

## Interrogating Ecological Imperialism in the Neocolonialised Northeast: Selected Reading of Desmond L. Kharmawphlang's Ecopoetry

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### Abstract

While the mainstream narrative of Indian Independence has been limited to racism, history and politics, the 1990s saw a widespread inclusion of environmental humanities in theoretical and literary efforts. Such an ethical engagement witnessed the 'greening' of (post)colonialism in the Global South as advocated by the ecological imperialism that aimed to understand the bio-power politics between nature, culture, race and imperialism. Keeping this in consideration, the article shall attempt to explore ecological imperialism in the contemporary neo-colonial period and how the Northeast India has interacted to it. For this purpose, the cultural and ecological alteration of the region shall be traced through the globalised machineries of development, progress, climate change, capitalism, insurgency and modernism as addressed in the selected ecopoetry of Desmond L. Kharmawphlang. This has been done with the intention to foreground their indigenous orality, myths, naturism and egalitarianism as it not only locates poesy in creativity but also in nature. In addition, the article shall also attempt to trace the degeneration of tribalism, deterritoriality, cultural and identity crisis with an aim to open *necessary* dialogism to understand the unique relationship between nature and culture of the Northeast in the postnatural period of the Anthropocene. Such an attempt seems crucial and relevant as ecopoetry considers ecological poetry as a potential carrier of ecological awareness and a hopeful saviour of the planet that could engage readers to understand the infliction of 'slow and invisible' violence in the Northeast that altered both the social and ecological imprints of the marginalized region. Additionally, the idea of 'environmentalism of the poor' shall also be investigated to initiate the process for reterritorialisation through the efforts of bioregionalism and indigenous studies. It would thereafter empower the marginalised communities of the Northeast and help them re-establish their connection with nature and territoriality in the neocolonial period.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, anthropocene, neo-colonial, ecopoetry, ecological imperialism

With recent attempts of 'greening' literary, theoretical and academic efforts through ecocriticism, there has been a surge of new interdisciplinary concepts that have not only aided in mitigating the new environmental challenges, vulnerabilities and problems in

the Anthropocene but also seems to reorient our understanding and interaction with the nonhuman world. Understanding the necessity of such an exercise, there has been an increased exploration and intersection of several transnational, colonial and indigenous conceptions. Of this effort, the most acknowledged conception had been the application of the idea of 'ecological imperialism' which helped us to not only understand the mechanism of power contestation and structural politics among humans and cultures but also among humans and the nonhumans and how the consequent tension rising from these equations had triggered the impending ecological crisis in the post-nature. In fact, the inclusive approach of ecological imperialism allows us to relocate ecocriticism from essentially being a 'white man's movement' shaped by Euro-American ideologies to *singularly* dominate the social and natural world, to the recent trend of *speaking back* to the Empire by the indigenous communities of the Global South whose socio-environmental history of violence, discrimination, oppressions and forced hybridity had been largely misrepresented or silenced. This effort within ecocriticism seemed to have emerged from its collaboration with postcolonial discourses which has subsequently made the approach both transnational as well as interdisciplinary. Towards this end, writers have frequently used the literary genres of fiction and nonfiction as a mode of ecological awareness and activism which have witnessed limited success. Understanding this problem, efforts were undertaken to remap the traditional representation of nature through the culture/nature binary. Towards this end, the formulation of ecopoetry seems to be pivotal as it aims to investigate contemporary ecological problems of the Anthropocene through cultural, literary and theoretical parameters. While ecopoetry may seem similar to nature writings and British romantic poetry, it is basically a reaction to it. This was because, unlike them, ecopoets attempted to provide a critical analysis of the ecological concerns which also saw its increased application in the recent decades. To this end, ecopoetry should not be reduced as a simple and direct mediation of nature in art; for it has largely been used to limit the idea of nature as a social construct that has become an agency for structural "world-making" and the legitimized exploitation of the ecology (Zylinska 105). Such a trend within ecopoetry, according to Axel Goodbody, made it appear as a "special kind of writing" that "has the peculiar power to speak 'earth'" and thereby making it, "the song of the earth" (129-130). Keeping this in consideration, the article shall not explore the literary and theoretical conception of British romantic poetry as it would not be able to do justice to either British romantic poetry or ecopoetry. This is because ecopoetry appears as an extension of the earlier romantic nature writings; for it attempted to add a cultural and ecological framework to our understanding, interaction and interpretation of nature; to consequently generate a deep sense of ethical responsibility, social justice and planetary awareness among humans who have got physically, emotionally, ethically and spiritually detached from the environment.

Keeping these ideas in consideration, the article shall attempt to explore the bio-ethical approach of ecopoetry as it garnered literary creativity, linguistic liberation, structural dialogism, ecological consciousness, emotional and spiritual rejuvenation in the selected poems of Desmond L. Kharmawphlang. These aspects further make his writings appear as an ambitious project for it also aimed to provide an alternative direction in regenerating sustainable management of the environmental catastrophes in the Anthropocene. To achieve this, Kharmawphlang asked pertinent questions of/for ecology in his poems along with his sincere efforts to listen and translate nature in his poems

through close observations and experiences. Such a framework of his poetry opened new doors for interpreting nature beyond its romantic conception; to study it as a critical proposition while acknowledging the recent 'green' shift in poetry. Recognizing the increased application of the new terminology of ecopoetry popularized by J. Scott Bryson in his work, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002), the article shall initially attempt to provide an theoretical and literary overview of this emerging field. This seems necessary as ecopoetics advocates for an eco-centric perception in our readings stained with humility, solidarity and morality to mitigate "intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality" that foreshadows the "warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe" (5-6). In providing ecologically hyperreal situations through imagination, ecopoetry has been able to make its readers active in engaging with more emotional and ethical access for the Anthropocene reality that ordinary prosaic language seems to have failed in achieving.

While the popularisation of ecopoetry has often been credited to Bryson, John Felstiner in his work, *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems* (2009) credited John Keats for initiating the spirit of ecopoetry in his famous line, "The Poetry of Earth is Never Dead" in the year 1816. Towards this end, Felstiner further stated that the "poetry of earth" was "not dead but lively, [and] it's more vital to us than ever" (xiii). Further, emphasizing on the relevance of ecopoetry, Bristow tied the conception of deep ecology to it, thereby developing ecopoetry into a "site of speaking and listening, response and reflection, cues and action" between humans and the environment (8). While such a gesture reiterated the idea of humans' being a 'poetical man' who fundamentally lived and dwelled in nature, it also reoriented our anthropocentrically scaled instincts to "save the Earth" through poetry which for Goodbody is "the place where we [can] save the earth" (130). This was because ecopoetry acknowledges both nature and poetry as complimentary creative spaces that are constantly transforming and liberating the new generation of the poets with a deep sense of moral responsibility and solidarity which seems necessary in the neo-colonial period as they experience structural deprivations, oppressions and marginalisation generated by capitalism, industrialism, urbanism, internationalism, development, high modernism, anthropocentrism, imperialism and globalization in the Global South. As these factors have resulted in the disintegration of indigenous communities and their regional environment, several poets from these regions seem to engage with ecological imperialism to highlight internal national conflicts, marginalization of indigenous population, exploitations by governmental and international corporations in the neo-colonial period.

Recognizing the seriousness of the biopolitical situation several eminent eco-poets from the Northeast India have centralised the representation of nature in their writings which they consider as quintessential to propagate ecological awareness, activism and partnership. To achieve this end, ecopoets have frequently amalgamated ancestral orality, legends, myths and songs to mitigate the contemporary postnatural crisis. This effort seems to be an outcome of the Northeastern practice of agrarianism and egalitarianism which made them worship, revere and fear the natural forces that provided, nurtured and sustained their livelihood. Such an inclusive eco-centric attitude had been illustrated by several prominent writers from the Northeast India, namely, Ajit Barua, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, Hiren Bhattacharya, Jogamaya Chakma, Navakanta Barua, Nilmoni Phukan, Nilim Kumar, Kynpham S. Nongkynrih, Robin S. Ngangom and Temsula Ao, who have addressed a wide-range of issues like degeneration of tribalism, cultural and

identity crisis, land appropriation, deterritoriality, slow violence, natural rights and accessibility of the indigenous, hybridity, structural poverty and marginalisation in their poems. These discussions further posed the practicality of India's political Independence and its implications in the North-eastern region of the nation. In fact, like India, the northeastern region despite its political independence still continue to be under the influence of cultural, economic and ecological imperialism commissioned by the government and multinational corporations that have played a silent role in intensifying the social paralysis brought about by capitalism, development, climate change, high modernism, insurgency and globalisation in the region. Recognising these socio-ecological concerns, eminent poet Desmond L. Kharmawphlang further explored the cultural and ecological alterations of the region into 'second' nature. Such an approach makes Kharmawphlang appear as an eco-consciousness poet who through his poems wanted to generate intersectional dialogism in the culture/nature binary and Northeast-India. In this regard, his poems could be seen as a site of ecological awareness and activism that also aimed to provide a platform for the indigenous populations to speak for their natural rights, dignity and accessibility of resources; which otherwise had been deprived to them. Such a socio-ecological condition had been conceptualised as the 'environmentalism of the poor' in postcolonial ecocriticism as they consequently aimed to generate a sense of reterritorialisation through the efforts of bioregionalism and indigenous studies; which would thereafter empower the marginalised communities of the Northeast and their natuescape; while also helping them to re-establish their connection with nature and territoriality in the Anthropocene.

Keeping these ideas in consideration, the article shall attempt to explore the tendencies of ecopoetry in selected poems of Desmond L. Kharmawphlang who like most North-eastern writers had fused the creative space of poetry and nature to explore complex human conditions and the impending concerns of the Apocalyptic environment. In this regard, the poetic efforts of Kharmawphlang could be seen as a documentation of the socio-environmental history of the region that highlighted the predominance of nature in the lives of the natives who shared a close affinity with their regional environment. This eco-centric relationship had been maintained for generations as their social structures were framed through the ideals of animism, paganism, primitivism and totemism which fostered a sense of deep love, reverence, dependency and sustainability among the natives for nature who were subsequently motivated to become ecological stewards. Such an attitude emerged from the feeling of reterritoriality, ecological rootedness and responsibility. Aptly capturing this bioethical structure of the Northeast, Kharmawphlang was able to address several contemporary ecological concerns and considerations in his writings as mapped by colonialism, modernism, industrialism, globalization and capitalism in the region. These factors have not only drastically altered the tribal lifestyle but also have threatened the regional ecosystem. For a better illustration of these problems, Kharmawphlang frequently engaged in the extensive use of tribal myths, folklore and metaphoric motifs in his writings to not only highlight the physical, cultural, spiritual and regional remapping of the environment and its impeding crisis but also the imperialistic desire to marginalize the tribal heritage, culture and history into inferiority as commissioned by the culture/nature and west/east binaries. In fact, Kharmawphlang considered myths as politicised stories and not neutral stories as they became socio-ecological rhetoric for motivated partnership, conservation, solidarity and sustainability among the indigenous population. In this regard, tribal myths, folktales and legends

appear not only as a social and natural document but also as an agency for social conditioning and manipulations.

Recognising the complexity of ecological concerns arising in the neocolonised Northeast, Kharmawphlang in his poem, "Autopsy" emphasised on the relevance of ecopoetry which he considered as "the lips of the earth" (3). Adding to this idea, Rauscher further claimed that the sounds and signs of the environment were poetical and creative which not only contained meanings but also contained our individual perceptions of it, thereby making the process a unique collaboration (192). This idea of 'poetry in nature' was made possible as the Northeast people have traditionally shared a close proximity with nature. However, with the increased infiltration of foreign agencies and ideologies, the close association between human and nature had been eroded. This seems to be an immediate outcome of the influence of imperialism in the region which seems to have become "curtains" shielding our perceptions of the *real* situations of the region. Despite this, the speaker's defiance and resistance to the western anthropocentrically scaled actions and philosophies enabled him to *see* nature which had been eloquently expressed in the words "today you are here with me", which otherwise had been made invisible and silent (Kharmawphlang, "Autopsy" 15). Following this, the speaker also felt the necessity to develop a method that would help others to understand the language, signs and cues of nature which "call me and I hear. / Here, where your voice lives" (Kharmawphlang, "Autopsy" 8-9). These lines reiterate a way to generate eco-consciousness adaptation within Northeast poetry which seems significant in the Anthropocene for it allowed a gradual and 'quiet' shift "into the raw dawn" (knowledge) from the earlier 'dusk' (ignorance) (Kharmawphlang, "Autopsy" 1). This naturally 'raw' knowledge acquired by the speaker through his personal encounters with the environment was not tainted with any strategic social conditioning. In fact, this further helped him to self-cultivate an 'instructive' relationship with the environment which allowed him to learn the difficult lessons of life, existence, survival, morality and sustenance. Such an equation further seems to liberate humans and their imagination through their "heavy wings" which could indicate a sense of guilt, fear and remorse of Man who suddenly seems to realise the irreparable damages caused by his exploitative and regressive activities which have subsequently pushed the environment to its apocalyptic crisis. This idea was further investigated by Kharmawphlang in his poems such as "Tyrchiang" and "Letter from Pahambir". In fact, in his poem "Tyrchiang", Kharmawphlang accounted the increased disassociation of the natives from the simple and natural beauty of the environment. This socio-environmental shift for Kharmawphlang seems to have been an immediate result of the advent of modernity and imperialism which had consequently made the natives more 'cultured', a 'new' identity that has been drawn "deep from books", materialism and ambitions (17). Towards this end, the speaker of the poem also experienced a heart-wrenching cultural dilemma that grew from his "tribal bones" as 'books' appeared to "prop" selective as well as institutionalized learning in him that thereafter manipulated his tribal identity, culture and heritage into degradation. In a similar way, Kharmawphlang in his poem "Letter from Pahambir" also dealt with the same idea through the concept of "wisdom of falsehood" brought to the tribal land by western ideologies of anthropocentrism, speciesism, capitalism, modernity and colonialism; which subsequently made the hybridized natives their "own worst enemies" for each other as well as to their own community (18-19). This cultural dilemma arising from bio-power politics was also

discussed by Kharmawphlang in his poem, “Letter from Pahambir”, where the “forgetful generation” expressed a sincere desire “to learn, [but] not to...teach” the glorious history, culture and heritage of the Khasi’s that has been gradually eroding with the advent of the ‘car’ (modernity) and the ‘church’ (imperialism) (12-14). Addressing these concerns, Kharmawphlang agreed to Timonthy Clark who considered these factors as eventually brewing “distrust [in] a society dominated by materialism and instrumental reason” along with the “twin[ing] and untwin[ing]” of tribal stories through folktales and myths by foreign aggressors that further detached the natives from their glorious past while also generating a sense of ambivalence, confusion, frustration and helplessness (Clark 139 and Kharmawphlang, “Letter from Pahambir” 4). The unplanned alterity in the regional culture, nature and folktales was seen as a grave situation by Kharmawphlang in his poem “Tyrchiang”, where he also highlighted the pivotal role played by myths and folklores in the tribal societies of the Northeast to not only uphold and celebrate their indigenous cultural roots and heritage which was predominately influenced and shaped by their environment, their spiritual gods and ancestors; but also as the source of their indigenous knowledge that was abound with social, natural and spiritual aspects. However, the advent of modernism, capitalism and globalisation which could also be seen as agencies of neocolonialism in the contemporary period, the simple and innocent “lust and laughter” of the potters vanished as they saw nature as a means for their personal and monetary benefits.

In an attempt to explore different ecological concerns, Kharmawphlang in his poems “Pictures”, “The Conquest” and “Umiam, August 19” represented nature with a romantic allure to celebrate its formative *presence* in the tribal society of northeast India. This was aptly done through the delicate and sensual opening lines of the poem “The Conquest” where the speaker associated his stories, memories and identity of his hometown with the regional environment that was bio-diverse, stable and regenerative,

I never get tired of talking  
about my hometown.  
In summer the sky is pregnant,  
swollen with unborn rain.  
  
Winter arrives, with a tepid sun  
touching the frozen hills, the  
dream boats on lakes. (1-7)

Describing the physical beauty and bliss of nature, Kharmawphlang also traced nature as a social construct that seems to have documented Man’s social and self-exploration. To this end, Kharmawphlang in his poem, “Pictures” reflects on the pitfalls of ‘slow’ and ‘invisible’ crumbling of tribal society. He also reflects on how the poem also focuses on the structured violence perpetrated on the indigenous people and their land by the state authorities. While such a situation may cause alarm among environmentalists, it roused a sense of constant adaptation among the indigenous people. It motivated their natural instinct to survive the socio-environmental hardships. To this end, they emphasised on their indigenous lifestyle that was structured on bio-centric ethics. However, it would be misleading to consider such a framework as an easy task in the contemporary neo-colonial period. In fact, such an effort requires deep commitment and perseverance among the tribes who have often found their required motivation in orality. In this regard, the poems of Kharmawphlang could be seen as an eco-protest that intended to

merge nature and culture which according to the poet seems to be crucial in maintaining the harmony between Man and Nature. This idea had been expressed in the lines of his famous poems “Pictures” and “Umiam, August 19”,

Lightning is happily licking the clouds,  
and a light drizzle falls.  
Your hair is wet, damp clothes  
Delicately sculpt your body. (“Pictures” 10-13)

Stones, scattered in the shallows  
around my feet, describing  
tales on the shore. (“Umiam, August 19” 1-3)

In fact, the spontaneous merger of nature and culture in the poem, “Pictures” could be seen as an outcome of deep brooding by the speaker whose thoughts drifted from the sensual description of nature, to the sound of the tea kettle, his sudden remembrance of his last night’s dreams along with his memory of the dead. In this collaboration of past memories and present experiences, the speaker was able to process his self-cultivation as “everything in the landscape reveal[ed] traces and voices of the past, everything witnesses to past guilt and suffering as well as love and happiness” (Goodbody 167). In addition, Kharmawphlang in his poem, “Umiam, August 19” traced the close bonding of humans with their environment that grew from their interconnectedness and interdependence with each other. This narration was often found in the indigenous oral tales of the Khasi that not only documented the social and natural history of the region but also celebrated nature as an invincible and an omniscient force. To justify this idea, Kharmawphlang used the image of “cicadas” in his poem, “Umiam, August 19”; where its *presence* pierced and ruled the ‘air’ while “drowning the energy of coal trucks” (5).

However, with the advent of modernity, globalisation, colonialism and consumerism in the region, there had been a decline in the indigenous lifestyle of the Khasi who were predominantly nature-oriented. This was because of the political and cultural shift within the Khasis who like the rest of India became the oppressed victims of the western ideologies, philosophies and actions of the Empire. In fact, the transition was not a swift development but a “contest of wills” that had systematically marginalised the local natives who were forced to ‘mutely’ watch the negative repercussion of the endless anthropogenic activities brought by imperialistic forces that were often blind to the rest of existence. This highlights the idea of cultural and natural imperialism which had drastically changed the foundation of the tribal communities who subsequently become a victim of *special* poverty and transcendental crisis. Such a reductive experience of the natives of the Global South had been voiced by Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier through their conception of “environmentalism of the poor” which was further elaborated by Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2010), Rob Nixon (2011) and Ursula K. Heise (2017) as they addressed expressed their concerns regarding peasant resistance, indigenous studies, imperialism and ecological crisis in the Global South. In addition, the concept also “highlighted [a close] relationship between poverty and environmental degradation” of “the poor” indigenous communities who had often been “subalternized” and marginalized to “degraded landscapes” and “its natural resources and services” for their survival and sustenance (Rangarajan 180 and 242). This was because of unequal distribution of ecological resources which structurally victimized, oppressed and marginalised the indigenous communities who thereafter engaged in hostile resistance

waged by their ancestors against the European colonizers and the state government while becoming “careful *managers* of the environment” in the Anthropocene. In this sense, ‘environmentalism of the poor’ is not only an initiative that “fights for human rights and environment” but also has become “another form of peasant resistance – this time with an explicit ecological content” (emphasis added) (Alier 513-514 and 517). Such a framework of ‘environmentalism of the poor’ allowed the intersection of social, environmental and ethical issues as it emphasized on the rights and defence of the poor and indigenous people. This idea was traced by Kharmawphlang in his poem, “Ranikhor” that explored the history of the Khasi community that had been built on the “sweat and tears” of their forefathers who “starved and [were] mangy as the dogs on the river side” (6-7). Such hardships and struggles could be seen as an outcome of the ideals of eco-centrism that the tribal communities maintained through generation which made their “cry of love for this earth... painful” but not oppressive and oppositional (Kharmawphlang, “Ranikhor” 8). However, this tension seems to have got worse as the region in the recent decades had witnessed an increased influx of “flight of wild ducks from Bangladesh / defying man-made borders”, which had deprived the natives of their natural ownership, availability and accessibility that seem to have slipped “through [their] fingers like time” (Kharmawphlang, “Ranikhor” 9-12). The socio-political problem of illegal cross-border migration from Bangladesh over the “green cliff” of northeast India has also resulted in a geopolitical crisis as it caused a breach in the national, social and natural security in the region that had subsequently deprived the indigenous people from their job opportunities, health, education, dignified living and infrastructures. In addition, it also caused an alarmingly increase of terrorism, arms and animal smuggling, insurgency, human trafficking and illegal trading in the region.

Along with these geo-political insecurities, the locals have also experienced a sense of territorial dispossession and ecophobia which got imprinted on their “memory that [eventually sat] on my soul” (Kharmawphlang, “Ranikhor” 10). Although the poem explored social struggles, movements and displacements of/in the region, it also depicted the complex relationship of individual and communal attachment of the inhabitants to their land as they closely identified their origins, history, identity, culture, heritage and responses through it. This social concern was also raised in the poem, “The Conquest” where the Khasi men crossed the Sumra River that flowed into Bangladesh for economical trading which was thereafter followed by social and marital relationships between the two nations, as Khasi men frequently brought “home women / to nurture their seed” (9-10). This gradual assimilation of cultures posed a threat to the indigenous Khasi community and their unique culture and lifestyle which was further intensified by British imperialism that aimed at “a steady conquest” of the north-eastern tribes with their “gifts of bullets, blood-money / and religion” (12-13). In fact, this geopolitical tension in the region didn’t end with the departure of the British as it merely shifted from the colonizers to those that came “from the swelting plains, / from everywhere” (Kharmawphlang, “The Conquest” 20-21). This highlights the mechanism of neo-colonialism in the democracy of the Northeast which still has remained victimized as a “stricken” land with “bruised children” (the new generation) while also hybridising the natural “teeming soil” of the region into “a truly metropolitan city” (Kharmawphlang, “The Conquest” 22-25).

In this regard, ‘environmentalism of the poor’ along with bioregionalism has been able to articulate the “socio-ecological plight of the world’s poor by drawing attention to the fact

that uneven patterns of neoliberal development in the Global South threaten the millions who depend upon access to natural resources for their survival". This discrimination further deprived the indigenous people of their ancestral territoriality and ecological entitlements which subsequently relegated them to structured oppression and marginality (Slovic et al. 3). In this sense, environmentalism of the poor could be considered as "social conflicts over access to and control over natural resources: conflicts between peasants and industry over forest produce" along with protests "between rural and urban populations" for big dams, mining projects, logging and conservational parks in (post)colonial India (Mukherjee 73). Addressing this issue in his poem, "Letter from Pahambir" Kharmawphlang also elaborated on the social mobility of the natives from their homeland to unknown cities for a better livelihood which they were strategically denied through structural deprivation and oppression as channelled by cultural and ecological imperialism. This not only resulted in dispossession and homelessness but also dislocated the new generation from their indigenous identity, culture and heritage.

To further illustrate the cultural and natural degeneration experienced in the region, Kharmawphlang in his poem, "Umiam, August 19" has used the reference of "darken" water. This imagery could be indicative of the politics of toxic waste discharges and pollution from industrial and other anthropogenic activities that have sustainably increased in the region in the last few decades. Further, the darkened water mentioned in the poem had also been attributed with "an angry secret" which seems to hold timely warnings of the human-engineered environmental crisis in the Anthropocene. Despite these natural signs and cues, we have continued with the regressive spirit of anthropocentrism and imperialism which was eloquently expressed in the deep ecological brooding of the speaker in the poem, "Umiam, August 19" where he suddenly felt "strangely happy" with the sudden outpour of rain which had been described as a lashing force which is indicative of the undying power, magnificence and wilderness of nature. In fact, such downpours in Umiam, a picturesque location of Meghalaya has been a natural occurrence for its locals- especially in Cherrapunji which has often been identified as the wettest region of the Earth. In fact, the ending scene of the poem seems significant as the speaker threw a stone into the lake following which the outpour of rain occurred. This action could be seen as an indication of how human interventions in nature is always followed by a consequential response from the environment, of which we may largely remain ignorant for we have physically, emotionally, culturally and spiritually alienated ourselves from nature. In this context, the sudden change of weather in the poem can be seen as a glorification of nature whose patterns remain unpredictable, mysterious and in flux, or as a response to global warming and climate change which has been an irreversible occurrence of the Anthropocene.

Caught in such ambivalent conditions in the neocolonial period, the northeast is facing challenges to preserve their indigenous culture and their regional landscape for the "forg[otten] generation" experiencing liminality in their homeward journey as they have become hybrid identities that consider their tribal culture as "weird" as they get treated as "city men" by the local residents. In this regard, the "city men" of the indigenous community get reduced as *misfits* within their own tribe and homeland while the "village curs turn quarrelsome / as we city men await/ the verdict of reception, smoking *uneasily*" (Kharmawphlang, "Letter from Pahambir" 8-10) (emphasis added). This tension within the community reiterates the culture/nature and urban/rural binaries, an equation that was closely traced by Kharmawphlang in his poem "Letter from

Pahambir”; as the villagers regard the “city men” as their superior counterpart, for whom their

Voices intone, hands fashion leaf plates  
to hold food for the men  
from the big city (26-28)

Amidst this situation, the “city men” of the tribe felt a sense of awkwardness and “shame” that intensified through the stories narrated by U Di as he recounted the tales of their tribal rituals and their animist culture through the image of a “*dilplin*” which symbolized “centuries / of prayers for harvest, a hunt” (34-35). Additionally, the stories also highlighted the sudden increase of exploitation of nature in the region that was triggered by a steady increase of structural poverty among the locals whose “bellies underst[ood] hunger, our hands / are shaped by it”. In fact, the state of helplessness, guilt and fear of abusing nature, sparked a growing tension within U Di that could also be traced among the tribal communities who were tied together “into a knot of one race of skin / and blood, chanting the songs” of similar struggles and hardships (36-37 and 50-51). While these stories ignited an “unnamed gloom” of environmental abuse, it also addressed the idea of migration that left the natives with a “great hurt [that] I carry in my soul / for having [been] denied my own” indigenous identity, culture, heritage and history. This situation further left the younger minds ‘lost and unfamiliar’ as they were torn between the tribalism and modernism (55-56). These stories for Kharmawphlang were important so for the new generation of “children” to “grow, and endure our / difficult ways” in the future (41-42).

Unlike the previous poems mentioned in the article, “Last Night I Dreamed” used the literary technique of *ars poetica* to highlight the initiation of the idea of a poem to that of “a sperm [swam] in the womb of folklore” that matures “into a naked nation (1-2 and 5). In this regard, the physical nature could be seen as the “naked nation” that is unaffected by the socio-political codifications and how creative ‘ideas’ get formulated by its encounter with several natural elements such as the “speeding clouds” that raised it along with the ‘forging by fire’, while the rains delivered it to the earth where it intermingled with “ragged mythology” (7-11). These references in the poem highlight the close affiliation between environment and myths in tribal societies; as the idea “crawl[ed]” and merged into “the subsoil of time” that makes poetry, myths and nature permanent as well as universal (12). Following this, the ‘idea’ enters the cultural space through the “food chain” where it takes the shape of the “*sohtung* leaf” after its consumption by the

*eri* worm.  
I wintered in its silken cocon  
and a season later,  
was spun into thread  
on whistling looms (16-20)  
while,  
Deft fingers plucked me  
and, as I exited the tale,  
grafted my flesh on the tongue  
of experience (22-25)

In the social ambit, the 'idea' further developed as humans whistled of it while engaging with their handlooms; thereby making the idea merges with social history and thereafter "bec[o]me a folktale". Following this, the 'idea' was structured into literary narratives by the "deft fingers" of skilled humans where the 'idea' "exited the tale" and "became a proverb" that was grafted by the "flesh on the tongue of *experience*" and orality, as it celebrated the importance of equilibrium between nature and culture (21-26) (emphasis added). As evident through the ecological imagery and symbolic references, Kharmawphlang through the poem attempted to celebrate the rich and vibrant tribal culture of handloom weaving and folk narratives of northeast India. Further, on its onward journey, the 'idea' travelled

place to place  
but always came back to you, searching the corner of your lips  
for clever words to trade (27-28)

as most of its audience failed to understand the essence of the 'idea'. In consequence, the idea "became a riddle" which needed a clever and alert decipher of words (32). This expression reiterated the capacity of imagination and creative freedom in poetic efforts whose experimentations with expressions, wordplay and emotions have made ecopoetry appear as a suitable form to understand the neo-colonial complexities of the Anthropocene environmental crisis. To this end, critics have considered ecopoetry as a creative genre that is apt in providing a better direction in tackling the impending Apocalypse. This is because poems are "not [only] cultural self-assertion of some group or other but [also] the wildness of human creativity responding to and mediating other modes of meaning and significance in the world" (Clark 54). Such a framework within ecopoetry seems relevant in the Anthropocene as it not only ignited our mind and soul but also expedited our exercise of self-healing and self-discovery by "finding creative and instructive ways of attuning human sensitivities to more-than-human contexts (Bristow 107). In this regard, nature could be seen as a site of inspiration, creativity and freedom that has generally been manifested by ecopoetry. Towards this end, Kharmawphlang's eco-poetic contribution to Northeast writings could be seen as a collective effort for paving a 'new' style in nature writings that aims to generate environmental awareness, solidarity and responsibility among its readers by actively engaging their imagination, creativity and emotions. To achieve this, Kharmawphlang's ecological writings provide his readers with a genuine and holistic experience of environmental concerns and consideration to better mitigate the unprecedented problems that have been intensified in the contemporary post-natural period. Such a trend has made Kharmawphlang's writings appear as an eco-poetic effort that attempts "to further the ecological project" of survival and sustenance by emphasizing on local, global and planetary urgency to save the dying Earth (Goodbody 130). This approach of Kharmawphlang furthered Felstiner's claim that poetry could be the hopeful savior of the earth as "poems touch our full humanness... [which could] quicken awareness and bolster respect for this ravaged resilient earth we live on" and thereafter channelize an eco-conscious response to the impending ecological crisis (xiii). Such an outlook calls for sustained efforts and great commitments of reorienting nature beyond its cultural and imperialistic construction, so as to enable our spiritual, emotional and ethical connection with the environment which seems to be possible through our active participation in nature as well as within ourselves.

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