

Materiality, Agency, and the “Revised Sublime” in Northeast Indian Anglophone Poetry¹

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Materiality, when read as a corporeal substance exhibiting length, breadth and thickness, is understood through the positioning of human agencies within that material world (Coole and Frost 07). Some basic notions that run the modern world spring from the assumptions of the nature of human agencies and material practices. As Coole and Frost remind us, such anthropocentric assumptions related to the concept of materiality and agency have continued through the various philosophical schools and trends since, at least, Descartes. These human-centric-world assumptions did not remain unchallenged in all these generations. In *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost speak about the posthumanist orientation of New Materialism in which matter itself is an “exhibiting agency” that “entails consideration of a raft of biopolitical and bioethical issues concerning the status of life and of the human” (7). That is where they note why Gilles Deleuze’s views were so important for the new materialist explorations of the thick mesh of “naturecultures” (to use the term in the sense of Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto*). Such an approach nullifies the distinction between organic and inorganic matters and manifests agentic capabilities within inorganic matters. The varied and immensely dispersed approaches within new materialist discourses contain multitudes; even a singular “new materialist” tag/group remains functioning in multifarious ways with the many orientations circulating within their approaches. Although the new materialist concept does not privilege the anthropocentric motif, it considers the human body as an important agent. The claim that new materialists consider human body as an important agent is also diverse as many scholars (Karen Barad and Jane Bennett, among others) have specifically turned towards an opposite direction i.e., human agency remaining dependent on nonhuman agencies. According to Barad, as claimed in *Meeting the Universe Half-way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, the relationships they develop intra-act with each other. Intra-action views agency not as an inherent property of humans to be asserted and exercised, but as a “dynamism of forces” (Barad 141) that indicates a network where things are constantly exchanging and working inseparably, and the “thingness” is placed as a product of the network. This essay too attempts to explore such human-nonhuman intra-actions, however, from the perspectives and contexts of Anglophone ecocritical poems from the Northeastern states of India.

The epistemological grounds and philosophical lineages from which new materialism emerged, do not entertain any simplistic claim. But the “material turn” in the discourse of humanities scholarship, as mentioned by Kevin Trumpeter in his “The Language of the Stones: The Agency of the Inanimate in Literary” is evident within “a number of interrelated discourses such as feminism, ecocriticism, posthumanism, science studies and material culture studies” (Trumpeter 226). These material turns reorient us to understand the nature and role of human agencies in ethico-political domains. Bill Brown in “Thing Theory” (2001) views theory as participating in a “New Materialism” triggering “new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate and threaten their relations to other subjects” (Brown 7). These newly gained perceptions not only reshape but also add innumerable dimensions to our understanding of the relation between the world and the human self and sometimes of the relations between the multiple selves regarding human agency. A close reading of the corpus of poetry from India’s Northeastern states reflects that organisms and environment are interdependent and mutually reactive. The term Northeast has been used as a geographical location, and no imposition of political or cultural homogenization has been intended here. Reading Northeast Indian literature through a lens of ecocritical perspective is almost a predictable discourse for the critics and readers working in this field. *Ecology, Myth and Mystery: Contemporary Poetry in English from Northeast India* by N.D.R Chandra and Nigamananda Das analyses the given corpus of poetry from the perspectives related to ecology and myth. A major part of the scholarly works done in this area has been focused on the co-constitutive relations of ecology and ethnicity. This essay will concentrate on the concept of the “revised sublime” that is often experienced at the sites where humans intervene in nature’s course of action. The concept of deep ecology is significant in this discussion since it helps readers identify a major shift in the poets’ worldview from the anthropocentric to the biocentric. Bruno Latour’s “Reassembling the Social” (2005) claims that “rocks” are also capable of deploying “many more types of agencies than the narrow role given to them in empiricist account” (51). The concept of “waste” will be discussed in this context to shape the interaction between organic and inorganic matters. This discussion aspires to deal with the exhibiting agency of matter and its connection with bioethical and biopolitical issues through the concept of “waste” as reflected in the corpus of poetry from India’s Northeast states. This will also connect the deep ecological concerns and multitudinous ambiguous networks of the organic with social processes.

The concepts of the revised sublime and waste are interconnected. Waste has been dealt with in many varied ways in many varied fields of inquiry. Jane Bennett in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* exposes agency to inorganic phenomena such as trash, food etc that hold the capacities to function even by defying human will. To mark the epistemological specificity of this connection, Bennett's discussion on the agency of the inorganic phenomena, especially on trash (*The Enchantment of Modern Life*) is significant. Poetry from India's Northeast echoes the spirit of ecopoems that place themselves on the cutting edge of poetic innovation and ecological thinking.² The bond between human beings and the environment in India's Northeast bears something more than merely being smitten by the pictorial beauties of naturescape. Ecopoem, unlike the mainstream poetic practices, concentrates on a wider social paradigm. Christopher Arigo in "Notes Toward an Ecopoetics: Revising the Postmodern Sublime and Juliana Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*" argues that the juxtaposition of innovative human practices in the cultural and technological fields and ecological thinking/feeling creates "a site of resistance, of politics, of political resistance" (*HOW2* unpaginated). By following Spahr's proposition in this context, I have previously discussed the "revised sublime" in "An Ecocritical Reading of Select Northeast Indian English Poetry" as "the tension between the tranquility and beauty as juxtaposed with human intervention in the landscape, often in its most destructive form" that "has become one of the most exciting tropes in current ecological writings" (*Literary Herald* 973-974). This connection conceives the concept of the revised sublime and establishes the relationships between the contemporary trends in New Materialism and revised sublime.

Ecopoetry is fundamentally related to politics since ecological degradation is essentially a political product both from economic and colonialist perspectives. An ecopoem, Arigo argues, reflects "a tension located at the intersection of human interference and destruction and the beauty of nature: the Revised Sublime" (*HOW2* n.p.). Rebecca Solnit opines:

The eighteenth-century sublime came from natural phenomena or artistic representations of natural phenomena; the unnatural disasters of the present offer no such containment within the bounds of the natural – the oil fields afire in Kuwait, the mushroom clouds above Yucca Flat, the blood-red sunsets of Los Angeles – though they still compel attention. The atomic bomb ... is both the principal metaphor and fact of the problematic relationship between our power, desire, and limits. (*Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West* 46)

In the context of the revised sublime, the binary between trash and culture is often invalidated. The concept of “trash,” termed as “waste” in this chapter, is a substantial thrust in this discussion. The more significant question appears to be: what constitutes waste? Salit Kark in *Conservation Biology* argues that waste is “something squandered, empty or barren, or lacking purpose. Waste means desolation, pointlessness, and uselessness, but it also indicates excess and surplus; both extremes have been viewed as problematic, void of meaning, and immoral” (331). In *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Suzanne Raitt also observes that “To call something ‘waste’ [as opposed to ‘rubbish,’ ‘garbage,’ and ‘litter’] is to invoke its history” (Hawkins and Muecke 73). Sophie Gee in *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* deals with Raitt’s argument that shows how “a narrative of its production is what distinguishes waste from all other types of leftover” (9). Christopher Schmidt considers waste as materiality in which waste incorporates “categories of garbage, shit, sexual excess, economic surplus, unproductive labour, idleness, and aesthetic imbalance” (16). The formless nature of waste helps it attain transcendence over binaries, and it exhibits a non-human agency, or what Bennett calls “vibrancy,” in its co-existence with and shaping of human lives, societies, politics and action.

To the contemporary ecopoems, nature is not a mere reference point. Ecopoets create an environmental consciousness by emphasising the ideological, spiritual, mythical and biological relationships with our surroundings. The corpus explores this consciousness by showing the connection between humankind and the environment. Jelica Tomic in “Ecocriticism – Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment” shows how the notions of biodiversity and cultural constructs, especially of the endangered species, are important in this context. But as a result of some specific cultural reasons and emerging economic schemes, the scope for biodiversity is at stake. The directional name “Northeast India” includes diverse ethnic races, tribes and sundry linguistic sub-tribes. But this directional umbrella term also undermines the geo-political and cultural diversity of this heterogeneous region. The ecopoetic endeavours are important in this respect since it shows a parallel connection between making an effort to save natural species and protect diverse ethnic groups. The extinction of an ecological species is shown to be no different from the extinction of an ethnic race. Mamang Dai, a noted voice from Arunachal Pradesh, presents the landscape in a newer height that reveals nature through different voices, both human and nonhuman. In conventional poetic representation, nature is often presented as a passive receiver of the existential agony of humans. Poetry originating in

this region, surprisingly embodies chaos amidst nature perceived within the poetic psyche. The animistic philosophy in Dai's poem *The Voice of the Mountain* presents this view:

I know, I know these things / as rocks know, burning in the sun's embrace,/about clouds, and sudden rain;/As I know a cloud is a cloud is a cloud,/A cloud is this uncertain pulse that sits over my heart. /In the end the universe yields nothing/except a dream of permanence. /peace is a falsity/A moment of rest comes after long combat.
(Misra 4)

In the same poem, Dai writes: "The other day a young man arrived from the village./ Because he could not speak he brought gift of fish/ from the land of rivers./ It seems such acts are repeated:/We live in territories forever ancient and new,/ and as we speak in changing languages/ I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree/ and try to make a sign" (Misra 3). The "gift of fish" from the "land of river" is being offered to the mountain. The mountain, the spirit of the land, forms a "sign" to communicate with humans. The anxiety of the endangered community is reflected in the "territories forever ancient and new" in which people "speak in changing languages". The need for making a sign with an objective to communicate with the natural world carries an urge to establish an effective recognition of one's existence.

Mona Zote, a voice from Mizoram shows her concern to shield the natural and cultural diversity of her land. Her poem "Girl with Black Guitar and Blue Hibiscus", shows poetry as a product of the interactions between a human being, an avian, the landscape and various other elements of human existences: "The pigeons are insane with grief because you left them/ the clouds will be noble and distant as always/ The scent of citrus flowers will fade in soft explosions/ and the girl will put a blue hibiscus in her hair/.../Until it becomes the black guitar and music becomes/ A cleft of a certain colour waiting for the first quiver of strings" (Misra 72-73). The co-existence of natural bodies and human bodies also blurs the distinction between them. Poetry from this region does not exhibit the meditation of a human subject upon a natural object in which the latter merely becomes the projector of the meanings of human life. It, on the other hand, produces a site of political resistance. Ecotone denotes an edge that encourages an active interaction between communities -- ecological and beyond -- that are unstable over time. Marcella Durand in "The Ecology of Poetry" views:

Ecological poetry is much like ecological living—it recycles materials, functions with an intense awareness of space, seeks an equality of value between all living and unliving things, explores multiple perspectives as an attempt to subvert the dominant paradigms

of mono-perception, consumption and hierarchy, and utilizes powers of concentration to increase lucidity and attain a more transparent, less anthropocentric mode of existence. (59)

Skinner argues in *Ecopoetics: "The Ecology of Poetry"* that "ecopoetics is the fusion of matter with perception, observation with process, concentration to transmission –that would most decisively turn what can seem nostalgic remnants of "nature" poetry into a more dynamic, affective and pertinent poetry" (Skinner 59). "Everywhere I Go", a poem by Robin S. Ngangom presents the simultaneous presence of his homelands, both "real" and "virtual":

Everywhere I go/ I carry my homeland with me./.../ I often hear about its future/ in conflict resolution symposiums./.../ But I can see it returning with women/ and water in rural evenings./And I want to tell my poet-friends/ of the twelve mothers who stripped themselves/ and asked soldiers to rape them/ In fact, I make imaginary journeys/ to its little world everyday. (Misra 46-47)

R. Willis views the connection between animals and humans through analyzing two linguistic figures of speeches: "The distinctive peculiarity of animals is that, being at once close to man and strange to him, both akin to him and unalterably not-man, they are able to alternate, as objects of human thought, between the contiguity of the metonymic mode and the distanced, analogical mode of the metaphor" (*Man and Beast* 128). In "Poems During November" Desmond Kharmawphlang displays these modes of axial relationship by showing metonymic associations of a human being with "a fox" and "the ravines". The stagnant life of the animals is juxtaposed with the dynamic discourses of human lives. Human life amid political turbulence has been displayed with a metaphoric distance: "The rains still weep on these hills,/ Filling the thin air with softness,/ Sending a fox howling halfway down/ The ravines" (Misra 61). Ngangom's poem, "The First Rain", by nullifying the boundary between the human world and the animal world, presents the crises related to their extinction: "An animal threatened with extinction/ needs a lair for his mate and his young,/ I'm not different./ I need the morning for its bright blood/ and I need to seize the night" (Misra 45).

Christopher Arigo ", speaks about a different kind of nature poetry that can abolish the distinctions between the "bulldozer" and the "bird", and it is in such suspending and transforming potentials of poetic imagination, where nonhuman/nature and human are in an inseparable embrace that one can trace within the poems of Northeast India. Arigo views:

(P)erhaps poetry as a practice is the best means of directly addressing an environment in crisis. And perhaps this is why it is so difficult to pin down what makes a poem or poet “eco”—because the concern insinuates itself into so many elements of the writing, between the lines, in the white spaces, questioning even the paper upon which the poem is printed): the paper industry is one of the country’s largest polluters after all. Or maybe it is because the poem itself is an ecology: a microcosmic ecosystem in which itself dwells. (*How2* n.p.)

R. K. Madhubir, a poet from Manipur, efficiently displays this tension: “Everybody’s heart tugging by nuclear holocaust/everybody’s hair raising by starwar/everything now doing by computers/moving the roads now instead of engines/in the age you are picking sparrow-dung as coins/encroaching like pahom for a few more steps” (*The Timebomb and Other Poems* 15). Thangjam Ibopishak also in his poem “Dali, Hussain, or Odour of Dream, Colour of Wind” raises the question: “Which is more fragrant/ The report of guns or the scent of flowers?/ The sound of guns lies on the nose,/ The odour of flowers on the tips of flowers./ Blind men see colours on voices” (Nongkynrih and Ngangom 91). The speaker questions the degree of intensity of the fragrance in two seemingly different objects: guns and flowers. This striking comparison seems to nullify the distinction between “the guns” and “the flowers”. This nullification establishes the human intervention in the landscape.

Patricia Yaeger speaks about “rubbish ecology” in which “binary trash/culture has become more ethically charged and aesthetically interesting than the binary nature/culture” (“Rubbish Ecology” 338). Following critics like Christopher Schmidt, Suzanne Raitt and Valerie Allen, one can argue that “to call something waste, is to invoke its history” (“Psychic Waste” 73), which in turn implies materiality, metaphor, and emotional affect (*The Poetics of Waste* 16). Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann observe that matter itself becomes a text and a “site of narrativity” (“Material Ecocriticism” 83). Schmidt exposes, the process of identifying the waste is a social process (*The Poetics of Waste* 16). Similarly, Kark also argues that the waste has always been treated as “other” that is socially hybrid and liminal. Consequently, waste is constructed by slipping away from a single and specifically articulated designation. Kark parallels history with garbage since it is incapable to eradicate the past events that haunt the forced coherence of linear narratives. Thus, the reappearance of history in an incessant flow of social existence might appear as the resurgence of “waste” in the flow of civilization. The corpus of English poetry from India’s Northeast celebrates “waste” and presents it as a

constitutive element of human existence. Poetry, originating from India's Northeast, frames a never-ending dialogue with history and past to authenticate their existences.

Since history is treated as “trash,” the individual always feels an urge to separate the self from “history.” The subject makes an effort to unburden the self of the confusion resulting from the act of separating the remaining part of the subject from the part s/he must jettison to sink away into “a beyond” from which there is no return. Surprisingly, the given corpus of poetry seems to feel comfortable at a junction where the two contradictory but related urges -- identifying the self in alignment with history and separating the self from history -- clash with each other. These two contradictory selves form a dynamic dialogue in which the phenomenological, cultural and political positioning of “trash” does not remain fixed. This space of indeterminacy and dynamism qualifies the concept of matter anew. The given corpus of poetry shows how such dynamism within the ecocritical poems of the northeast remains in dialogue with the dynamism of matter within new materialist approaches. Although the arguments are centred on the ecocritical side, the dynamic concept of ‘history’ in this discourse shows what both of them (*i.e.* ecocritical poems of the northeast and reverse sublime on one hand, and new materialism on the other hand) can offer for each other.

The questions related to homogenization and diversity are most common in the context of this corpus. How could people who celebrate their ethnic identities as “other,” show their grievances against the process of marginalization which categorizes them as “other”? The metaphoric manifestation of waste is evident in the cultural model of waste. According to Georges Bataille, using defined identity is an attempt to control nature whereas the unidentified and unidentifiable waste or garbage confounds and threatens the humanized world. Rejection of the ‘trash’ ascertains one's sense of purity of the self (*The Accursed Share* 56). The nomenclature of the northeast of India (since it responds to the issue of cultural plurality in a contradictory way), provides a pertinent instance in projecting this tension between the “self” and the “other” in this context. They celebrate their ethnic identities, but simultaneously they contest the process of “othering” by the mainlanders. Once that ‘othering’ is recognized, the subject tends to prove the “other” invisible, powerless and non-existent. The identification of the self as marginalized implies denial of agency, identity, subjectivity, or worth. This feeling of marginalisation is reinforced when their tradition of oral history and ethnic identity is made redundant in the given socio-political context. Redundancy often shares its semantic space with “garbage” and “waste.” But in the context of this corpus, the identity of the self is being constructed and projected by embracing the history and the ‘other’ to its core existence.

Ecofeminism explores an inseparable connection between the social construction of “nature” and the social construction of “woman”. Ecofeminists simultaneously question the anthropocentric and the androcentric views. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in *Ecofeminism* (2010) have shown an undeniable connection between patriarchy and ecological degradation. Mamang Dai’s poetry resonates with the modern trend of ecofeminism and she portrays her bodily connections with nature. But surprisingly, it does not describe a Euro-centric connotation of a woman’s body with tainted nature; it rather exposes the relationship between the feminine body and the natural world. In “The Voice of the Mountain”, Dai says: “I am the woman lost in translation/ who survives, with happiness to carry on./ .. I am the place where memory escapes/ the myth of time,/ I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain” (Misra 4). Here, too, we see it is through nature and non-human entities (like mountains) that the human concerns are voiced and not vice-versa; nature becomes for them their voice. Dai’s poem “The Sorrow of Women” portrays the diminished self of “womanhood” that finds expression in the metaphors associated with the natural world: “Life is so hard like this./ Nobody knows why./ It is like fire./ It is like rainwater, sand, glass./ What shall I do, my love,/ if my reflections disappears?” (Misra 5). But the tone of assertion seemingly overpowers the tone of lamentation here. The poet, being a keen observer, says: “And they are talking about escape,/ about liberty, men and guns,/ ah! The urgency for survival./ But what will they do/ not knowing the sorrow of women” (Misra 5).

The imagery used in the poems places women as constitutive elements in keeping the structural balance between social and political presences. These multidimensional incongruities associated with the notion of “womanhood” and its inseparable bonding with the course of nature have been shown throughout the poem. Dai shows a parallel connection between the volatile nature of a woman’s soul and the dynamic presence of a river. In the poem “The River”, the river presents itself as a female subject and the context she is in; and thus, seems to be the representative of human existence in general: “I thought the river is a woman./ A country, a name,/ a note of music trapped in the white current,/ a sheet of paper carrying a secret map;/ the skyline is where it begins/ between the darkness and the summit/ in the birthplace of thirst” (Ngangom and Nongkinrih 89-90).

Women bodies, through the lens of the patriarchal matrix, are considered redundant or waste. But the exclusion of this waste is not allowed. The ‘waste’ and the ‘self’ mingle with one another and become a single entity. The role of agency in the social sphere becomes relative and dynamic in these contexts.

In the poem “The Land of the half-humans”, Thangjam Ibopishak exhibits the presence of the “headless body” through its activities, especially activities related to the removal of “waste”: “(F)or the headless body only shitting is its share/...the body is working, labouring, shitting; work, labour, shit. To sweat, to be bone-weary” (Nongkynrih and Ngangom 93). The waste becomes the instrument to assert human existence. The poets find this ‘othering’ process burdensome that sets a limit to exploring the scopes for their existences. Surprisingly, they employ another kind of ‘other’ness to remove the former ‘other’ness. Susan Signe Morrison in her book mentions fear as a garbage that corrodes one from within (*The Literature of Waste* 57). Fear is one kind of metaphysical despair that transmutes into and seeps into and out of the body politic. But this metaphysical waste, as Scanlan describes, can be recognized as soon as the division between self and waste collapses (*On Garbage* 25). In the poem “For the next birth”, written by Yumlebham Ibomcha and translated by Robin S. Ngangom, the poet wishes to lead a so-called “otherly” life to amputee “fear,” another prominent societal waste:

In the next birth/ I shall take birth as a bastard./ You should also take birth as one./Then let’s meet at an ownerless shack of the marketplace/ just you and I, freely/...I shall grow up as a bazar dog/ walking alone any direction I choose/... You should also grow up an orphan like me./.../ Let us embrace/ for a moment without fear. (Nongkynrih and Ngangom 84-85)

These acts of embracing the “otherly” identities, like being a “bastard”, “bazar dog” and “orphan” are desired since these identities hold the potential to eradicate “fear,” another societal trash. The positioning(s) of the wastes are in flux in these contexts.

Aruni Kashyap in his poem “Land of Rivers and Rains” clearly articulates: “We are the other/ of others” (*Indian Literature* 55-57). Poetry from the Northeast of India creates a space between human and non-human worlds by moving beyond the observer/observed dualism arising of Enlightenment sciences. Kelvin Hutchingson comments in *Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies*, such a reflective identification with nature “entails a quasi-mystical surrender of critical self-reflexivity that has troubling political implications” (182).

In a poem titled “Magon and Stray Ramblings” by Megan Kachari and translated by Pradip Acharya, the poetic persona reveals itself through the description of the waste and ruins:

Tears make me drink till I am sozzled,/ The night sky shivers at my mad rants/ My ruined vials go alert like the cat,/ and the startled whore spits at me/ out of hatred, sheer

hatred.../ Like erosions I steadily break and splinter,/ Breaking against the bend in my heart./ The river of sorrow rushes relentlessly on... (*Melodies and Guns* 11)

Here the “other” is shown to be essential in giving expression to the poetic self. The repetition of the same lines in the last stanza of the poem establishes the argument in a more convincing way.

Lands, hills, rivers and forests become a living repository of the many changes the Northeast had encountered, and Ao’s poem “Blood of Others” records such changes. In Ao’s poem, the “land” embraces the essence of both material presence and emotive significance. People associate the changing landscape with their changing identities, and they think that the lost identities can only be retrieved through unearthing their cultural memories. Simultaneously, the border between the self and the other is also left nullified, and the fixity regarding the identities of the “self” and the “other” becomes unsettled. The history, the waste becomes the major constitutive element in defining the self:

When my time came I told stories/ As though they ran in my blood/ because each telling revitalized/ My life-force/ And each story reinforced/ My racial reminiscence/ The stories told of the moment/ When we broke into being/ From the six stones and/ How the first fathers founded/ Our ancient villages and/ Worshipped the forces of nature.
(Misra 83-84)

As the poems of Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, Cherrie L. Chhange, and others show, they do not cherish having their global identity at the cost of the extinction of their ethnic identities. On the other hand, a sense of being marginalized in the sphere of national and global politics makes them consider their very own “ethnic” existences as “waste” without which, paradoxically, their survival would have been at stake.

In such contexts as these, the coming together of concerns of nature and ethnic diversity within the medium of poetry becomes for them a voice against this forced alienation. These poems expose two contradictory selves at the same time: a self that is tied to the land and the tradition and celebrates the past ethnic identity; and, a self that aspires to avail a global identity. This coexistence of two contradictory selves creates a space in Arigo’s site of resistance that leads the readers to experience the revised sublime in the corpus of anglophone poetry from India’s Northeast.

Lowell Duckert in “Speaking Stones, John Muir, and a Slower (Non) Humanities” argues that our ethics have to be “attuned to the voices of things” (278) and Jane Bennett comments

that poetry can be a suitable medium to convey insight into non-human agency (“Powers of the Hoard” 240, 267; “The Force of Things” 360). Bennett’s views on the vibrancy of matter and nonhuman agency are closely related to what the first part of the paper explored about northeast ecocritical poems. Here, the distinction between human and non-human agency becomes blurred and we find an echo of what Eric Robertson claims about the breakdown of this boundary in the middle ages: “rock and human differ[ed] more by degree than by kind” (“Exemplary Rocks” 100) since “the line between the human and the natural world” was “porous” (“Exemplary Rocks” 105). Ian Bogost puts: “To put things at the centre of a new metaphysics also requires us to admit that they do not exist just for us” (*Alien Phenomenology* 6).

The positioning(s) of waste in these contexts are relative. Morrison comments: “Garbage is considered waste only because it once was something else, something ‘better’” (*The Literature of Waste* 135). Morrison also displays how even after existing materially in space, “garbage provokes reflections on time” (*The Literature of Waste* 135). Christopher Schmidt considers poetry creative as well as ethical excess. Schmidt puts that poetry “is not logic or/ knowledge or philosophy; it is action and action’s pleasure” (*The Poetics of Waste* 159). Waste is shown to be a medium through which the body remains conscious of the interconnectedness of one’s own body with the “other.”

Zygmunt Bauman comments that waste reshapes the creative process (*Wasted Lives* 22). The poem titled “This Earth, a Memsahib”, written by Megan Kachari and translated by Manjeet Baruah presents the poem as a ragpicker who is putting hard effort to remove the trashes from the memory lane to highlight the pleasant, shining and extravagant aspects of human feelings:

The cascading waves of the river, across that bank,/Our games in the past, from the water to the earth./ The pungent smell of the corpse, afloat now/ And stuck to the mud/ And this smell of death,... from the river to the bank/ But your breasts?/The clothes tossed to the wind/ You can still love,/ The caress of fingers/ Over your breasts? (*Melodies and Guns* 35)

The poem, here, plays the role of a rag-picker who removes trashes from the territories of human existence and invigorates life by restoring love, affection and human passion in life.

In “Next Nature: Sublime natural and technological landscapes”, Jos de Mul demonstrates three-fold connotations connected with the English noun “landscape”: first, establishing a (bio) physical reality, secondly, physical reality as being perceived by a human spectator and thirdly, as a represented landscape in art (5-6). The etymological analysis explains that even the (bio) physical landscape is a cultural construct. The landscape and the nature portrayed by the poet of the land presume a human gaze on space. The represented landscape narrates the history of human perception. Mul displays how the concept of “separative cosmology” generates the idea of ‘worldview’. The conception of the world as an image in front of a representing subject is also a product of the global existence of contemporary times. The separation of humans from their landscapes in this context, is, therefore, a product of technology and the tension between the ethnic self and the global self. The cultural representations of the landscape (the landscapes are being represented as being associated with the memories of the past and ethnic cultures) are closely related to the process of politicisation of the space. The political nature of landscape and identity has been portrayed vividly through the interpretation of the corpus.

The poets of this region use poetry as instruments to question the “digestive system” of the capitalist structure. The process identifies the interchangeable nature of the concept of waste. This process of restructuring the concept of waste through this corpus unsettles the structure of the system. A system feeds on the game of designing inclusion and exclusion to frame the structure. Everything which is waste, excess, redundant and indeterminate needs to be suppressed to sustain the structure of the system. Waste challenges the reductionist policy of the established structure. The poet, by showing waste as a constitutive element of our existences, initiates a counter politics that also puts anthropocentric structuralist politics in question. Morrison in *The Literature of Waste* views that “Poetry acknowledges the poignancy of materiality; it functions homeopathically for the alienation and disgust we all too often feel toward our own and others’ bodily waste and decay. Poetry, salvage and sacrifice, leads to the creation of a community of affinity” (198).

Challenges against this homogenization are echoed through the writings of the poets who are conscious of the paradoxical matrices embedded in the layers of their existences. Since the landscape is invaded by the bio-geo-politics of capitalocene, poetry originating in this land is bound to deal with that political construct. Morrison views that “The humanities can play a role in the movement to “degrow” and decentre, to what Serres calls tenancy, as opposed to ownership, of the world” (*The Literature of Waste* 198). Ottmar Ette in “Literature as

Knowledge for Living, Literary Studies as Science for Living” considers literature “a mutable and dynamic storehouse of knowledge for living... devises and aesthetically shapes blueprints for how to live” (986). Poetry deems to be one of the most reliable spaces which reflects and reshapes reality. An open communication through poetry reshapes human perspectives about the world and the way of living.

Aruni Kashyap in his poem “Land of Rivers and Rains” positions river and landscape to be the owners that exist even after people die. The poet does not assert the conventional right of human ownership on the landscape; instead, he thinks himself to be a part of that eternity: “I belong there” (*Indian Literature* 55-57). He seems to feel proud when he says: “I come from there,/ From the land of first suns/ Where rivers are born/ And people die, born/ In rivers, over boats” (*Indian Literature* 55-57). The speaker portrays himself as a tenant on this earth. The readers cannot find an anthropocentric tendency to hold ownership over nature and landscape in this poem; rather, an overt tone of complete submission to the ownership of the landscape is noticeable here. The poem clearly expresses the temporality and the dependence of human lives which play the roles of tenants under the supervision of nature. It says:

It is a land where waters rule,/ Reddish soil slide down like blood/ Towards rivers, crisscrossing us, our houses/ Our lives, like veins, like roads and railways/ in this country, from one end to another/ like migratory swallows, oscillating/ without jewels translucent, transparent on its beaks./ Like waters, that govern our lives. (*Indian Literature* 55-57)

The poem, thus, conveys the greatest message to the human world that we need to accept the status of tenancy under the ownership of nature.

Materiality, according to Coole and Frost, “is always something more than “mere” matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable (Coole and Frost 9). Thus, this relational trend of materiality is connected with the multitudinous ambiguous network of organic and social processes (Coole and Frost 10). Although this direct conversion of scientific theories into philosophy cannot be presented in a simple fashion, the tropes and motifs of those scientific theories resonate deeply with the theoretical discourses of new materialist philosophy. Coole and Frost argue that this physical world is “mercurial stabilization of dynamic process” (13). One of the major trends in new materialism is a fresh focus on bioethical controversies. An

increasing emphasis on the theories of democracy and citizenship and the significance of bodily process is a notable element in the field of new materialism. This area is a part of biomaterialism. This emphasis on corporeality relates itself to the trend of posthumanism.

The notion of the “revised sublime” by Christopher Arigo is, therefore, applicable in understanding the relationship between non-human and human agencies in the poetry of Northeast India. Bringing together eco-political concerns of “Northeast poetry” and the agential potential of waste enables realizing their intra-active entanglements, where waste reminds us of the human-nonhuman mesh. The relevant queries that can be raised in the context of English poetry from the Northeast of India are as follows: can the revised sublime be a site for recovering our lost connection with nature? Or, is it a product of the loss of connection? Does the revised sublime, through its paradoxes as revealed especially in the analysis of this corpus, suggest a better perspective of how to live on this earth? This discussion considers it worth stating that the ecopoem, as it occupies the space in question, holds the potential for reshaping thoughts about ecological issues. The poets from this region acknowledge their responsibilities by presenting this issue as a matter-of-fact truth of human life. Their writings encourage the common mass to think about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis in a new way. When seen through the lens of the revised sublime (specifically the onto-epistemological concerns of waste, as explored in this essay), not only the new materialist concerns of human-nonhuman entanglements acquire a new and fresh dimension of critical engagement, but the corpus also shows how literary studies communicate values with profound ecological implications therein.

Notes

¹ This paper was first presented in a 3-day international conference titled “Rethinking Humanities and its Entanglements” (Aug 5-7, 2020) organized by Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Kolkata.

² For further details, see Chandrakanta Murasingh’s views from the conversation titled “The Thud of Boots and the Odour of Gunpowder” conducted in December 2004 for the Poetry International Web.

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