

Tarnishing the Purity of Nature = Defloration of Woman: Analyzing Interconnections between Nature and Women in Temsula Ao's Poetry

Dr. (Mrs.) Indu Swami

PG Department of English
Assam University: Diphu Campus
(A Central University),
Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India
induswamionline@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Eco-feminism regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected and combines the philosophy of feminism with the principles of ecology and environmental ethics. It asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together.*

In the first section of the present paper, I shall try to analyze the interconnections between the status of women and the status of non-human nature based on four central claims viz. the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are interconnected; these connections must be uncovered in order to understand both the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; feminist analysis must include ecological insights; and a feminist perspective must be a part of any proposed ecological solutions. The second segment of the paper aims to foreground the eco-feminists issues presented in the poems of Temsula Ao, one of the most formidable poetic voices from Northeast India.

Keywords: *Women, Nature, Suppression, Eco-feminism, Poetry and North-East India.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Eco-feminism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as myriad forms of feminist and environmental theories and activism intersected. It acts in both and neither of these broad movements, simultaneously serving as an environmental critique of feminism and a feminist critique of environmentalism. Thus, eco-feminism regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected and combines the philosophy of feminism with the principles of ecology and environmental ethics. It asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. These socially constructed oppressions formed out of the power dynamics of patriarchal systems. In one of the first eco-feminist books, *New Woman/New Earth*, Ruether, states:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society (204).

Ruether makes clear a central tenet of eco-feminism: earth and the other-than-human experience the tyranny of patriarchy along with women. Classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, naturism (a term coined by Warren) and speciesism are all intertwined. In other words, eco-feminism is a movement that makes connections between environmentalists and feminisms; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment" (Sturgeon 1997: 23). Eco-feminism seeks to recognize the interconnectedness and battle these injustices; as Greta Gaard suggests: "More than a theory about feminism and environmentalism,

or women and nature, as the name might imply, eco-feminism approaches the problems of environmental degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked” (Gaard 2001: 157-172).

Eco-feminism is multi-faceted and multi-located, challenging structures rather than individuals. By confronting systems of patriarchy, eco-feminism broadens the scope of the cultural critique and incorporates seemingly disparate but, according to eco-feminism, radically connected elements. Combining feminist and deep ecological perspectives, in and of themselves extremely varied ways of thinking about reality, is a complex, transgressive process that is often in flux.

Eco-feminists, or ecological feminists, are those feminists who analyze the interconnections between the status of women and the status of non-human nature. At the heart of this analysis are four central claims:

- The oppression of women and the oppression of nature are interconnected;
- These connections must be uncovered in order to understand both the oppression of women and the oppression of nature;
- Feminist analysis must include ecological insights; and
- A feminist perspective must be a part of any proposed ecological solutions (Warren, 4).

A closer look at each of these claims will illuminate the concerns of eco-feminism.

1.1. The Oppression of Women and the Oppression of Nature are Interconnected

One way to talk about the connections between women and nature is to describe the parallel ways they have been treated in Western patriarchal society. First, the traditional role of both women and nature has been instrumental (Plumwood, 120). Women’s role has been to serve the needs and desires of men. Traditionally, women were not considered to have a life except in relation to a man, whether father, brother, husband, or son. Likewise, nonhuman nature has provided the resources to meet human needs for food, shelter, and recreation. Nature had no purpose except to provide for human wants. In both cases the instrumental role led to instrumental value. Women were valued to the extent that they fulfilled their role. Nature was valued in relation to human interests either in the present or the future. Women and nature had little or no meaning independent of men.

A second parallel in the treatment of women and nature lies in the way the dominant thought has attempted "to impose sharp separation on a natural continuum" in order to maximize difference (Plumwood, 120). In other words, men are identified as strong and rational while women are seen as weak and emotional. In this division of traits those men who are sensitive and those women who are intellectually or athletically inclined are marginalized. They are overlooked in the typical (stereotypical) description of men as opposed to women. The same holds true for distinctions between what is human and what is not. The human being is conscious, the nonhuman plant or animal is not; the human is able to plan for the future, to understand a present predicament, the nonhuman simply reacts to a situation out of instinct. These distinctions are drawn sharply in order to protect the privilege and place of those thought to be more important.

These parallels are instructive but they do not explain why they developed. Two theologians were among the feminists who first articulated the link between women and nature in patriarchal culture. They were Rosemary Ruether, in *New Woman, New Earth* (1975), and Elizabeth Dodson Gray, in *Green Paradise Lost* (1979). Both of them focused on the dualisms that characterize patriarchy, in particular the dualisms of mind/body and nature/culture. In her work Ruether traces the historical development of these dualisms in Western culture. She points to the way in which Greek thought, namely dualistic thought, was imported into ancient Hebraic culture. The triumph of this dualism came in the development of a transcendent or hierarchical dualism in which men master nature, not by basing themselves on it and exalting it as an independent divine power, but by subordinating it and linking their essential selves with a transcendent principle beyond nature which is pictured as intellectual and male. This image of transcendent, male spiritual deity is a projection of the ego or consciousness of ruling-class males, who envision a reality, beyond the physical processes that gave them birth, as the true source of their being. Men locate their true

origins and natures in this transcendent sphere, which thereby also gives them power over the lower sphere of "female" nature (Ruether 1975, 13-14).

In this way, transcendent dualism incorporates and reinforces the dualisms of mind/body and nature/culture as well as male/female. In addition these distinctions are read into other social relations, including class and race. As a result, ruling-class males lump together those whom Ruether calls the "body people": women, slaves, and barbarians (Ruether 1975, 14; see also Plumwood, 121-22).

While agreeing with the reasons for the development of transcendent dualism, Dodson Gray's response to it differs from Ruether's. Ruether's tack is to reject transcendental dualism outright; Dodson Gray appears to embrace the dualism but to reevaluate the pairs. In other words, she maintains the distinction but insists that being more closely tied to nature does not detract from women's worth. Instead, for Dodson Gray, it enhances it. As others have pointed out, Dodson Gray "come[s] dangerously close to implicitly accepting the polarities which are part of the dualism, and to trying to fix up the result by a reversal of the valuation which would have men joining women in immanence and identifying the authentic self as the body" (Plumwood, 125).

A similar division of opinion can also be traced in other feminist writings. It is the difference between the nature feminists and the social feminists (Griscom 1981, 5). The nature feminists are those who celebrate women's biological difference and claim some measure of superiority as a result of it. The social feminists are those who recognize the inter-structuring of race, class, and sex, but who tend to avoid discussing nature exploitation precisely because it invites attention to biological difference. Both kinds of feminists have positive points to express, but another sort of feminism, one that transcends these, is needed in order to understand the connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature.

1.2. These Connections must be Uncovered in order to understand both the Oppression of Women and the Oppression of Nature

Feminist analysis of the transcendent dualism identified by Ruether shows that there are three basic assumptions that govern the way the dualism's elements are treated (see Ruether 1975, 1983). These assumptions lie behind the parallels between the oppression of women and nature described above. First, the elements in the dualism are perceived as higher and lower relative to each other. The higher is deemed more worthy or valuable than the lower. Second, the lower element is understood to serve the higher. In fact, the value of the lower is derived in instrumental fashion. Third, the two elements are described as polar opposites. That is, "the traits taken to be virtuous and defining for one side are those which maximize distance from the other side" (Plumwood, 132). In other words, men are "not women" and women are "not men." The same holds true in traditional conceptions of human and nonhuman nature. These three assumptions lead to a logic of domination that repeatedly identifies differences and controls them in such a way as to protect the "higher" element in the dualism. In this way, from the point of view of the "higher," difference automatically implies inferiority.

In patriarchal culture these three assumptions are at work in a "nest of assumptions" that also includes (1) The identification of women with the physical and nature, (2) The identification of men with the intellectual, and (3) The dualistic assumption of the inferiority of the physical and the superiority of the mental (Plumwood, 133). Once this nest of assumptions is unpacked the differences between the social feminists and nature feminists and the deficiency of each become more clear. On the one hand, the social feminists simply reject the identification of women with nature and the physical and insist that women have the same talents and characteristics as men. These feminists focus on the interaction of sexism, racism, and classism (Griscom, 6). On the other hand, the nature feminists embrace the identification of women with nature but deny that nature or the physical is inferior. But neither of these responses represents a sufficient challenge to the dualistic assumptions themselves since both leave part unquestioned. Social feminists do not ask about the assumed inferiority of nature, and nature feminists do not ask about the assumed identification of women with nature. In this way, both "remain within the framework in which the problem has arisen, and... leave its central structures intact" (Plumwood, 133).

A thoroughgoing eco-feminism must challenge each of the dualisms of patriarchal culture (see King, 12-16). The issue is not whether women are closer to nature, since that question arises only in the context of the nature/ culture dualism in the first place. Rather, the task is to overcome the nature/ culture dualism itself. The task can be accomplished first by admitting that "gender identity is neither fully natural nor fully cultural," and that neither is inherently oppressive or liberating (King, 13). Second, eco-feminists need to learn what both the social feminists and nature feminists already know. From social feminists we learn that "while it is possible to discuss women and nature without reference to class and race, such discussion risks remaining white and elite" (Griscom, 6). And nature feminists remind us that there is no human/nonhuman dichotomy and that our bodies are worth celebrating (Griscom, 8).

1.3. Feminist Analysis Must Include Ecological Insights

One result of the way the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are linked in these dualisms is that feminist thought and practice must incorporate ecological insights. To do otherwise would not sufficiently challenge the structures of patriarchal domination. The most direct way to illustrate this is to discuss the repercussions of the feminist assertion of women's full humanity in light of the interlocking dualisms described above. The fact that male/female, human/nature, and mind/body dualism are all closely linked together means that feminism cannot rest with proclaiming women's full humanity. To do this without also raising the question of the human/nature relationship would be simply to buy into the male-defined human being. In other words, if women and men are now to be re-conceptualized non-dualistically, the choices available are either to buy into the male definition of the human (as the social feminists tend to do) or to engage in a re-conceptualization of humanity as well. But, as soon as we begin to redefine humanity, the question of the human/nature dualism arises (Plumwood, 134-35). This is also the case when we ask about the status of race or class. Thus, any thorough challenge to the male/female dichotomy must also take on the other dualisms that structure Western patriarchy.

At this point it becomes clear that eco-feminism is not just another branch of feminism. Rather, eco-feminists are taking the feminist critique of dualism another step. What eco-feminism aims for transcends the differences between social and nature feminists. What is needed is an integrative and transformative feminism that moves beyond the current debate among these competing feminisms. Such a feminism would: (1) unmask the interconnections between all systems of oppression; (2) acknowledge the diversity of women's experiences and the experiences of other oppressed groups; (3) reject the logic of domination and the patriarchal conceptual framework in order to prevent concerns for ecology from degenerating into white middle-class anxiety; (4) rethink what it is to be human, that is, to see ourselves as "both co-members of ecological community and yet different from other members of it"; (5) recast traditional ethics to underscore the importance of values such as care, reciprocity, and diversity; and (6) challenge the patriarchal bias in technology research and analysis and the use of science for the destruction of the earth (Warren, 18-20).

1.4. A Feminist Perspective Must be Part of any Proposed Ecological Solutions

Just as feminism must challenge all of patriarchy's dualisms, including the human/nature dichotomy, ecological solutions and environmental ethics must include a feminist perspective:

Otherwise, the ecological movement will fail to make the conceptual connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature (and to link these to other systems of oppression), and will risk utilizing strategies and implementing solutions which contribute to the continued subordination of women [and others] (Warren, 8).

In particular, two issues in the ecological movement and environmental ethics need to be addressed in the context of eco-feminism: the status of hierarchy and dualism, and the place of feeling.

As already indicated, eco-feminism works at overcoming dualism and hierarchy. Much of current environmental ethics, however, attempts to establish hierarchies of value for ranking different parts of nature (Kheel, 137). It does this by debating whether particular "rights" ought to be extended to certain classes of animals (Singer). This is another way of assigning rights to some and excluding them from others and of judging the value of one part as more or less than that of

another. These judgments, then, operate within the same framework of dualistic assumptions. As a result, this debate merely moves the dualism, as it were; it does not abandon it. Human/nonhuman may no longer be the operative dualism; instead, sentient/non-sentient or some other replaces it.

Another way in which environmental ethics has perpetuated traditional dualist thought lies in its dependence on reason and its exclusion of feeling or emotion in dealing with nature. The dualism of reason/emotion is another dualism under attack by feminists. In this case environmental ethics has sought to determine by reason alone what beings have value and in what ranking and what rules ought to govern human interactions with nature (Kheel, 141). This procedure is flawed according to eco-feminists since "the attempt to formulate universal, rational rules of conduct ignores the constantly changing nature of reality. It also neglects the emotional-instinctive or spontaneous component in each particular situation, for in the end, emotion cannot be contained by boundaries and rules" (Kheel, 141).

Ethics must find a way to include feeling, but including feeling does not mean excluding reason. Again, the task is to overcome the exclusive dualism. Eco-feminism, then, involves a thoroughgoing analysis of the dualisms that structure patriarchal culture. In particular eco-feminists analyze the link between the oppression of women and of nature by focusing on the hierarchies established by mind/body, nature/culture, male/female, and human/nonhuman dualisms. The goal is to re-conceptualize these relationships in nonhierarchical, non-patriarchal ways. In this way, eco-feminists envision a new way of seeing the world and strive toward a new way of living in the world as co-members of the ecological community.

What eco-feminism lacks, however, is an analysis of what Ruether and Dodson Gray agreed was hierarchical or transcendent dualism, the dualism that they think undergirds the others. Eco-feminists, largely philosophers and social scientists, have not attended to the specifically theological dimensions of patriarchy. Meanwhile, feminist theologians and ethicists have focused primarily on the interrelationship of sexism, racism, and classism without sufficiently articulating or naming the interconnections between these forms of oppression and the oppression of nature. Yet the analysis of these critically important social justice questions would be strengthened when it is understood that the same dualistic assumptions are operative in each of these forms of oppression.

Furthermore, feminist theology needs to explore the relationship between human beings and God in light of those dualistic assumptions and the impact of the new way of seeing human beings those results from linking the oppression of nature with other forms of oppression. When re-conceptualizing the male/female dualism entails re-conceptualizing the human/nature relation because male/female is embedded in human/nature, as eco-feminists argue, then the human/divine relationship also needs reworking, since male/female is also embedded in human/divine. In other words, if feminist theology is serious in attempting to transform patriarchal dualisms, it must go further than reworking the dualistic imagery used to refer to God; it must discover how the images themselves support a dualistic relationship between human beings and God with the same assumptions as the traditional male/female and human/nonhuman dualisms.

2. ANALYZING NATURE AND WOMEN EQUATION IN TEMSULA AO'S POETRY

Indian environmental movement emerged at around 1973 with the famous *Chipkoo* movement that began in the Central Himalayas. The villagers of the Garhwal protested against the commercialization of the forest for timber operations, while the villagers' entry was restricted to the forest for making agricultural implements. The protest rapidly changed into a movement and spread to other villages, where women took an active participation. The women worked together with the men but when the men differed with them over the use of forest resources, they divided themselves from the men and constituted their own group. This movement helped the women to recognize the inner connections between nature and human life. Manisha Rao in her paper "Eco-feminism at the Cross Roads in India: A Review" observes:

Protest movements against environmental destruction and struggles for survival highlight the fact that caste, class and gender issues are deeply enmeshed in it. It is the poor, lower class and lower caste and within them, the peasant and tribal women, who are worst affected and

hence, they are the most active in the protests. Women, therefore, cannot be homogenized into the category (as the eco-feminists tend to do), either within the country or across the globe (138).

Although Eco-feminists believe that women in general share a special bond with nature because of their unique connection with it, the relation between women and nature varies to some extent from one region to another. For the Third World women, observe Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in their book *Eco-feminism*:

The term mother earth does not need to be qualified by inverted commas, because they regard the earth as a living being which guarantees their own and their fellow creatures' survival. They respect and celebrate earth's sacredness and resist its transformation into dead, raw material for industrialization and commodity production. It follows, therefore, that they also respect both diversity and the limits of nature which cannot be violated if they want to survive" (Introduction 19).

What Mies and Shiva say about the Third World women in general could specifically be said about the women of the Northeast of India. The women of the Northeast India, in fact, have day to day interaction with nature and environment and in the poems of the women poets of the Northeast of India; this inseparable connection of women with nature is evident.

Full of natural beauty, Northeast is considered to be the most serene region of India but the so-called works of 'development' have badly affected the environment of the region. Vandana Shiva writes:

Dams, mines, energy plants, military bases are the temples of the new religion called 'development', a religion that provides the rationale for the modernizing state, its bureaucracies and technologies. What is sacrificed at the alter of this religion is nature's life and people's life. The sacraments of development are made of the ruins and desecration of other sacred, especially sacred soils. They are based on the dismantling of society and community, on the uprooting of people and culture. Since soil is the sacred mother, the womb of life in nature and society, its inviolability has been the organizing principle for societies which 'development' has declared backward and primitive. (*Eco-feminism* 98)

In the name of development, policy makers of this country are actually making thousands of people homeless. The policy makers fail to realize that an attack on nature is not only an attack on the flora and fauna of a region but also on its tradition since nature, particularly for the tribal people, is an integral part of their culture and ethnic identity. That is why they consider any assault on nature as a stabbing on their own culture and tries to shield it. The poetry of the Northeast is an exemplar of this resistance. Temsula Ao, one of the most formidable poetic voices from Northeast India, responds to overall cultural transformations taking place in the Northeast.

In her poem, "Lament for an Earth", Temsula Ao literally laments and mourns nostalgically for an earth that was once "verdant", "virgin" and "vibrant":

Once upon an earth
There was a forest,
Verdant, virgin, vibrant
With tall trees
In majestic splendour
Their canopy
Unpenetrated
Even by the mighty sun,
The stillness humming
With birds' cries (1-10).

The loss of the splendor of the forest or the tarnishing of the purity of nature is in similitude with the defloration of a woman. The very use of the word 'virgin' makes clear that Ao here draws a

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comparison between the land and the woman. The canvas of the forest expresses its egoistic attitude through Ao's unflinching voice as it challenges the prying rays of the mighty sun. There is melody in its silence as its calm ambience is filled with chirping of the birds. In the same poem Ao again writes:

Cry for the river
Muddy, mis-shapen
Grotesque
Choking with the remains
Of her sister
The forest.
No life stirs in her belly now.
The bomb
And the bleaching powder
Have left her with no tomorrow (53-62).

The river and the forest seem to be linked in a bond of sisterhood. Unpardonably, today the flow of the river is choked by the debris of mankind. The water world is at stake with the changing technological periphery around riverside. The green periphery of the river is now replaced with brick-smoke-mills.

In a satirical slant Rabindranath Tagore once mocked the so-called progress:

That was not so very long ago, and yet time has wrought many changes. Our little riverside (Ganga) nests, clustering under their surrounding greenery, have been replaced by mills which now dragon-like, everywhere rear their hissing heads, belching forth black smoke...May be this is for the better but I, for one, cannot account it wholly to be good (208-209).

Ao here laments for the loss of a life that Mother Nature cushioned in her cocoon. She unambiguously declares that the continuous ravages done to this region due to military operations in order to get hold of rebel tribes have left the Nagas with "no tomorrow". To Ao, it is a curse to live in a world where Mother Nature is being ravaged every now and then by the overpowering paws of development. Ao's lamentations thus continue in the poem:

Alas for the forest
Which now lies silent
Stunned and stumped
With the evidence
Of her rape (21-25).

Cast in the form of a lament, the poem brings out Ao's concern for nature which she goes on likening with a woman and mother embodiment.

The correspondence between woman and nature is also obliquely hinted at by Ao in the poem, "Requiem?" in which she writes:

Who will mourn?
Who will mourn this blackened mass?
This charred carcass
Of a recent blushing bride
Roasted on the pyre
Of avarice

Lit by the gluttony
Of the scavengers
And abetted
By the kitchen stove.
Who will mourn? (1-11)

This poem apparently describes how a newly wedded bride has been burnt to ashes by her in-laws because of their greed for money and property. But from another perspective, it could be argued that Ao here compares a newly wedded bride with all her fresh dreams to a land that hopes for a bright tomorrow. And if the bride is a metaphor for the nature of Northeast, then the greedy in-laws are to be seen as the members of the so-called progressive world, whose ever ending gluttony has engulfed the serenity of the region.

“Blessing” is another poem of Ao which is also critical of the notions of progress and development, and, in a way, of entire human civilization. Ao seems to be so unhappy with the norms of civilization that she writes:

Blessed are the unborn
For they cannot mourn
The loss
Of what they
Never had (26-30)

Ao feels that the blinds are more blessed than those who have sight as people with sight do not respect the light of nature:

Blessed are the blind
For they see not
What they with sight
Have done to the light (11-14)

The poem takes a bitter satiric turn when Ao writes that the deaf, dumb and even the lame are more blessed than those who can hear, talk or run because deaf and dumb people are at least incapable of telling lies or hearing lies and the lame are already out of the game played by the society in the name of norms and culture:

Blessed are the deaf
And the dumb
For they hear not
And cannot
Utter lies.
Blessed are the lame
For they are out of the game
That people play
Unmindful
Of the norm
They themselves form (15-25).

Almost the same tone of criticism is also found in “To the Children of the World” in which Ao is worried about the future of her native land, about its ‘tomorrow’. In these worries of Ao about the future of Nagaland, her maternal concerns clearly come out. Women are considered to be the

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conceiver of life. So it becomes their sole responsibility to give their newborns a peaceful and pure environment to live in. But Ao is skeptical about one such future and considers the earlier generations responsible for bringing the children in a polluted world:

To all you children who are born,
And are yet to be born,
Just one word of advice-
Never ask
Why you were born
To inherit
The plunder of the ages... (1-8)

Ao not only feels the responsibility of the earlier generations is immense in bringing the young generation in a polluted world but she herself takes up the responsibility and feels concerned for the younger generations which is evident in her above poems.

Shiva in her book *Eco-feminism* states that whenever there is a conspiracy to assault Mother Earth, women, especially the *Adivasi* women, revolt. This is true for Naga women in general and Temsula Ao in particular. But along side this protest, a constant fear of losing their land seems to be always present in the psyche of the Naga people. Since, to the Nagas, land is synonymous to life, loss of land symbolizes loss of life. Thus Ao writes in her poem "Dying":

Dying has a look
Unseeing and dark
Like a bottom-less well.
And is as vacant
As a pair of eyes
From where
The soul has
Already fled (14-21).

The image of death, which continuously recurs in Ao's poems, also in the poem "Death", could be interpreted as the fear regarding the extinction of a community as well of the land. In these poems of Ao on death, death does not give any solace, rather comes as an inevitable end to life that crushes everything into dust:

When it renders
The immortal-assuming sensibility
Into mere remnants
Suitable only for the hollowed earth (6-9).

The smell of gunpowder pervades the Northeast of India. It is almost ruled by armaments. In the poem "A Strange Place", Ao cites this to be a significant cause of the damages done both to the land and its populace:

This is a place where
Armaments become
National policies,
And diplomacy
Another name

For the clearing-house
Of dollars and pounds
And transit camps
For spies and spy-catchers (19-27).

So, the culprits in this case are not indiscriminate user of science and technology or the rapid growth of industrialization and the resultant pollution as in the case of the West; but a long governmental neglect and a slow killing insurgency resulting in an identity crisis for the inhabitants of the Northeast of India. It becomes clear that the poets of the Northeast of India are not only concerned for a ravaged nature but also for the fast changing lives of the native people and endangering of their values and ethics.

Temsula Ao's poems on nature not only mourn the ravages done to nature, but also raise a strong resistance to the instruments of change that are responsible for the destruction of nature. In the poem, "Earthquake", she even warns the society as well as patriarchy about the fatal outcome of adulterating both pious earth and woman:

When the earth rumbles
And contorts
To throw up her secret
Like a pregnant woman
After conception,
It is no portent
Of new life.
But of death and disaster
For those who dwell
Upon her swell (1-10).

A natural phenomenon like earthquake here is clearly seen as the revenge taken on human civilization by the Mother Earth. The image of earth here is that of a pregnant woman who conceives not to give birth but to destroy life by bringing out magma from its womb:

She gaps open
To devour
Toppled towers
And torn limbs,
And incites
Mountains to slide,
Rivers to rise
And volcanoes
To vomit
Lava and deadly ash.
She heaves and hurtles
As if to uproot
The very moorings
Of life (11-20).

This image of the Mother Earth as the destroyer also matches the image of *Ma Durga* found in the Hindu Mythology. *Ma Durga* possesses different images in different situations. She is usually known for her *Shanti Roop* (peace image), *Matri Roop* (mother image) and *Daya Roop* (mercy image). But when the *Mahisasura* dared to destroy her creation and hurled violence on her people, the peaceful, merciful, mother took the violent forms of *Chandi*, *Rudra* and *Shakti* (all

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three images represents violent and fearful image of *Devi Durga*) and beheaded the monster to bring peace to the earth. This analogy comes to the readers' mind since *Prakriti* (Nature) is an image of *Devi Durga*. The ending of the poem again blends the image of a woman and with that of nature:

And after her fearsome furore
Is registered
On the Richter scale
She subsides
Like a hysterical female
After her fury is spent
Leaving
Mortal man
To lament
That he has
Only this unpredictable
And temperamental
Earth
To love
And content with (25-39).

Thus Ao equates the nature with woman and also warns the world of the alarming change both the Nature and women can possess if technology or patriarchy comes in their way.

Eco-feminists not only protest against the destruction of nature, but they also highlight the need for preserving nature with care. In a similar vein, in the poem "The Garden", Ao writes:

A slice of the earth
On the ground,
Or firmed in pots
Of any imaginable
Size, shape and colour
Becomes the respectable
For new life (1-7).
[...]
They grow
Goaded by hormone,
Aided by fertilizers
And tended by your loving care (14-17).

By saying this, Ao actually participates in the 'social programme' of environmentalism. Even though the so-called progressive world is taking away each and every bit of green from the Nagas, Ao argues that the garden can offer a green space which could and should be protected:

The slice of earth
Thus nurtured
Brings forth

Beauties

In praise

Of the GARDNER

Of all gardens (18-24)

The concluding lines of the poem also suggest that by taking care of the garden one actually serves the Almighty.

The poem, "Stone People from Lungterok", shows one interesting aspect about Ao's poetry on nature that she conceives the Naga ethnic identity as something constituted by nature:

Lungterok

The six stones

Where the progenitors

And forebears

Of the stone people

Were born

Out of the womb

Of the earth

Stone people

The poetic and politic

Barbaric and balladic

Finders of water

And fighters of fire (1-13).

The pride in a distinct ethnic identity, which sets the Naga people apart from the rest of the world, is clearly evident in this poem. Lungterok literally means 'six stones'. The Ao people believe that their first forefathers emerged out of the earth at the place called Lungterok. There were three men and three women. Some of these stones are still found in a village called Chungliyimti in the Ao area of Nagaland. Temsula Ao here echoes the belief of her community and remembers the glorious past of the Nagas who were the:

Stone people

The romantics

Who believed

The sun can sulk

The moon can hide

And the stars are not stars

But pure souls

Watching our bereaved hearts (25-32).

The poem also shows how the Ao people of the past believed in the mysterious supernatural power of nature:

Stone people

The worshipper

Of unknown, unseen

Spirits

Of trees and forests
Of stones and rivers,
Believers of soul
And its varied forms,
Its sojourn heir
And passage across the water
Into the hereafter (42-52).

The poem, in fact, shows that some of the tribal beliefs and superstitions - things which have no value in a civilization dominated by science and technology - were conducive to the protection and preservation of nature.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Temsula Ao's poems corroborates that the Northeastern states and its denizens face clichéd accusations of violence, backwardness and conflict from every nook and corner of Indian fraternity. People often overlook significant features of the region, one of the chief being the richness of the biodiversity and the unique tribal culture and tradition of the indigenous people. In the above poems of Temsula Ao, the quintessential essence of eco-feminism is predominant. In almost every poem of Ao, we can find her deep concern for nature. Ao has very efficiently equated nature with women and has also presented their interconnectedness in a unique manner. Ao in her article "Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective" thus appositely encapsulates her voice of apprehension for the jeopardized indigenous identity of the Naga tribes:

The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity markers does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. Globalization in this sense will eventually reduce identity to anonymity ("Identity" 7).

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