays exclusive claim to modernity and progressiveness and compels the indigenes to be apologetic about their own culture has been the subject matter of much of the satirical writings from the region.”

By now you must have realized that Indian literature in English is a large and complex body of writings enriched by writers from different regions of the sub-continent like the North-East region. You must have also grasped

the thematic concerns and issues which shape North-East writings in English. We hope that you will read other writers from the North-East and further enrich your knowledge.



2.9 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss and assess the Shillong Circle of Poets and their contribution to North-East Poetry.
2. Do you think the poem “A Poem for Mother” is metaphorical in nature? Discuss the poem as a personal as well a social poem.
3. Do you think the poet, Robin Ngangom Singh takes a neutral stance in the poem “Native Land”? Explain the political and personal restlessness depicted in the poem.
4. How does the ordinary public become the recipient of policies and action of the leaders in Nongkynrih’s poem “When the Prime Minister Visits Shillong the Bamboos Watch in Silence”?
5. Who are peculiar brand of leaders that the poet mentions in “When the Prime Minister Visits Shillong the Bamboos Watch in Silence”? How are they different from the rest?
6. Write a critical note on the images used by the poet to evoke a picture on invasion in the poem “The Conquest”.
7. Write a note on the concept of pleasure and painful experiences of the poet as revealed in the poem “The Conquest”.
8. Do you think that the title of the poem “Letter to a Dear Friend” suits the content and the context of the poem? Or should questions be reversed as “Reply to a Friend”? Give your opinion.
9. How does the poet establish a comparison between his well-being to that of nature in the poem “Letter to a Dear Friend”?
How does the concept of “modernization” and “development” become question marks in the poetry of the North-East? Discuss using any three poems prescribed in this unit.



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