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## Ecopolitics In The Northeastern Indian Novel *Escaping The Land* By Mamang Dai: A Poststructuralist Approach

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### Abstract

In this paper, we have attempted to trace the emergence of Ecopolitics among the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India, in the context of Indian author Mamang Dai's novel *Escaping the Land*. We have placed the understanding of Ecopolitics under Post-structural literary theory as explained by Verena Andermatt Conley. We have examined the Animistic faith and the sense of Belongingness that determine the ecocentric nature of the lifeworld of Adis. In the narrative, due to various kinds of cultural displacement, the Adis are faced

with the dilemma of having to choose between their ancestral values and a strange, modern worldview, and this confusion seems to pervade all walks of their lifeworld. We have adopted postcolonial literary theory of 'Place and Displacement' by Ashcroft et al. to talk about the identity crisis faced by the Adis along with the slow progression of an unmapped wild 'land' into a modern state, and how in the struggle to catch up with the outside world, the land crumbles under a destructive world order. We have analysed the role of Ecopolitics in driving public opinion, and the creation of a bioregional identity which is more attuned to the politics of Environmentalism. We have adopted a pragmatic approach to the current conservation debates by proposing Ecopolitics as an effective solution to the current ecological crisis and to minimize conflict of interest in human-nature relationships within the realm of the Anthropocene.

### **Keywords**

Ecopolitics, Cultural Displacement, Lifeworld, Belongingness, Bioregionalism

### **Introduction**

Ecopolitics is aimed at building a sustainable society rooted in humanitarian values. It had started and become a prominent movement in the western world following the origin of the environmental movement of the 1960s. Green parties had formed in countries such as Germany and Australia in the 1970s. Traditionally, ecopolitics is associated with left liberal ideology. The 'German Greens', who gained prominence than their contemporaries due to a wider media coverage have coined four central principles for ecopolitics which are environmentalism, nonviolence, social justice, and grassroots democracy. But, ecopolitics cannot be limited to just these concepts, since it is a current movement which is evolving despite the challenges posed by right conservative politics. Ecopolitics is relevant to the present environmental movement since it is aimed at directing the fundamental postulates of Environmentalism towards direct policy formation and governance.

In literature, ecocriticism is a direct response to the call to address the ecological crisis faced by the modern civilization. Ecocritical literary theory examines the relationship between literature and the environment by considering how the environment is represented in various literature, and looking at how literature can contribute to the creation of environmental awareness and activism. In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary*

*Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty states that ecocriticism “focuses on the ways in which literature reflects and engages with the physical world, and in so doing, helps shape our attitudes toward nature and the environment” (4). Nowadays, ecocriticism has adopted a multidisciplinary approach by incorporating theories from Geography, Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology as well as the physical sciences to widen the scope of literature in forming creative discourses regarding man-nature relationship. Approaches such as Ecofeminism, Ecopsychology, Deep Ecology, Animal Studies etc. are attempts which resulted from this amalgamation of theories and concepts from different disciplines. However, despite this broader perspective, literature has fallen behind in exerting or influencing any direct action regarding policy formation or administration and governance related to the environment. It has mostly limited itself to traditional forms of environmentalism and literary movements such as Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Arcadianism and Aestheticism. Historically, the place of literature in shaping large scale societal movements such as the Apartheid and Feminism is widely acknowledged and glorified. But, when we look at Environmentalism, we can take pride in only a few popular texts such as the *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson that have influenced people to question their lifestyle and fundamental relationship with their surroundings in the real world. We find that Carson’s work is a result of her political worldview and sensibility towards the environment. Nevertheless, it is not our objective to discuss why literature is overshadowed by other disciplines in influencing administrative policy regarding the environment. Rather, we are trying to highlight the importance of Ecopolitics in filling this gap by integrating politics and literature. For this purpose, we have placed the concepts of Ecopolitics under the spectrum of Poststructuralism as done by Verena Andermatt Conley in *Ecopolitics: The Environment in Poststructuralist Thought*.

Conley emphasises the ways in which power and language shape our understanding of the world. She argues that nature and culture are intertwined and cannot be separated. Hence, any attempt to address environmental issues must take into account the underlying social structures. She even advocates the idea of a new model of citizenship which recognizes the interconnectedness of all living things. Also, she discusses how marginalised communities are disproportionately affected by environmental issues. She accentuates the need to consider the social inequality present, since environmental degradation is directly related to it. In this paper, we take cue from Conley’s work in the analysis of ecopolitics in Mamang Dai’s *Escaping the Land*.

Mamang Dai was born in a traditional *Adi* household in Bodong village in upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh in 1957. She has received the renowned ‘Sahitya Academy Award’ for her notable work *The Legends of Pensam* in 2017. Other significant contributions include the *River Poems*, *Mountain Harvest: An Anthology of Contemporary Writing from Arunachal Pradesh* etc. Apart from her literary career, she has served as the Chairperson of Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women, as a member of National Book Trust, programme officer at Worldwide Fund for Nature and on many other levels.

*Escaping the Land* is Mamang’s most recent novel published in the year 2021. The narrative is situated in the context of an assembly election in Arunachal Pradesh (AP) where Lutor, the contender for Chief Minister of the State’s primary Local party—the All-NEFA People’s Party (ANP) and Tanik who is his political rival and leader of the United People’s Party of Arunachal (UPPA), which later joins the ruling United National Congress (UNC) party contest against each other. Maying, the narrator as well as author’s persona, briefs the contemporary history of AP and its transition from an unmapped political landscape into the twenty fourth state of the Indian Union. The narrator belongs to the *Adi* community, but moves to Delhi for the purpose of education. She returns as a Government official to set up a Biodiversity office in the state. However, she gets involved in the events that occur during the assembly election.

The *Adi* community described in the novel is a tribe that has occupied the region now known as Arunachal Pradesh since time immemorial. Usually, tribes are groups formed by different clans who are related in various ways such as through marriage. The earliest written records of the *Adi* community dates back to the colonial period, when the British seized the territory in the late nineteenth century (Singh 38). The *Adi* people have a rich cultural past, as well as unique social and religious practices. Based on their geographical location and dialects, they are separated into various sub-tribes. The Gallong, Minyong, Padam, Shimong, and other sub-tribes are among them (Dutta12). They were formerly mostly an agricultural population, but with the advent of modernisation and urbanisation, many *Adi* people have migrated to cities in pursuit of better prospects. In the face of industrialisation, the *Adi* community has also encountered obstacles in conserving its cultural legacy and traditional knowledge (Choudhury 67).

## The Adi Lifeworld

German philosopher Husserl defines the lifeworld (Lebenswelt in German) as the world that humans occupy, “immediately experienced as a given” condition. The understanding of the lifeworld is pernicious to any ecopolitical understanding, since the central determinant of any philosophy or ‘theory’ surrounding ecological thinking is the relationship between human beings and their environment, how they are ‘constituted’, mutually, and ‘shaped by’, reciprocally. We shall find that the lifeworld of the Adis is distinct due to their Animistic faith. There is an interesting incident described in the text which can be cited as evidence for this. When Lutor was a little boy, he comes across a flying fox staring at him:

In the faint light filtering in through the open door behind him there was the dark creature, rain-wet and alive, watching him...The liquid eyes of the animal shone like gold and Lutor stood transfixed...Perhaps it was the ghost of a relative... Lutor’s uncle had rushed in shouting loudly and struck the creature with a heavy pole. The furry animal fell to the floor without a sound and did not move again... It seemed to smile at him with great tenderness as if to say: ‘It is alright. Do not be afraid. I have seen you.’ (20-21)

The flying fox, recognizes Lutor’s ‘self’, and also sense that he is afraid. There is a moment of connection between the selves of Lutor and that of the flying fox when it seemed to be ‘smiling’ at him. The effect of the ‘visitation’, as Lutor’s mother used to refer to this event, was that Lutor fell ill and started having strange dreams. Edward Kohn in *How Forests Think* narrates his experience of living with the Runa tribe of the Amazon valley. Kohn writes: “The Runa, like other Amazonians, treat jaguars and many other nonhuman beings as soul-possessing, signifying, intentional selves. They are (to use a recently resuscitated term) animists; for them, nonhumans are animate. They are persons” (93). Thus the forest is perceived as an “ecology of selves” where the representation of the world is not limited to the ‘human self’ and can be extended to ‘nonhuman selves’. Thus, the nature of animistic faith held by the Adis can be compared to that of the Runa people and we can see that they are almost the same. This belief is an anachronism to the anthropocentric, modern world view that place the human ‘subject’ at the center of all human nature interactions. We find that the animism practiced by the Adis singly challenges the foundation of the hegemonic structures of language on which the anthropocentric worldview is constructed.

The second determinant of the interconnectedness to ecology in the lifeworld of the Adis is their sense of 'Belongingness' to the land. According to Escalera Reyes (2020), "Human beings need to live collectively or belong to a group that allows for rooting and that generates identity and social reference. Sense of belonging is the greatest reason to form groups, communities and societies" (3). In *Escaping the Land*, the narrator says: "I felt some of my gloom and fear of the road and rocks disappearing. It was as if the land was speaking to me through this gesture of sharing: 'This is your land. Whatever happens, there is nothing to fear'" (68). From these lines, it can be understood that for the people belonging to the Northeast, belongingness is not just about being part of their clan or tribe, but also about living within, but not limited to the geographical parameters of the region. The idea of 'Place attachment' involves, an emotional and cognitive connection of an individual or a group to a particular environment. This happens as a result of the experience of a long-term affective bond to a particular geographic area, sometimes without awareness, and the meanings that gets ascribed to it. The attachment to the place begins with the adaptation and creation of a 'Lifeworld' attuned to the geographic conditions of the particular landscape. Hence, landscape plays a paramount role in ecopolitics (Escalera-Reyes 3). Lipun, one of the Government officials in charge of the NEFA survey mission, and Lutor's mentor and guardian, decides that "the hills are safe for us" during the Chinese incursions of 1962, and choose to remain in the same place while evacuating the others to safety. Lipun wrote these lines in his tour diary: "We own this land so that we may rest here" (Dai 47). Thus, we can say that the lifeworld of the Adis is characterized by an intimate connection to their landscape and non-human beings. Lutor introspects on his feelings towards the landscape:

Where did this feeling of ecstasy come from? It came from loving the land, from looking at the light lifting from the hills and burnishing it for the gods. It came from living in contentment with the river and trees and fighting and loosing and struggling and realising one day, how closely all life and land is tied together. This was the wonder! (208)

This connectedness to the ecology manifests itself in the myths and oral narratives of the Adis. In their myths, the non-human, non-animated things like the sun, the earth, fire, etc. are portrayed as human like selves. In their worldview, there is no idea of an omnipotent unworldly dominant God who protects the universe. It is an idea of a world inhabited by men, women, animals, spirits, plants and other selves who all live their separate, yet

connected lives. This way, the tribes connect to these entities on a personal level. The 'Adis' pray to Almighty 'Donyi Polo' (the Sun God) to bring good harvests and for their well-being. These manifestations are characters with human like traits, but who rule over the tribes and shower them with gifts and blessings. From the observation of their faith in Animism, their strong sense of belongingness to the land and interconnectedness to non-human beings and things, we can conclude that the Lifeworld of the Adis is attuned to ecocentric principles that are suitable for a sustainable society.

### **Disintegration of the Adi Lifeworld due to Marginalisation and Territorialisation**

From the land peopled by isolated clans, AP transforms into a territory subjected to large scale settler and migrant population during the colonial as well as postcolonial period, which has had an impact on and changed both its topography as well as cultural space. The hills occupied by the Adis is located between the Indian state of Assam and Tibet- a region under Chinese administration. Hence, it is identified as the frontier which is critical as a passage as well as the national border. Throughout history, many forces have tried to gain control over the region for political advantage. Hence, the Government of India in the present, and the colonial government before that have treated the place as a 'security issue'. On one occasion, addressing a political rally of ANP, Lutor says:

Don't be fooled. A "security issue" is a slippery fish. The terms of reference are always changing. Yes, we are a border state but our interests for the country and the security of the state is the same. So, why is a "security issue" something that we cannot talk about? Why can we not discuss what is important to us?

What sort of state are we? Are we a peaceful state or not? (80)

The discontent in the minds of the Adis is quite evident from these lines. The marginal stature has worked against them in foregrounding and representing relevant issues in the arena of national politics.

The initial attempt to territorialize the region culminated in the formation of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in the year 1954. "Open up the land. Bring it into the mainstream. Let the new government reach every tribe and village" (Dai 30) was the motto of NEFA. It was propagandised to be "the land of the fittest survivors" (47). But, these geopolitical changes were overwhelming to the indigenous tribes of the region who

had to battle with their surroundings to ensure the bare minimum to survive. Rasa, a political ally and friend of Lutor recounts:

The whole area was marked Naga Tribal Areas, subsequently renamed as Tirap and Tuensang Frontier Division, NEFA, and we the Nocte, Wancho and Tangsa people were identified as Nagas. Now this nomenclature has become a bone of contention and has raised claims of Tirap being part of the Greater Naga territory...It has to do with family, with titles, with ownership, with big money, and ego (189).

Geographic/political mapping is necessary to form an asymmetrical relationship of mastery and control over that which is owned. But in the precolonial era, the indigenous landscapes including the one occupied by the Adis were never 'defined' as enclosed spaces. Collective ownership of land and other resources was practiced among most communities. For instance, Rasa, Lutor's friend and political ally tells Kellan:

You see, in the old days people from Myanmar would visit my father and present hornbill feathers as a mark of respect. We intermarried and we still have cultural affinities. There were no boundaries. The whole area was marked Naga Tribal Areas...Now this nomenclature has become a bone of contention and has raised claims of Tirap being part of the greater Naga territory...It has to do with family, with titles, with ownership, with big money, and ego... (189)

British born author Verrier Elwin, a missionary turned Gandhian talks about the vision of the Union for AP in *A Philosophy for NEFA*. Elwin discusses in detail the ethnically and culturally diverse practices and way of life of the people of the NEFA and tries to debunk the myth of the noble savage. But, it fails to point at the tense geopolitical situation which resulted from government policy. Hence his work was criticised to be a paternalistic brochure of the Nehruvian legion. The book was published after the Naga insurgency which began in the year 1956 over Naga identity. Another major war that shook the region was the Chinese incursions in 1962 when the Indian Government had to retreat deep into Assam. "No one knew from which side this army was approaching but government wireless telegrams ordered officers to burn buildings, banks, houses, every scrap of food and every drop of medicine and Evacuate! Evacuate!" (Dai 34). The Bangladesh Liberation war of 1971 also had its repercussions on the land. All these events left the people of the region in a "climate of fear and distrust" (Dai) which opened the ground for the birth and growth of many revolutionary outfits such as "the Arunachal Dragon



Force, Tiger Force, and the United Socialist Council of Arunachal Pradesh” (Dai) in several pockets of the state. These groups started to amass huge wealth and ammunition and established themselves as independent organizations through the use of violence and hostilities towards adversaries. The politicians in the state joined hands with such outfits in return for assured political support. Corruption became rife in the state under the combined mismanagement of unscrupulous legislature and a bureaucracy that had become puppets in the hands of terrorist groups. Dai observes how AP became a hotspot of large scale destruction of forest resources due to a lack of democracy and proper administration. In the context of Dai’s work, let us examine how the identity of the indigenous population of the hill region was affected by this ecopolitical turn of events and what was their response to it. Our focus is limited to the discussion of the Cultural displacement that the tribes were subjected to.

### **Cultural Displacement of the Adis**

According to Bill Ashcroft et al., a major aspect of post-colonial literatures is a concern with ‘place and displacement’. It is here that the unique post-colonial identity crisis emerges; the concern with the establishment or restoration of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. Indeed, critics like D. E. S. Maxwell have argued that this is the defining model of postcoloniality. Dislocation, such as migration, the experience of captivity, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured servitude, may have undermined a legitimate and active sense of self. Or it could have been destroyed by cultural denigration, which is the conscious and unconscious suppression of indigenous personalities and cultures by an allegedly superior racial or cultural model (*The Empire Writes Back* 8-9). The issue is not only one of cultural engagement but also one of cultural rotation. There is a new world order of mobility, of rootless histories, according to James Clifford, and the paradox of global culture is that it is ‘at home’ with this motion rather than in a specific place. Clifford's book *Routes* investigates the extent to which displacement practices ‘might be generative of cultural meanings rather than their simple transmission or extension’ (218). Ashcroft et al. finds that such a cultural displacement produce an “alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image” in the affected community. Displacement, whether caused by colonisation, infiltration of foreigners or settlers, natural calamities, or cultural modernity, can have a profound impact on the cultural identity of indigenous populations. The kind of displacement that is experienced and felt

by the characters in *Escaping the Land* is a result of both physical (geopolitical), emotional, and cultural severance from their lifeworlds as well as slow degradation of the lifeworld, in reality or in the mindscapes of these characters. We contend that the term displacement is not just limited to the ‘subject’ being dislocated or ‘moving out’ from their lifeworld, but can be extended to the transformations taking place in the lifeworld itself over a period of time, due to both human and environmental factors and that this displacement can have a profound impact on the identity of the inhabitants. We shall examine the causes for the cultural displacement that the *Adis* had to face in the select narrative.

The violence perpetrated by underground organizations and their influence on the younger generation is a primary cause for the cultural displacement and feeling of alienation among the *Adis*. The narrator laments the widening gap between the people and their leaders and the politicians’ lack of concern towards the alienation affecting public peace. She thinks that ‘easy money’ has ruined the value system of her community, leading to general loss of purpose and meaning. A circle officer in Namtok is shot dead by the militants for trying to resist extortion. She reflects on the state of events and thinks that it is difficult to live in such a state of fear and anxiety, with rampant violence and assassinations. Politics has become just a distribution system for easy money without any genuine commitment towards the public. Power grabbing has become the sole purpose leading to a sense of hopelessness.

The loss of cultural values is a notable reason for the cultural displacement of the tribe. According to the Adi belief system, the big trees housed the spirits of their ancestors. With the felling of the trees, the *Adis* fear that these ancestral spirits become homeless. Despite a threat to their fundamental faith of Animism, the *Adis* do not protest against the timber mafia. Most of the timber barons are either politicians or operate with the help of an established extortion racket. Raising a voice against the exploitation of forest resources might have severe consequences for the tribes. For instance, Kellan who is the brother of Umsi, Lutors love interest, worked at the Forest Department. He was a righteous man who did not want to get involved with the illegal timber smuggling racket. In a planned mission, Kellan is killed by unknown assailants on the road, on his way to Pasighat. The police under Tanik’s Government arrests some young men who surrenders and claim that they are revolutionaries associated with some faction of the NSCN (Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland). The case is closed without

further interrogation. It is interesting to note that Kellan introspects on the loss of old values that has taken place in his community and was aware of the reason why his people do not value the forests resources for its own sake any longer—“ Give them money to keep their forests. The people had tasted money and nothing else would appease them now. Stuff their mouths with bundles of money!” (183).

The issue of settler colonialism and insider colonialism has caused a lot of tension in the region. Settler colonialism is a situation where colonizers come to reside in a land permanently and create new political systems for themselves, while asserting their authority over all aspects of their newly acquired territory. The central component of settler colonialism is the settler's domination over the land (Park 3). The tribes have always watched any outsider with suspicion and many incidents of conflicts between the tribes and outsiders are present in the narrative. Though the events in *Escaping the Land* happens during postcolonial period, some historical events are recounted in the novel. There is a reference to the Komsing case of 1911, where a British political officer named Noel Williamson crossed the Inner Line on a survey mission into the Abor hill (which later became part of NEFA). Williamson and his party of men were later attacked and killed in the village of Komsing. As a result, British troops marched into the Siang valley for the punitive Abor expedition of 1911. “The Government of India also took advantage of this opportunity to send survey missions into the hills to propose a suitable frontier line between India and Tibet” (14). The concept of “internal colonialism” incorporates the relationship between migrants and indigenous communities which can be understood as a form of colonialism that occurs within the boundaries of a single nation-state (Hill 360). This domination can take various forms, such as economic exploitation, political marginalization, and cultural suppression: “People had poured in from other parts of the country to set up as traders, tea merchants, and oil companies. Now there were drug lords and arms dealers” (Dai 68).

Yet another cause of the cultural displacement of Adis is their social vulnerability as a marginalized community. The social vulnerability approach highlights the ways in which social factors, such as race, class, and gender, contribute to vulnerability to environmental hazards and displacement (Adger). For example, marginalized communities may be more likely to live in areas that are at risk of flooding or other natural disasters due to factors such as poverty or lack of access to resources (Cutter et al.). The social vulnerability approach recognizes that vulnerability to displacement is not solely determined by natural factors, but is also shaped by

social and political factors. In *Escaping the Land*, Singa, the political officer from Delhi mentioned that the location was prone to natural disasters such as flash floods and landslides, which had caused many fatalities, including those caused by falling rocks (28). During the lengthy month of August, the weather was gloomy with frequent thunderstorms and roadblocks. As a result, many individuals were trapped in their districts and unable to cross swollen rivers or navigate roads that had been damaged by mudslides (205).

With their joining the union of India, the people of AP have been struggling to adapt with the changes influenced by the outside world. The modern world has had an impact on the culture of the Adis and it can be substantiated using the term cultural modernity. One influential perspective on cultural modernity comes from the sociologist Max Weber, who argued that modernity is characterized by the rise of rationalisation, the differentiation of social roles and institutions, and the increasing importance of individualism and self-expression (Weber 35). Other scholars have emphasized the role of globalization in shaping cultural modernity, arguing that the increasing interconnectedness of societies and cultures around the world has led to a "hybridization" of cultural forms and practices (Appadurai 2).

The old couple Gagil and Tanmut were overwhelmed with the changes taking place around them. The arrival of the first tourists in Pasighat brought with them exposure to new cultures and ideas. Young people were particularly interested in discussing Bollywood celebrities and international travel. Additionally, an area near the site of a planned bridge over the Siang River became a popular gathering spot for parties with loud music and the noise of motorcycles, which had a noticeable impact on the town, causing it to shake like an earthquake (85). The narrator raises a rhetoric question that needs to be addressed in the context of contemporary events from around the world: "What does a society do when an old practice is suddenly taken away by men who do not live with you but watch you from a distance and impose new laws with armed police?" (98). The narrator mentions that the traditional institutions of village headmen and tribal interpreters was being overtaken by a new administration—"The new sarkari (administration) has reached us. Others will decide what will happen now" (11)

Understanding the lifeworld of the Adis from Conley's poststructural conception of ecopolitics, we can see that their marginal stature as a minority community occupying the frontier has magnified the effects of cultural as well as physical displacement on their community. The ecological destruction of the landscape of the hills of

AP is simultaneous with the cultural as well as physical displacement of the Adis as can be seen from the above instances. Let us now examine the emergence of Ecopolitics as a solution to the disorder and the role it plays to raise a bioregional identity among the community.

### **Ecopolitics: Bioregionalism and Bioregional Identity**

According to Conley's theoretical conception of ecopolitics, the primary step towards the introduction of sustainable practices in the environment is the reformation of the social structures of the community. Maying's main purpose in returning to her native land was to set up a Biodiversity office to check the large scale destruction of forests in AP. But, she decides to get active in the election campaign of Lutor's party and understand the ground realities. She becomes aware of the issues challenging the democracy of the state and understand that it is not possible to bring ecological reforms before rectifying these issues. We can understand her idea of environmentalism from these lines: "What did politicians know? I wanted to know what the people in the villages knew. I wanted to hear the words of the rainman. Who lived here? I wanted to hear the voices of people who lived here. What did the environment mean to them?" (109) The rainman who is the community's spiritual guide tells the narrator that "the land is a being just like us, and to know the land you have to live here" (113). He asks her to be patient with the land. The narrator highly regards Lutor and his ideology.

There is direct intervention from the part of the state using laws to stop the smuggling of timber. The Supreme Court of India ordered a complete ban on timber operations in the state. However, the ban received widespread protest from politicians, youth organisations, merchants, and almost everyone in the community. "Pay us for keeping our forests, they cried" (183). Another reform from the part of the Government was "The Arunachal Pradesh control of Organised Crime Ordinance" (APCOCA), introduced to fight terrorist and anti-national activities in AP. But, under a corrupt legislature, the Act only became a hogwash to gain public support for the election and to quash enemies using false allegations. We can see that Government interference does not bring forth any positive change in the state.

In such a state of affairs, the political ideology put forward by Lutor's ANP is important. His political view exhorts the idea of Bioregionalism and he tries to instill a bioregional identity in the people of the Adi community during the election campaign. "He spoke about election issues, about health and education and labour

wages and law and order, but most of all he spoke about the land. The life of it, the blood of it, the best of it.” (279) Bioregionalism stress the importance of administrative policy that is in harmony with the natural systems and processes of a particular region. Michael Vincent McGinnis, a leading scholar of Bioregionalism states that it “envisions a politics that is grounded in the land, sensitive to ecological limits, and respectful of the cultural diversity of place.” (130) Lipun resonates the same idea when he said that without love for the people, “the administration was meaningless”. Lutor, during his party’s political rally, tries to remind the Adis of their fundamental relationship to the land:

If everything depends on yourself then what better place to make a life than the place where you were born? Everywhere people love their land. It is life, birth, happiness, and children. It is or source of strength and our inspiration. It is life (82)

Robert L. Thayer states that Bioregional identity constitutes a sense of belonging and connection to a particular region, and the recognition that humans are part of the larger ecological systems of that region (46). After Lutor’s failure in the election, Kampo tells Maying that “We try to be different in so many ways but this green garb does not fall off. I guess we’ll carry it to the grave.” (298). Despite his integrity and truthfulness, Lutor lose in the election against Tanik who is a clever politician and associate of Kijji Ongo who is the physical embodiment of a conservative capitalist timber baron from AP. The novel ends on a positive note with the image of Kellan’s son reading a book about the land of Arunachal Pradesh.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have adopted the poststructural literary theory to approach the working of Ecopolitics in Mamang Dai’s *Escaping the Land*. We conclude that without initially correcting the inequalities that are present in the social structure of the community, it is not possible to effectively carry out any reform related to ecological preservation. We have found this applicable in the context of the Adi community in the narrative. Ecopolitics in theory is aimed at integrating social justice and conservation. Nevertheless, in reality, ecopolitics is still developing and has not yet become a large scale movement.

We have used the sociological concept—‘Lifeworld’ to identify the strong sense of belongingness the Adis feel towards their land. The social, economical, and political implications of this interconnectedness presents itself as an alternative way of life to the modern ‘city dweller’ whose lifeworld is far removed from natural and non-human entities.

We have looked at the gradual fall of the lifeworld of the Adis from a land of *Kojum-Koja* (a sacred place beyond the moon and stars) into a land of constant conflict and sorrow. By using Bill Ashcroft et al.’s theory of ‘place and displacement’ we have analysed the various factors that have contributed to the disintegration of *Adis*’ lifeworld such as territorialisation, settler colonialism and cultural modernity.

We have examined the Bioregionalism and Bioregional identity that guides Lutor’s politics. In the broad scenario, we conclude that Ecopolitics integrate strict policy measures and human-nature relationship to create a bioregional identity in the community to muster responsibility and love towards the ecology.

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