



## Research article

# When Place Is Taken Away: Indigenous Narratives of Displacement and Ecological Change

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### Abstract

In indigenous literary production in India, the land figure more often than not as a site of kinship, memory, labour, ritual, and ecological knowledge, not as an external property. This article explores how that relation gets disturbed when extractive development and environmental degradation, coupled with colonial intrusion, are at work in some of the major works of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, and Easterine Kire. The study adopts a text-centred close reading approach to respond to the common perception of such writing as evidence of a pre-determined theory. It considers diction, repetition, voice, lineation, sensory imagery, and the interruption of the narrative in Shekhar's short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Dai's poem "Small Towns and the River," Ao's poems "The Old Story-Teller" and "Lament for an Earth," and Kire's historical novel *Sky Is My Father*. The analysis reveals four types of literary expressions of displacement: extractive contamination, anticipatory ecological grief, linguistic alienation of more-than-human kin, and colonial disruption of the village time and ritual authority. These texts are not merely lamentations about a lost territory. They reveal the ways in which bodies, speech, ceremony, gender relations, and collective memory are damaged, and they allow for refusal and storytelling to be possible. The argument is that the narrative of literature cannot be used to stand in place of ethnographic or policy evidence, but that it can capture aspects of the loss that are often reduced to administrative categories. Together, these texts provide a nuanced description of the nature of belonging to an ecosystem and provide insight into why the place-naming, oral memory, ritual calendar, sensory environment, and community interpretation of place should all be taken into account in culturally based impact assessment.

**Keywords:** Adivasi literature; Indigenous ecocriticism; displacement; environmental memory; oral tradition; extractivism



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## Introduction

A development file can be used to report hectares, units, and monetary values with regard to compensation. From the moment these categories fall short, literature starts. A river might be a path to the dead, a forest an archive of speech, a dancing ground the materiality of cultural performance, a field a labour/history of generations. If such places are taken by mining, flooding, military occupation, or enclosure, then the damage can only be registered physically by relocating people. What is disturbed is a network of relations that helps people to understand themselves, how they should behave, and what obligations they have towards human and more-than-human life.

In the article, this disturbance is examined in some selected writings of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire. It is geographically confined to India, but it gathers highly contrasting histories: Santhal experience in coal-rich Jharkhand; Ao-Naga historical memory of environmental destruction; Angami Naga historical memory of Khonoma under British incursion; and Adi poetic reflections of riverine and mountain worlds in Arunachal Pradesh. The term Indigenous is used in a comparative sense, and Adivasi is employed when it is used in the political and cultural lexicon of central and eastern India. These categories are not mutually exclusive nor mutually definitive, and the comparison does not mean that there is one common Indigenous worldview (Xaxa, 1999, 2008).

The issues involved are related to the history of development-induced displacement in India. Dams, mines, industrial and infrastructure projects, protected areas and similar initiatives have consistently demonstrated disproportionate impacts on communities whose customary rights to land remain poorly formalized by formal property rights (Baviskar, 1995; Fernandes, 2008; Padel & Das, 2010). According to Cernea's (1997) model, a series of dangers are linked to involuntary resettlement: landlessness, joblessness, marginalization, food insecurity and loss of common property. Those categories are still essential, but literary works reveal an adjacent loss: loss of a colour, cadence, burial orientation, work rhythm, taboo, species relation, or remembered route. These tidbits are not simply window dressing for a political argument. They depict the intimate nature of structural violence.

Environmental humanities scholarship has provided important concepts to help understand these injuries. Place is understood as relational and historically produced, not as a passive container (Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977); Indigenous ecological knowledge is approached as practice, as responsibility, as adaptive learning, not as a collection of detachable facts (Berkes, 2018; Simpson, 2014); and environmental injustice is read through unequal exposure to extraction and attritional harm (Martinez-Alier, 2002; Nixon, 2011). It is not the worth of these frameworks; it is the generalized use of these frameworks. If theory is restated before each of the literary examples, then various texts start to seem interchangeable. The river, forest, the mine, and the village are then made to be illustrations of a previous claim.

In the present work, the literary works, therefore, take precedence over the interpretations. It poses three related questions. In what ways does ecological loss become noticeable through the specific formal choices? How does each text negotiate the linkage of place and collective memory without wrenching apart multiple communities into one? So what role does close reading play in public discussion about displacement, without making the literature “verifiable social data”? The analysis continues by means of short text quotations, attention to narrative form, and comparison following the establishment of the individual readings.

The main thesis is that the chosen works generate four different grammars of displacement. Shekhar turns coal into a material that stains bodies, houses, vegetation and cultural performance; Dai imparts a knowledge and temporality to the river that is greater than that of the anxious future of the town; Ao finds the ecological estrangement in the naming of other animals as ‘savage’ and in the silencing of the forest; Kire recovers a village ecology wherein taboo, agricultural time, gender, oral history and anti-colonial defence are co-conspirators. These modes are not repetitions of the same theoretical formula, but they do overlap. The disagreement is about what they differ on. From the most general conceptual perspective, the research considers narrative as a practice in which relationships between place, displacement and ecological change can be documented, challenged, and re-imagined (Figure 1).

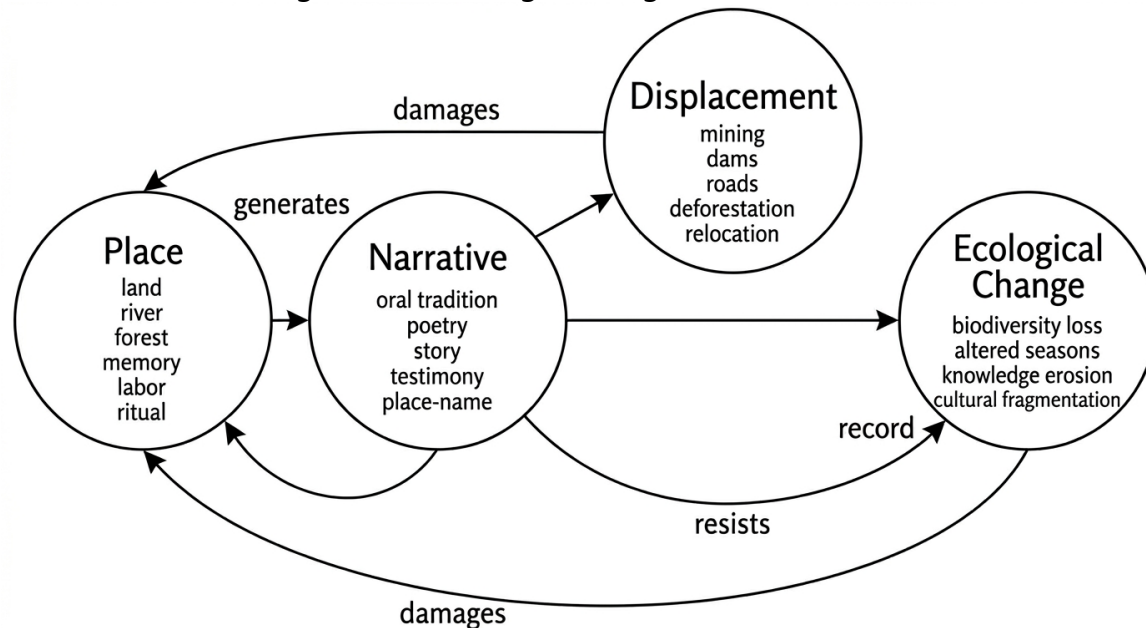


Fig. 1. Conceptual relationship among relational place, narrative mediation, displacement, and ecological change.

The article begins by explaining the context, terminology, and method. It then provides four extended close readings and a comparative synthesis along with an examination of ecological and public implications. The conclusion identifies the boundaries of the corpus and offers avenues for further research that will incorporate vernacular texts, community-driven histories of modern mobility, performance traditions, and translation histories.

## Context, Corpus, and Method

The theoretical framework is deliberately kept narrow. Place is conceptualized as a lived relation created through the processes of memory, labour, language, ritual, and environmental practice. While this is inspired by humanistic geography, place-based anthropology and Indigenous scholarship, it is stated only once and not expanded upon in each section (Basso, 1996; Massey, 1994; Simpson, 2014). It allows for the recognition that land can be a material, historical, moral, and affective object. A sacred hill is not less physical because it is sacred; a river is not less ecological because it is a route of memory. The categories interpenetrate.

Similarly, displacement is interpreted as not just the movements between coordinates, but as something more. This can be through forced relocation, or it can be while one is still in place: through pollution, access limitations, militarization, altered river regimes, loss of species, or loss of language and ritual authority. The term *slow violence* from Nixon (2011) is helpful here as it refers to damage that occurs over a long period of time and can't be pictured as a single event. The dispossessed can be acquired in regions of mining activities, contaminated, indebted, subjected to labour precarity, and land transformed into an extractive zone over time (Lahiri-Dutt et al., 2012). These individual effects can be collected into a voice, image, or scene, without claiming that a scene is statistically representative in literature.

The scope of the comparison needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Santhal and Naga stories of the same experience aren't clones, and even within Naga, the general term "Naga" has some linguistic, territorial, and political variations. Bhumika (2021) states that the contemporary narrative of Naga writing needs to be read in its particular and multiple ways, not swallowed up by one single postcolonial narrative. The same goes for the present article. The differences in literary mediation are clarified by using direct political monologue (Shekhar), lyric recurrence (Dai), oral-poetic self-reflection (Ao), and historical reconstruction (Kire). It does not assert the same cosmologies, nor the same circumstances of politics.

The primary texts have been selected because they make the formal central to ecological relations, yet include various varieties of stress. In her title story, Shekhar brings a Santhal dancing troupe to the laying of the foundation stone of a thermal power project constructed on dispossessed land. Dai doesn't tell the story of a development project in his poem; instead, he sets the river as a knowing presence – and a concern about the future. Through Ao's poetry, a connection between the loss of the environment and a fracture of interspecies kinship and oral transmission is established. Through the novel, Kire reconstructs the 19th-century Khonoma and describes how the village's life is shaped by territorial disputes with British expansionism, gender-specific work, warfare, stories, and genna observances, as well as the agricultural seasons. It is not a strict process; some texts will not always proceed from development to physical relocation. Shekhar foregrounds extraction and dispossession, Dai registers anticipatory environmental

anxiety, Ao represents ecological and linguistic rupture, and Kire reviews the colonial disturbance of village territory and social time.

In terms of method, the article utilizes close reading and comparison informed by history. Here, close reading involves considerations of syntax, quoted phrases, repetition, metaphor, sound, line breaks, perspective of narration, and how a quote relates to its surrounding scene. Brief quotation is used not as decoration but as a focus for analysis. The line numbers are provided for poems where they were less useful than page numbers (see the editions listed in the references). There is no need to replace engagement with the primary text by using secondary scholarship; the latter is to set context and test interpretations.

This approach is another limit. A novel or a poem is not an ethnographic transcript, environmental impact statement, or direct record of the community consensus. Literary texts edit, abate, create, and order. They are interpretive; they demonstrate the imagining of a relation, contesting it, remembering it, or making it sensible. It is a distinction for public-facing scholarship. A poem does not in itself determine compensation rates, nor does it verify a historical event. To say that a poem gives environmental testimony is not to say that it does those things. Its role is to bring to light what such procedures might miss.

The summary of the corpus can be seen in Table 1. The table lists the main literary object in each section and the formal feature to which the analysis is applied.

**Table 1. Primary corpus and analytical focus**

| Author                   | Primary text                                  | Pressure represented                      | Formal focus                                                            |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar | "The Adivasi Will Not Dance"                  | Coal extraction and land dispossession    | Monologue, chromatic repetition, interruption, refusal                  |
| Mamang Dai               | "Small Towns and the River"                   | Uncertain ecological future               | Refrain, personification, enjambment, ritual direction                  |
| Temsula Ao               | "The Old Story-Teller"; "Lament for an Earth" | Deforestation and loss of transmission    | Kinship diction, self-implicating pronoun, lament, acoustic absence     |
| Easterine Kire           | <i>Sky Is My Father</i>                       | Colonial intrusion and village disruption | Historical reconstruction, taboo language, ritual time, counter-archive |

## Close Readings

### Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar: Coal, Blackness, and the Politics of Refusal

The Adivasi Will Not Dance is written by Shekhar with Mangal Murmu playing the role of an old musician and troupe leader speaking to a substantial state audience. The form of the story is important: It isn't a case study of dispossession, but an extended performance of speaking for one's community, rather than interpreting it. Mangal is asked to perform dance and music at the Inauguration Ceremony of a Thermal Power Plant. He interrupts that script with his speech. Culture is the thing that is expected, and it is the political ceremony that allows it to happen, which becomes an accusation instead.

The most succinct environmental picture in the story is Mangal's claim that "It is this coal, sir, which is gobbling us up bit by bit." (Shekhar, 2015, p. 174). The verb "gobbling" endows the mineral and the industry of which it is a product with an appetite. Coal is no longer a resource passively extracted by identifiable institutions, but rather the grammatical agent of consumption. The phrase does not, however, conceal the human responsibility. Its monstrous figure is an illustration of the magnitude of an extraction system that surpasses any given machine or any official. Slow down the sentence with "bit by bit. But the community is not annihilated in one great flash; rather, it is eaten away over the years, little by little, by dust, land loss, sickness, and narrowing opportunities for livelihood. Thus, the temporality of slow violence is condensed into everyday language.

The next step in the argument is presented in colour. Our ochre earth has turned black, says Mangal – Shekhar, 2015, p. 174. The shift from ochre to black is not a general paradigm of prettiness and ugliness of nature and industry. Ochre reminds us of a certain type of ground and of the colors of soil, houses, and the painted surfaces of Santhal domestic life. The darkness of leaves, stones, sand, roof tiles, wall designs, and children's bodies merge. The same adjective can be used for objects that are human and nonhuman surfaces, and thus the landscape is somatic, and the body is environmental. Pollution has no boundaries to the community; it lands on skin, it gets into breath, and it distorts the grammar of home.

Repetition is also important to the passage. Mangal's inventory is always returning to "black", creating an additive pattern, and not a single descriptive statement. With each recurrence, a zone is taken away from the ordinary way of life of a village. It has a chromatic enclosure effect with the uniform residue of coal. For Adami (2020), Shekhar's linguistic selection is part of a critical stylistics in which vernacular words and specialized registers reveal power inequities. In this place, the simple act of a colour word does political work. It demonstrates a contamination of the industry to make unlike things alike. The emotional body of the crying child strengthens the bond of extraction and lack of rain. The emotional body of a crying child deepens the bond of extraction and lack of rain. Tears are like a stream that flows across dry soil. The image flips the scale: a face becomes a landscape; ecological scarcity is felt in the distress of a child. Mangal's environmental description thus rejects the division of public infrastructure from the private realm. Mangal questions the construction of constructing the power plant: 'Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories?' (p.185). The power plant could be proclaimed in national developmental language, while its material "prehistory" can be seen on roofs, walls, crops, and faces. Chakraborty's focus on subaltern agency in Mangal's monologue is correct: The subaltern agency doesn't exist in the abstract; it is one that has the authority to name what official speech cannot.

The relation of culture and territory accentuates the critique in the story. One can switch on Santhal musicians like mechanical toys by the outsiders, and while that is happening, the person takes "our very dancing grounds" (Shekhar, 2015, p. 170). The possessive

pronoun is important. The ground is not a neutral stage for an event: it is a part of a collective practice, and it makes this practice possible. The term "very dancing grounds" reveals a contradiction in the state's demand: Adivasi culture is being promoted as spectacle just as its land is being appropriated. The extraction is thus doubled. The mining of coal is done, and the dancing of dance is done.

This double extraction is responsible for the fact that refusal, instead of performance, is the final move in the story. Mangal doesn't hate dancing per se. He denies that it becomes an expression of happy inclusion. His constant asking of questions ("why should we sing, why should we be happy?") places the responsibility for the answer on the shoulders of the dignitaries who assume that everyone is happy. The monologue is a shift from folklore consumer to grievance addresser. On the form side, it is the story's creation of a counter-public space, which is nevertheless violently closed, in the form of a ceremonial platform. Shekhar (2015) concludes with the sentence: The Adivasi will not – "We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can this power plant be good for us? And how can we Adivasis dance and be happy? Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We Adivasis will not dance. The Adivasi will not-(p.187). The dashes are all important, as well as the declarative words that precede them. Mangal's speech is interrupted physically, and the last sentence of the story- the complete proposition is not delivered. This will not undermine the rejection. The reader is already familiar with the missing verb, and the broken syntax exposes state violence as an intervention into language. The story does not conclude in a poetic fashion or a conciliatory recap. It puts a sentence under siege.

It also doesn't allow for an easy victory of resistance. If one does not refuse, then Mangal suffers the consequences of refusal. The narrative does not guarantee the reversal of land acquisition and the recovery of livelihoods in the blink of an eye. Rather, it marks the occurrence at which a coerced performer demands to be a political speaker. This distinction is at the heart of the paper's thesis: ecological narrative is not just a story of land attachment—it's a battle for who can say what development is.

But a close reading of Shekhar uncovers more than the theme of displacement. Verbs, colours, pronouns, lists, questions, and punctuation are all used to distribute agency. Coal consumes, blackness spreads, "our" marks collective possession, the dancing ground makes art and territory, the final dash makes interruption. These formal decisions render extractive violence legible, but do not erase Mangal as a passive victim or an uncomplicated symbol of an entire population of Adivasis. People in this study are concerned with the loss that occurs when the river ceases to flow. In the study, people are worried about the loss that comes when the river stops.

### **Mamang Dai: River Time and Anticipatory Ecological Grief**

The scale of interpretation is different for Mamang Dai's "Small Towns and the River". There's no mine, dam, eviction notice, or military road in the poem. Its importance to the issue of displacement is related to the ontology of place it provides, and the future anxiety that enters that relation. The initial gestures between the continuity of seasons and human death: the

town seems serene among the trees, but the death of a few years ago brings the community together in ritual. The poem brings in a river, one which cannot be named as "scenery," against "mortal repetition.

The line "The river has a soul" is repeated twice: The river has a soul / In the summer, it cuts through the land / like a torrent of grief Sometimes / Sometimes, I think it holds its breath / seeking a land of fish and stars / The river has a soul / It knows, stretching past the town. (Dai, 2004: 12 and 17). The sentence is not just repeated, but changed. The line in its first occurrence is based on the idea that rituals persist through life and death. As the river flows in, it's another form of continuity. The second time it is the basis of knowledge: the river "knows" rain, dry earth, the town, mist on the mountaintops. The shift from soul to knowledge gives the river inner depth and spatial extent. It's evidence, actor, and connecting agent.

In Dai's phrase, "torrent of grief," mourning (2004, line 14) comes into being in conjunction with hydrological motion. The metaphor doesn't just personify a non-person, the river. The grief has the power, direction, and volume of water. Meanwhile the summer river runs through the land, taking its breath away. Cuts and breath-holds form a tense animation, the river strong yet weak, its flow interrupted yet halted, its world of fish and stars. The poem's ecological imagining is thus not pastoral quiet nor abstract animism. It is composed of State Transitions. It consists of State Transitions.

The immortality of water" is a series of events that begins with the first rain and ends with the dry earth and mountain mist - "from the first drop of rain to dry earth/ and mist on the mountaintops/ the river knows/ the immortality of water" (Dai 2004, lines 19- 22). Immortality is not static, but a process. Water remains by flowing through elevations and forms. This temporality is not the anxious temporality of the town. Childhood, death, burial, and an uncertain future are all marked by human communities, and the river is a link that extends beyond the individual to a cycle that is far greater than human life. But the poem does not suggest that rivers can never be hurt. This is how bringing the river's memory and knowledge makes it clear what would be broken if there were a change in flow, species, access, or ritual orientation.

The poem's geographic setting makes this point real. The dead are given "toward the west," and the departing soul walks east toward the sun: "Small towns grow with anxiety / for the future / The dead are placed pointing west/ when the soul rises/ it will walk into the golden east/ into the house of the sun" (Dai, 2004, lines 25-30), not abstract compass data. It's a ritual map which helps the town find death in a world. A moral and ceremonial landscape involves river, bamboo, mountain mist, and solar orientation. The displacement from such a location would then come at a cost not just for residential but for the direction of knowledge in which the dead and the living are connected.

The express gesture to futurity is present in the lines 'Small towns grow with anxiety / for the future' (Dai, 2004, lines 25-26). It is the delay of the thing of worry that is the enjambment. The first line permits the possibility of "grow with anxiety" to read as a state of growth, while the second line says what can't be safely predicted. The poem does not identify the source of threat, and that's a limitation that's analytically significant. It should not be inserted into a historical record of a specific project. Instead, it communicates anticipatory ecological grief, wherein apprehension appears prior to a singular catastrophe being told.

Dai's poem then adds a tone that can be easily overlooked when considering the definition of displacement as a mere act of moving. It poses a question: what happens if the future of an old, river-town relation is up for grabs? The formal answer is through the use of refrain, enjambment, personification, and ritual orientation. The river's memory transcends the town, while the town's fear shows that continuity is not guaranteed. The quietness of the poem is not the lack of politics; it is a different way of catching the changes in the environment.

### **Temsula Ao: Interspecies Kinship, Language, and the Silenced Forest**

The poetry of Temsula Ao is an approach to ecological loss itself in terms of storytelling. "The Old Story-Teller" is a voice-over to the story about a legacy of storytelling where warriors, were-tigers, and animals speak to the listener. The poem is not just a nostalgic look back on an illiterate past. It brings attention to the circumstances surrounding the continuation of a community's stories beyond the ears of the younger listener. Writing is not an unproblematic substitute for oral performance but a response to threats to transmission (Chakraborty, 2020). The most interesting twist is the memory of animals: "As did the various animals / Who were once our brother / Until we invited human language / And began calling them savage" (Ao, 2013, "The Old Story-Teller," lines 23-26). The line break is used to cause "animals" to be on the edge of one line and kinship to be on the next. The "lag" results in a relationship coming as a correction to the classification of a habit. Animals are not background animals in a human story; they are remembered as relatives. The past tense 'were' is painful because it does not represent biological extinction, but ethical separation.

That separation, Ao then attributes to a human achievement: "Until we invented human language / And began calling them savage" (2013, lines 25-26). We is an implicating pronoun. This isn't just a condemnatory poem against a distant stranger; it is an awareness of a human practice of naming that creates hierarchy. Usually considered a marker of civilization, language is the tool used to make others uncivilized. The irony is exact. This term savage is used in the name of the animals, but also in reference to the violence in the speaker's linguistic heritage.

This critique makes it difficult to simply sing a song of praise to oral history. Storytelling can keep the interspecies memory alive, but language can also create distance. In the case of Ao's poem, it is not a battle between a pure indigenous language and a corrupted modern language. It reflects on the ambivalence of representation. The old storyteller holds histories, territory, and identity, but the poem acknowledges that survival in written form alters the mode of transmission. The important question isn't whether the change maintains responsibility, but whether it merely stores words when relationships have diminished.

In Lament for an Earth, the repercussions of broken relations are made clear. The forest, now dead, is given an acoustic form in the exclamation "Alas for the forest / Which now lies silent/stunned and stumped / with the evidence / Of her rape" (Ao, 2013 "Lament for an Earth" lines 21-25). Peacefulness is not silence. It is the lack of birds, animals, leaves, work, and reciprocal listening. The verb "lies" may refer to position, death, and deception, all of which hover over the ravaged forest. That which was vertical, sounding, and inhabited has been reduced to a stillness by force.

Alliteration and imagery of the human body combine to exaggerate the wound Ao suffers in his neighborhood. The forest is described with words which resonate with each other in their

initial consonants, causing the line to falter over the residue of cutting. Otherwise, logging trucks and mills connect the violated forest to an industrial chain. The poet's lament is thus not a universal brooding over man's estrangement from nature. It marks a transition from living forest to transported commodity, yet remains the moral punch of violence to a body - "Of her sister / The forest/ No life stirs in her belly now/ The womb/ And the bleaching powder/ Have left her with no tomorrow" (Ao, 2013, "Lament for an Earth," lines 57-62).

The concept of violation is a gendered one which needs to be analyzed. It can be a strong indictment of the intimacy and brutality of environmental degradation, but it can also open up a feminized land as a passive victim. Ao mitigates that danger in part by the laments of the poem, and by a neat association of forest with river, both of which are hurt and bear a history. However, a reading of the metaphor is not sufficient for an ecocritical reading, nor should such a reading be made without critically examining the gender politics of the metaphor. The impact of the poem is that it renders the exploitation of the land extremely uncomfortable to be spoken of, while its weakness is that it is a familiar association of the female body and the weak land.

In the lament, ecological loss is a material and semantic loss, as read with "The Old Story-Teller". Without habitat and water, forest; without separation, the language of "savage" normalizes forest destruction; without oral transmission, the stories that remember territory fade -That forgetting the stories / would be catastrophic/ we could lose our history/ Territory and most certainly/ our intrinsic identity. (Ao, 2013, "The Old Story-Teller," lines 28-32). The shifts in voice – recollection, warning, lament and self-critique – keep them together in Ao's poems.

The poems also defy notions that tradition continues as if there's no change. The old storyteller writes because the situation in which he or she is expected to listen has changed. The written poem is a kind of oral memory, but there is a warning here about the portability of the oral memory – a story of no location can be retained as text without any practical connection to species, route, obligations. Ecological poetics is thus not an inheritance of belief, but a debate on the laborious process of transmission, in Ao's case.

### **Easterine Kire: Village Ecology, Taboo, Gender, and Colonial Rupture**

The story in Easterine Kire's *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, which recounts the account of a Naga village in the 1800s, traverses the realms of domestic life, farming, ritual, oral history, inter-village conflict, and British military expansion. The novel's subtitle itself is a clue to the method. The village is not "shown" as a self-evident historical subject. Kire's practice combines archival research with oral narrative and community memory to create a "counter-history of colonial encounter" (Mandal & Singh, 2022).

The kinship formula is found in the title "Sky is my father, Earth is my mother" (Kire, 2018, p. 64). The sentence structures the cosmos in family-like terms, but it's more than a metaphorical love language. Named by father and mother, from where, to whom, and why. There is nothing in the sky or on the earth that is outside the human subject and is merely a tool for his or her use; rather, these are the previous relations out of which personhood arises. The title thus sets the reader up to expect an analysis of territorial defence that extends beyond mere possession. A land attack "invades" a kinship system.

That structure is part of everyday regulation. Piano recalls the maxim, "If you engage in breaking taboos, you break yourself" (Kire, 2018, pp. 14-15). The repeated verb "break" puts together rule, body, and community as a single operation. A taboo is not just given as an external rule that is placed on a free individual. Anyone who transgresses it breaks the self, since the self is created in relation to the village, the ancestors, the soil and the spiritual order. The surrounding passage pictures the earth opening to receive a transgressor before the time, and attributes an active moral agency to the earth.

The novel's genna observances are also ecological/collective. Some days have been designated for a variety of reasons that involve a stop to work, to protect crops, to preserve the fertility of the herd and/or to ensure the ritual order. A contemporary reading may rid itself of such observances as superstition or as an inefficient interruption. What is the social and environmental role of a collectively perceived pause? Is the question Kire's story poses? Genna is a regulator of labour, synchroniser of households, marker of limits, and a public maker of agricultural vulnerability. It does not equal modern conservation science; it's not something just for show.

The agricultural calendar is also a catalyst for the village story. Neither does work in fields, cooking, house repair, brewing, feasting, and movement of age groups form the background before the "real" history of war occurs. They set out the limits of what constitutes the threat of colonial intrusion. The territorial logic of the British movement is another: paths are measured for the passage of the empire, labour is forced, villages are punished, and a natural fortress is an objective of the military. It's a battle over how to organize territory, as well as a series of battles.

Kire, however, does not idealize all the inherited practices. Novel stage of lashu death: "No mourning of the dead" (Kire, 2018, p. 5). The ban comes because of a woman's death during childbirth and to stop public mourning. Read carefully: the short sentence is strict (since it has taken away both action and object: mourning is not allowed, and the deceased woman cannot be collected into the community by means of the ordinary lament). The scene reveals that sometimes a ritual order is expensive in terms of gender.

This tension is vital. If taboo is understood only in ecological terms, the woman's silenced death is lost. In this reading, the novel's narration of collective restrictions and the time of farming is levelled. Kire's story needs to be read twice; relational systems make it possible to live with land and distribute vulnerability unevenly. This ambivalence adds to the analytical value of the novel compared with a romantic image of the native harmony prior to colonization.

Oral Storytelling is another layer to the village ecology. The thehou is a location where young men listen to stories, traditions, and experiences of war. The Village is a village of stories at locations, clans, and duties. The social memory of the novel is an echo of this episodic movement. Instead of focusing on one central character and event, characters and events are built up over generations. The form focuses attention on the continuity of a community under pressure, rather than an imperial campaign in history.

In this world, colonial violence arrives as burning and siege, as forced labour, and as the effort to make the hills administratively crossable. Resistance is sustained by houses and fields, which are military targets. The British do not find a wasteland of scattered warriors but a

village whose survival is facilitated by topography, agriculture, social structure, and a past of remembered duty. Ecological and political are linked at the level of life and lives.

The eventual treaty cannot bring back a pristine past. The colonial encounter alters who is in charge, what is religious, how people move around, and how history will be documented. Here is an apt citation of Bhumika's (2021) caution not to put Naga literature into a single explanatory framework. Kire's novel is an ecological story, historical fiction, an oral-memory project, a gendered social account, and an anti-colonial reconstruction. It is not an exclusive claim that Indigenous people can live in harmony with nature.

The village ecology is, then, assembled through repeated injunction, kinship language, ritual pause, gendered prohibition, agricultural labour, oral instruction, and territorial defence, as close reading reveals. Displacement in the novel does not mean only being removed from land. It is colonial disruptions of time and narration that make land uninhabitable as a collective world.

### **Comparative Synthesis: Four Forms of Displacement**

Comparison is possible between the four readings, even though it is not assumed that they are the same reading. Shekhar portrays extractive displacement as contamination and coerced performance; Dai expresses a foretaste of unease in a river world; Ao brings in naming interspecies and broken transmission in the face of ecological destruction; and Kire reconstructs the colonial disturbance of village time, ritual, and territorial authority. Each text is an inquiry: What is taken when place is taken away? It depends on genre, history, and community.

They are particularly different in their time structures. Shekhar's story is one of attritional mining mixed with the time condensed of a state ceremony. The reader hears the slow violence become a public refusal. Throughout the poem, Dai is moving through the seasons, the death, the ritual, and the water, with the undefined future anxiety opening as a final freedom in the fluid, cyclical manner of the poem. Ao's poems reflect on the loss of kinship, the damage to it, and the hope that stories are not heard anymore. The novel is a historical novel written over generations, and colonial rupture could be seen against the slower pace of agriculture and village life. Displacement can therefore be cumulative, anticipated, remembered, or administrative, and it is never one event-time.

The texts also have different voice distributions. Mangal's voice is confrontational and politically positioned. Dai's lyric speaker hears the river and stores up sorrow in a controlled repetition. Ao's storyteller is an inheritor who is also responsible for the language of human separation. Kire's storytelling brings several lives in a remembered community together. These are formal jobs that will decide what can be known. Evidence is not interchangeable in terms of a shouted refusal, refrain, lament, or multigenerational story.

In the corpus, ecological knowledge is not so much a piece of information as a way of relating. It contains knowledge of rivers and seasons, recognition of animals as kin, communal pauses around cultivation, place finding of death by direction, memory of places where dancing can be done, and stories for a village. Berkes (2018) defines such knowledge as cumulative and adaptive; the literary works add that it is tonal, embodied, and narratively organized. A lot of this cannot be passed on as a list, because it requires interaction. Comparatively, the recurring interactions between ecological features, memory, livelihood, ritual, identity, oral

transmission, and seasonal knowledge are summarized in Figure 3. The matrix is not intended as a quantitative measure of Indigenous cultural practices, but rather as an emphasis on interpretation in the selected texts.

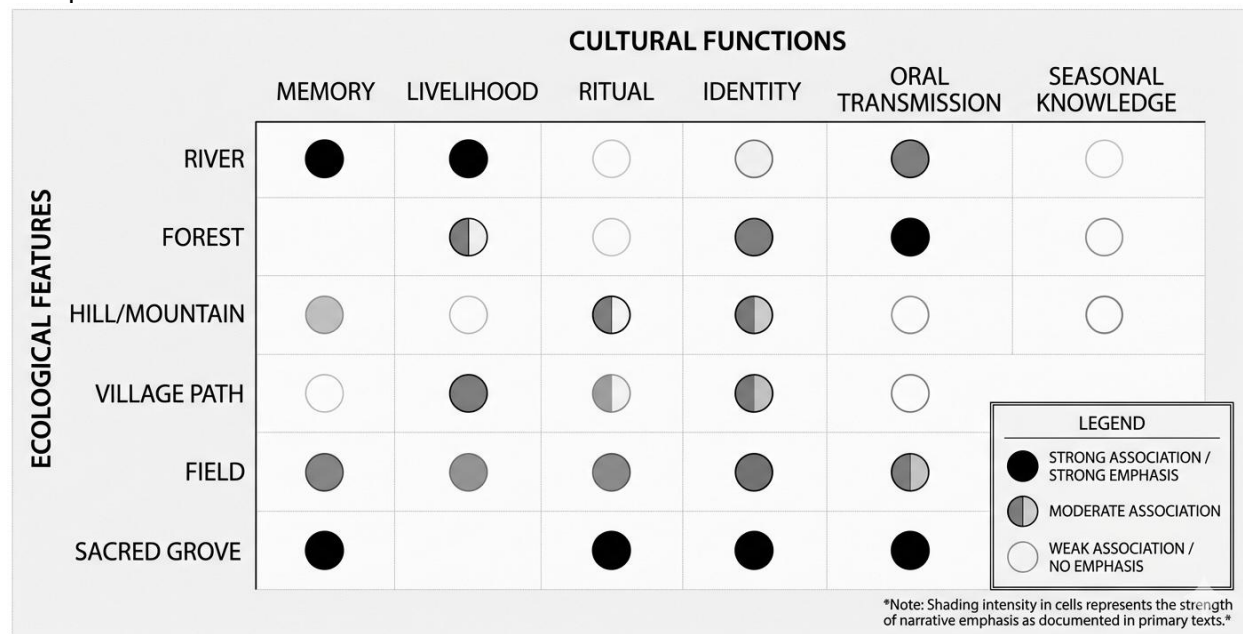


Fig. 2. Interpretive matrix of ecological features and cultural functions emphasized in the selected literary corpus.

These sensory motifs are a constant reminder of this. Shekhar's black dust changes sight and touch; Dai's river grieves and breathes and rains and mists; Ao's forest is known by its lost sound; Kire's village is paced by work and feast, prohibition, story, alarm. The first place that environmental change is met is through changes in sensation and practice, before it is officially a category. One way in which literature is relevant to ecological thinking is that it can mark that point at which the world feels different.

Alternatively, the corpus can be viewed as counter-mapping, as long as it is used with caution. Administrative maps create legibility by using boundaries, mineral blocks, roads, property titles, and project zones. The selected texts cover alternative correspondences: grounds of dancing, directions for burial, sound of the forest, memory of the river, histories of the house, and ritual calendars. These pieces illustrate the role of narrative in the making of territories, as proposed by Escobar (2008), who claims that territories are created through cultural and ecological practices. However, a literary map is not a substitute for community-managed spatial information or legal rights. It provides another level of focus.

Another shared feature is the rejection of materialism and the separation from culture. The most clear-cut statement comes from Shekhar: "We can't celebrate when the ground of dancing is taken away! Animals, forests, and territorial memory cannot be folklore without Ao's storytelling. The rituals of Kire cannot be separated from the life of agriculture and village governance. Its use in death, memory, and futurity cannot be overlooked while it is read as landscape in Dai's river. Culture is not a compensation package that has been added on to the loss of environment; it is one of its modes of existence.

Meanwhile, the texts make the idea of tradition complex. Ao points to language as a source of species hierarchy. Kire discovers the cruel nature of the forbidden grieving of a gender.

Shekhar portrays internal suffering as well as exploitation from the outside, and his collection does not hold up idealized images of Santhal life. In the continuity of Dai's poem, there is anxiety. No one among these writers offers a pristine ecology that can be restored. Their work can be appreciated as critical continuity, which entails the memory of inherited relations tested and rearticulated in changing circumstances.

This distinction is important for environmental politics. Romantic visions of "ecological harmony" can help to acknowledge Indigenous ways of being, but can also set unattainable standards for purity and mask differences, adaptation, desire, and gender inequity. Coulthard (2014) and Whyte (2017) warn about the type of recognition that does not decolonize. The literature also indicates that appreciation of cultural symbolism is not the only component of respect for place-based knowledge; political authority and the right to refuse are also important.

The comparative finding is thus exact: Displacement is ecological rupture when a project or power disturbs the relations by which a community inhabits land. Interruption can be in different forms. It could darken the visible world, throw off the rhythm of a river-bound future, silence a forest and its tales, or disrupt the village calendar with siege and governance. These differences are apprehensible in literary form. The close readings reveal a comparative pattern that can be summarized in Figure 4. This comparative pattern is summarized in Figure 4: being ecologically intimate is disrupted in various ways, whereas being a memory worker, a storyteller, a refusalist, or an adapter is possible. Not all movement is universal or circular; individual texts focus on different stages and may contain an unresolved movement.

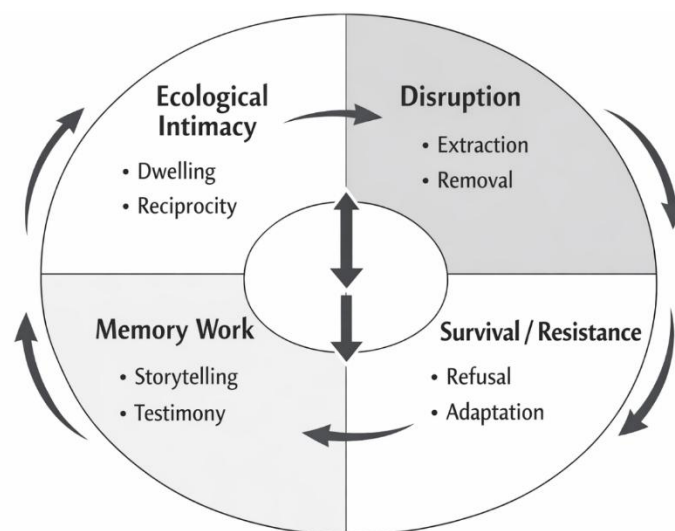


Fig. 3. Comparative synthesis of ecological intimacy, disruption, memory work, and survival or resistance in the selected texts.

## Ecological and Public Implications

The readings raise questions about the definition of loss in environmental and social terms. The conventional procedures work best for measurable assets, households, income, infrastructure, and biophysical indicators. Their weakness is that they treat cultural

relationships as an appendage. Assessments can be informed by the following questions raised by the corpus: What types of places carry out ritual, memory, and collective learning? Who maintains local knowledge and through what means and methods? What sensory changes are already being reported? What forms of access are important even if there is no land ownership? Who in the community is affected differently by customary and developmental change?

These types of questions can complement and not supersede rights-based procedures. Participatory mapping can document place-names, routes, commons, burial grounds, sacred sites and work areas, while oral-history protocols can capture histories of environmental change; cultural impact assessment can explore the effects of relocation on language use, festivals, care networks and intergenerational teaching. The only thing that matters is when these measures do not give communities control over what is documented, how it is stored, and whether it can be disclosed. The extraction of knowledge can replicate the extraction of land in the absence of consent and governance. There is a role for literature in this process. It must not be used as an argument that all members of a community hold a shared belief; nor is the poetic image of a thing to be changed into a policy variable without interpretation. It has a diagnostic and ethical significance. Shekhar teaches an assessor to be aware of the paradox of cultural celebration and territorial dispossession. Dai highlights directionality in ritual, hydrological memory and anxiety for the future. In Ao, the author demonstrates the ecological qualities of silence and naming. A village calendar, women's labour, oral instruction and defence of territory are one social ecology, as Kire shows.

The texts also question the language of compensation. Financial compensation can compensate for some of these losses, but it can't replace a river's cosmological role in burial, the sound of a forest, or a ground for social dispersal. The model of reconstruction developed by Cernea (1997) is already beyond cash and is now focused on livelihood and community reconstruction. There is another principle that the literary evidence suggests: restoration must be worked out in conjunction with affected persons, and the restoration of some losses cannot be accomplished. Non-substitutability does not resolve policy conflict, but it does not allow the false comfort of the thought that all relations are equally priced.

The corpus calls for a new approach to teaching and disseminating Indigenous literature that doesn't focus exclusively on folklore, identity, or regional colour. These works are just as much part of the field of environmental humanities, development studies, public policy, history, and ethics. When items are included, the questions asked in these fields are changed. Students are taught not only that displacement is harmful, but also how harm is constructed in syntax, spectacle, silence, and memory. This type of reading cultivates interpretive attention, which is a public skill that is less frequently found in technical planning.

Lastly, the right of refusal should be respected. Mangal's rejection is not a rejection based on sentiment but rational, as it is a project that requires cultural approval without giving land justice. Public consultation is empty if it merely acknowledges agreement. This

political lesson is tied to the ecological lesson of the corpus: there can be no respect for relations to place without regard for the authority to defend the relations to place.

## Conclusion

This article has been composed around a general thematic discussion and then broken down into four points for the text. Coal in Shekhar gets hungry, blackness in Shekhar transcends the body and landscape, and a broken sentence becomes cultural refusal in form. The river is the soul of Dai and knowledge, and the town's anxiety towards the future is legible against that temporality. The naming of animals as savage unearths language as a tool for separating species in Ao, and the absence of an ecology is heard in the forest in the movie. Kinship relations with the sky and earth, genna ceremonies, oral memory, gendered taboo, and anti-colonial defence are all part of a village ecology that cannot be reduced to scenery in Kire.

The works as a whole reveal displacement to be a phenomenon that cannot be simply described as the migration of a population from one place to another. It may start before, during, or after moving; or there may be no formal relocation at all. It can be in colour, breath, sound, direction, agricultural time, mourning, and telling a story. Literature's role is to make these fragmented relations visible, without eliminating disagreement and ambiguity. It is not an Indigenous theory of land – it is situated forms of attention.

Taken together, the works show that displacement is not adequately described as the transfer of a population from one site to another. It can begin before movement, continue after resettlement, or occur without formal relocation. It enters colour, breath, sound, direction, agricultural time, mourning, and the authority to tell a story. Literature's contribution is to render these dispersed relations perceptible while preserving disagreement and ambiguity. It does not provide a single Indigenous theory of land; it provides situated forms of attention.

The study has clear limitations. The corpus is small, English-language, and concentrated in central-eastern and northeastern India. It cannot stand for the range of Adivasi and Indigenous writing in Indian languages, oral performance, song, theatre, testimony, and digital media. The analysis is literary rather than ethnographic and does not claim to document present community opinion. Edition-specific pagination and the movement of oral material into English also require further study.

Future research should place these texts beside works in Santali, Tenyidie, Ao, Adi, Khasi, Gondi, Bhili, and other languages; examine how translation changes ecological terms; and include community-led research on contemporary mining, conservation displacement, climate mobility, and urban migration. Gender and age should remain central, particularly where customary systems and development projects distribute burdens unevenly. Comparative work would also benefit from studying performance: what happens when a poem, dance, or story is heard in the place to which it refers?

The deepest shared claim of the corpus is not that land is symbolically important. It is that place that participates in making persons and communities. When place is damaged, the

loss is material, but it is also grammatical, sensory, ceremonial, and historical. A just ecological politics must therefore learn to hear what administrative language abbreviates - and must leave room for the sentence of refusal to be completed.

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