

INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH IN THE AGE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

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The Anthropocene has emerged as an important conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between human civilization and the natural world. The term describes an era in which human activities have become a major force transforming the earth's climate, landscapes, oceans and ecosystems. Although the Anthropocene has not been formally accepted as an official geological epoch, it continues to possess considerable significance in literature, philosophy, environmental history and the humanities. In literary studies, it enables critics to examine how imaginative writing responds to climate change, species extinction, environmental pollution, extractive economies and the unequal distribution of ecological suffering.

Indian poetry in English occupies an important position within this emerging field of Anthropocene literature. India's environmental realities—including deforestation, river pollution, urban congestion, mining, disappearing biodiversity, Himalayan glacier loss, coastal vulnerability, extreme heat and unstable monsoon patterns—provide a distinctive context for ecological poetry. The IPCC identifies increasing heatwaves, flooding in monsoon regions and glacier melting in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region as major climate risks for Asia. Indian English poetry transforms these large-scale processes into intimate experiences of displacement, bodily vulnerability, memory, grief and ecological anxiety.

From Nature Poetry to Anthropocene Poetry

Nature is the bedrock of poetry. Early Indian poets frequently represented rivers, mountains, flowers, birds and seasons as sources of beauty, spirituality and national identity. In Anthropocene poetry, however, nature is no longer merely a harmonious background for human experience. It appears as an endangered, wounded and active presence that records the consequences of human intervention.

This change may be described as a movement from the poetry of nature to the poetry of ecological crisis. Anthropocene poetry questions the traditional separation between humanity and nature. Rivers carry industrial waste, mountains contain the scars of mining, cities invade forests, plastic enters marine life, and atmospheric pollution penetrates human lungs. The environment becomes inseparable from the body, economy, technology and political structures.

Consequently, the central question is no longer simply how poets describe nature, but how poetry represents human responsibility for environmental transformation. The lyric poem becomes a space in which individual perception encounters planetary history.

Ecological Precursors in Modern Indian English Poetry

Several twentieth-century Indian English poets anticipated the concerns now associated with Anthropocene studies. A. K. Ramanujan's "A River," for instance, challenges conventional poetic celebrations of the river Vaigai. Instead of presenting the river only as an object of beauty, Ramanujan draws attention to drought, flooding, destruction and the human and animal lives ignored by traditional poets. The poem exposes the ethical limitations of an aesthetic imagination that celebrates spectacular nature while overlooking suffering.

Similarly, Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is deeply connected with the physical and cultural landscapes of Odisha. Rivers, drought-stricken fields, temples, coastal spaces and impoverished communities form an interconnected environment in his work. Nature in

Mahapatra is not separate from hunger, history, sexuality or social deprivation. Studies of landscape in Indian English poetry frequently identify Ramanujan, Mahapatra and Arun Kolatkar as poets whose representations of place invite ecocritical interpretation.

Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* offers another significant ecological precursor. Its stones, hills, temples, animals, dust and ruined structures destabilize distinctions between the sacred and the material. The landscape possesses a fragmented agency of its own. Kolatkar's attention to ordinary matter anticipates material ecocriticism, which understands stones, animals, water and other non-human entities not as passive objects but as participants in ecological networks.

Gieve Patel's "On Killing a Tree" is among the clearest examples of environmental consciousness in modern Indian English poetry. The poem presents tree-felling as a prolonged act of violence rather than an ordinary human activity. The tree appears as a living organism with regenerative energy, while the language of cutting and uprooting exposes human domination over the non-human world. These poets did not necessarily employ the vocabulary of climate change or the Anthropocene. Nevertheless, their poetry reveals ecological degradation, human indifference and the violence concealed within ideas of progress and development.

Indigenous Ecologies and Poetry from Northeast India

Poetry from Northeast India has considerably expanded the ecological dimensions of Indian poetry in English. In the works of Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao and other poets from the region, rivers, forests, mountains, animals and ancestral landscapes are inseparable from cultural identity and collective memory.

Mamang Dai's poetry draws upon the Indigenous traditions of Arunachal Pradesh. Poems such as "Small Towns and the River" present the river as a living presence connecting human mortality, ritual, memory and the continuity of the community. Her ecological vision resists anthropocentrism by emphasizing the sacredness and intrinsic value of non-human life. Critical studies connect Dai's poetry with deep ecology and the Donyi-Polo worldview, in which the earth and its elements are understood as animate and spiritually significant.

Temsula Ao similarly connects ecological destruction with cultural loss. Her poetry mourns deforestation, disappearing traditions and the disruption of relationships between tribal communities and their environments. Modernization is therefore not presented as a purely beneficial process. It can destroy both biodiversity and cultural memory. Studies of Ao's poetry emphasize her critique of unsustainable development and her representation of Indigenous ecological responsibility.

Such poetry challenges the universalizing implications of the term "Anthropocene." The environmental crisis has not been created equally by all human beings, nor are its consequences experienced uniformly. Indigenous communities, farmers, labourers, coastal populations and economically disadvantaged groups often experience environmental disruption more intensely despite contributing comparatively little to global emissions and industrial extraction.

Indian Anthropocene poetry must therefore be read through postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental justice. It reveals that ecological exploitation is connected with histories of colonialism, capitalism, militarization, displacement and unequal development.

Sudeep Sen and Contemporary Anthropocene Poetics

Sudeep Sen's *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* represents one of the most direct engagements with the Anthropocene in contemporary Indian English poetry. Published in 2021, the book combines poetry, prose, visual art and documentary elements to address climate crisis, pandemic isolation, migration, illness and human survival. Its hybrid form responds to events that appear too fragmented and unprecedented to be contained within conventional poetic structures.

In Sen's work, ecological crisis and bodily crisis become interconnected. Atmospheric heat, water scarcity, ice, rain, contagion and quarantine enter the intimate spaces of breathing, illness, loneliness and memory. The Anthropocene is thus experienced not simply as an abstract geological condition but as a physical and psychological reality.

His poetry frequently brings geological and bodily scales together. Rocks, glaciers, rivers, oceans, dust and human bodies participate in common material processes. Poems associated with landscapes such as Ladakh, the Himalayas, volcanic regions and ancient rock formations combine ecological observation with spiritual meditation. Rocks are not represented as lifeless matter; they preserve deep time, environmental memory and histories that exceed human existence.

Sen's poetic method may be described as an aesthetics of fragmentation. Short lines, visual spacing, hybrid genres, documentary passages and shifts between lyric intimacy and global catastrophe reproduce the instability of the Anthropocene. A comparative study of Sen's *Anthropocene* argues that such poetry politicizes environmental crisis by connecting planetary disturbance with specific histories and unequal social conditions.

The three terms in the subtitle—"Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation"—suggest an important movement. Climate change represents planetary disruption; contagion represents the vulnerability and interconnectedness of bodies; consolation represents the possibility of survival through art, memory and ethical awareness. Poetry cannot reverse ecological destruction, but it can resist indifference and cultivate responsibility.

Major Characteristics of Indian Anthropocene Poetry

Indian poetry in English in the Anthropocene is marked by several interconnected features. First, it replaces the idea of passive landscape with the idea of an active material world. Rivers flood, stones preserve memory, trees resist destruction, mountains witness violence and animals respond to disappearing habitats.

Second, it connects ecological damage with social inequality. Environmental crisis is experienced differently according to class, caste, gender, occupation, region and access to resources. The polluted river, failed monsoon or disappearing forest is simultaneously an ecological, economic and political event.

Third, it brings together local and planetary scales. A single tree, village, river or human body becomes connected with global warming, industrial capitalism and planetary transformation.

Fourth, it employs Indigenous knowledge, mythology and spiritual traditions without merely romanticizing the past. These traditions offer alternative models of coexistence, reciprocity and respect for non-human life. Contemporary international environmental assessments likewise increasingly recognize the importance of Indigenous and local knowledge systems in understanding biodiversity and environmental stewardship.

Finally, Anthropocene poetry frequently experiments with form. Fragmentation, prose poetry, visual arrangement, multilingual references, documentary material and intermedial combinations reflect a world in which older boundaries—between nature and culture, human and animal, body and environment, local and global—have become unstable. Literary scholarship increasingly recognizes poetry, experimental writing and other hybrid genres as significant forms for representing Anthropocene conditions.

Conclusion

Indian poetry in English in the age of the Anthropocene represents an important transformation in ecological imagination. It moves beyond the romantic celebration of nature towards a critical investigation of environmental destruction, human responsibility and multispecies vulnerability. Earlier poets such as A. K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar and Gieve Patel establish important ecological foundations by questioning human indifference and representing the material power of rivers, trees, stones and landscapes.

Contemporary poets, especially Mamang Dai, Tamsula Ao and Sudeep Sen, deepen this ecological consciousness by connecting environmental crisis with Indigenous knowledge, cultural memory, climate change, contagion and environmental justice. Their poetry challenges the idea of humanity as separate from or superior to nature. It presents human beings as materially entangled with water, air, soil, animals, plants and geological processes.

Indian Anthropocene poetry is therefore not merely poetry about environmental decline. It is a form of ethical witnessing. By giving imaginative presence to damaged landscapes and vulnerable communities, it questions exploitative models of progress and invites readers to reconsider their relationship with the more-than-human world. In doing so, it transforms poetry into a mode of ecological memory, political critique, mourning and possible consolation.