



The Cloud-Messenger in Manipur's Shifting Landscapes: Ecological Intelligence in Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* in Manipuri

Abhinav Sarangthem¹ and Nadeem Yumkhaibam²

1. Undergraduate Student, Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi

2. Undergraduate Student, Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi

Abstract:

This paper attempts to identify poetic and aesthetic structures that enable Ecological Intelligence in classical Indian literature by focusing on Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*. Further, through a parallel reading of a lesser-known translation of the text in Manipuri by Mangisana (1996), this paper highlights the significance of revisiting Indian philosophical traditions and classical aesthetics in the context of contemporary ecological crises such as in Manipur. The environmentally fragile region of Northeast India has also faced a politically fragile history. In the view of commercial tourism, modernity and climate change, together with extractive policies and threatened ecology, this paper will draw attention to the need of integrating classical and folk aesthetics through Ecological Intelligence. This intelligence will provide a way to acknowledge the role and scope of ecology in human affairs thereby enabling a broader and holistic understanding of non-human participants and subtle cultural and mythic relationships in lived ecology.

Keywords: Kalidasa, Meghaduta, Manipur, Ecological Intelligence, Environment.

Introduction

Any knowledge system is based on the organisation and transfer of systematic assets of knowledge from one generation to another. It is the “holistic conceptualization that specifies, for a given country, a set of knowledge institutions and actors and delineates the interconnections among them” (Hertz et al, 2021). Traditionally, the Indian knowledge system approaches life in a holistic manner (Timane & Wandhe, 2023). The emphasis on the interconnectedness of all living beings forms the basis of learning from both within and outside of the self; the environment that one occupies is as important as the self that lives in it. The

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Indian knowledge system also upholds the idea of naturalism and spiritualism in the development of thought. Naturalism, as an ambiguous term that has been contrasted with spiritualism or idealism and at times used as a synonym for materialism, developed in India at times side by side with spiritualism and often in and through mutual interaction (Chattopadhyaya, 2003).

The idea of Naturalism in philosophy is that only natural laws and forces (as opposed to supernatural ones) operate in the universe. But in the Indian context, the aforementioned spiritual connections are present in Indian Naturalist thought, lining itself with Ecological Intelligence through its usage and definition. An example of this is the *Sāṃkhya* system, recognized as paradigmatically Naturalist. One of its first principles, "*prakṛti*", is what is used to refer to the concept of Nature. *Prakṛti* is broader than Nature. *Mūla-Prakṛti*, which brings into focus the "relatedness between all created entities based on common origin", with the connotations of *Prakṛti* becoming an "infinite variety of related evolutes that makes up the phenomenal world while also maintaining the oneness" (Baindur, 2015, p. 56-57). From here, we see that Naturalism is embedded into the soul, the very atom of the Indian knowledge system, where the definition of the natural world is connected to the existence of the cosmos itself.

The earliest extant sacred literature of India consists of four groups: the *Vedas*, the *Brāhmanas*, the *Upaniṣhads* and the *Tantras*. The *Vedas*, as sacred hymns, are the oldest scriptures of Hinduism and form the foundation of Indian knowledge and philosophy. Vedic Naturalism prominently mentions the forces of nature like fire, sun, light, wind, air, earth, water and space. The belief in the *Vedas* was that these elements shaped human life, not the other way around. (Chattopadhyaya, 2003). Vedic belief was Naturalist in form but Spiritualist in content, which meant that skepticism regarding the belief and questioning about the existence of gods and practices found its way into the texts. The *Upaniṣhads* further explore the *Vedas*' deeper meaning, introducing self-realization and karma concepts. As philosophical texts that evolved the significance of the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣhads* laid the foundations for the concept of karma, the law of cause and effect that governs the universe, dharma or the concept of duty in relation to the cosmic order and moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Timane & Wandhe, 2023).

The interaction between the Vedic and non-Vedic schools of beliefs and practices gave rise to two types of Naturalism: Orthodox Theism or *āstika* and Heterodox Atheism or *nāstika*, with the main point of difference being the acceptance or rejection of the Vedic authority. From here came the emergence of two heterodox groups, the *Ājīvikas* and the *Cārvākas*, whose beliefs were materialistic in nature, the forces and actions of material elements called *mahabhūtas* being the cause of all things and beings of the world. (Chattopadhyaya, 2003). The *Cārvāka* thought of the material reality of the world and its composition of physical matter discard everything supernatural from their world-view, believing that events and occurrences are "not determined by its cause but by its essential nature" (Chatterjee, 2021, sec. 1, para. 3). Thus, Naturalism in the Indian landscape led to the growth of ecological consciousness in the people. Termed as hard-naturalists, *Cārvākas* were also known as *Svabhāvavāda*, denying the causal relationship between the material elements and the compounds arising out of them. Everything that was not nature was discarded from their view.

From such a wide pool of naturalist thought, ecological philosophy became a key part in Indian knowledge systems, with the conceptual understanding of dharma, karma and moksha all-embracing and using nature as an important part of the higher cosmic order. Ecological consciousness, thus, was baked into Indian thought systems without degrees of separation from science, literature, philosophy and arts. Chatterjee notes how the relation between science and philosophy has been almost symbiotic in the West and how in India, "different philosophical systems combine the metaphysics of the transcendent with the logic of the mundane and the rules of individual and social morality" (Chatterjee, 2021, sec. 3, para. 2), creating a 'positive

science' system that laid its roots in naturalist ideas, giving way to positive, symbiotic relationships with the natural environment of people and their respective karma and dharma. In this holistic view, all life is one and inner reality and external reality are mutually dependent.

Moreover, what makes India's Naturalist philosophy unique comes in the form of its belief of Nature as a cosmic force in itself, a force that is taken as above humans. The Western philosophical notion of anthropocentrism and their "exclusion and superiority from nature...responsible for forging the dangerous binary of Man/Nature" (Roy, 2016, p. 46), does not apply in the Indian Knowledge System. The human-wildlife pair live in coexistence and understand animals not as mere resources but as rational, sentient beings possessing their own cultures, intentions, and histories of interaction with humans (Jolly & Stronza, 2025). Dwivedi (2018) also notes how the Hindu *Daiva* or *Devatas* are celebrated and revered as a cosmic force of consciousness, where "natural objects are personified divinely, and each of these Gods is addressed and referred to as the creator of the universe or the Supreme God in the Vedic hymns..."that" is not to be invoked or worshipped but instead experienced and known everywhere" (p. 380).

Thus, the non-human is recognised as part of nature. This extends to feminine *Śakti*, taken as a manifestation of divine female power: an omnipresent force that animates life, sustains creation, and transcends the boundaries of the known universe. Kinsley (1986) has noted: "Within the totality of the godhead, sakti is the complementary pole of the divine tendency toward quiescence and stillness. It is quite common, furthermore, to identify sakti with a female being, a goddess, and to identify the other pole with her male consort. The two poles are usually understood to be interdependent and to have relatively equal status in terms of the divine economy" (p. 133). *Śakti* represents both a cosmic force and the life force that animates each being, the source of strength, wisdom, and spiritual energy. Indian knowledge systems thus emphasize the interconnectedness of all existence, moving beyond a compartmentalized understanding of knowledge to integrate intellectual, spiritual, and practical dimensions and connecting nature with the human. As Choudhuri (1993, p. 172) states, "The traditional Indian attitude to progress is harmony with nature's rhythm".

Emotional-Ecological intelligence and Kālidāsa's Writings

Ecological Intelligence, in line with the Naturalist philosophy of the Indian Knowledge System, came to define Indian literature and art through the depiction and reverence for the connection between humanity, the cosmic order and the natural world, defining both social relationships with the environment and cultural tradition in that environment. Daniel Goleman in his seminal book *The Ecological Intelligence* (2009), defined Ecological Intelligence as the human "ability to adapt to our ecological niche", implying the "understanding of the organic relation between organisms and their environments or ecosystems" (Goleman, 2009, p. 36) as well as the capacity to acquire cultural information, to learn from experience and to adapt to the environment without harming it. This understanding of systems of relation between nature and organism is what underlies the values of Indian naturalist philosophy, something that seeped very deeply into the artistic and cultural traditions of India.

Ecological Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognise, understand and use one's emotional cognitive perceptions during interactions with the natural environment. This thought is important in understanding how India and its knowledge systems have a deep connection with nature, through the very presence of eco-narratives and ecologically conscious literature and art throughout the country's history. Important epics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* often portray nature as a powerful mirror to human emotional states, with the natural environment intertwined with characters and their emotional states, suggesting a profound empathy and resonance with the environment. Sacred geography, in the eco-philosophical thought, can be seen in the *Rāmāyaṇa* with the *sanjīvinī* plant being only found in one mountain and the "*maruda malai*" hill as a piece of that mountain, highlighting the importance of "natural

sacred places” and its associations with oral narratives about the location called *sthala purāṇas* (Baindur, 2015, pp. 124-125) Beyond this, the personification of nature is also another part of the eco-philosophical strain that runs in each work of fiction, myth and tradition. The Vedas personifying the major elements and the personification of animals in the *Jātakas* and Viṣṇuśarman's *Pañcatantra* are an example of this thought process. In Indian literature, specifically Sanskrit literature, Ecological Emotional Intelligence comes through the concepts of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *rasa* theory as well as poetic devices like *alankāra*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its *rasas* are specifically relevant in this discussion of Ecological Intelligence on this paper, with Kālidāsa's texts using the *rasa* theory to connect nature and human expressions of love, anger, fear and sorrow as an intrinsic, orderly relationship.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, distinguishing drama from ordinary life, use the *rasas* to highlight the emotional essence of the drama, an aesthetic experience that the audience can relish in (Tieken, 2000). *Rasas* are aesthetic emotion, meant purely for the empathetic spectator or *sahṛdaya* to experience. Kālidāsa's application of the tenets of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* impacts how he portrays nature in relation to the human in his texts. He used *vibhāvas* - the stimuli that give rise to emotions in the characters and the audience - to create serene hermitage feelings of peace, love, and tranquility in *Abhijñānaśakuntalām*. The lush forests and blooming flowers enhance the romantic atmosphere but also act as ways for the *Śṛṅgāra rasa* to be amplified through description. Thus, the *Śṛṅgāra rasa*, as the *aṅgīrasa* or primary sentiment of the *rasas*, become the main connective tissue in linking natural descriptors of the landscape.

Kālidāsa's awareness of Ecological Intelligence comes through this symbiotic relationship with the *rasas*, showing how nature becomes a mirror and amplifier of *rasa*. The connection between the environment and the emotional responses from it is necessary to understand the full scope of the text, the meanings inscribed within the natural descriptors connecting to the emotional landscape of the text. In *Abhijñānaśakuntalām*, Śakuntalā nurtures the trees and plants around her hermitage. This favour is returned by nature, bearing her wedding gifts of clothes and jewels on trees such as fruits, returning her love (Baindur, 2015). Not only this, the imagery of the bees is important to the sexual connotations of the play, with the bee denoting the masculine figure about to “suckle honey” from the feminine flowers. Natural environment and emotional intelligence are connected through gendered expressions of nature in Kālidāsa's works. A. Singh (2019) talks about how Kālidāsa connects the natural environment and feminine features in such a way that he was working towards “establishing a complete identification between nature and womanhood” (p. 301). His example of *Rtusamhāra* where the different seasons are gendered into feminine roles is emblematic of this, where Kālidāsa says in *Rtu.*, Act III.1–19: “autumn is like a newly wedded, coy damsel; spring, blazing red with kimśuka flowers as a red-robed damsel”.

Where gendering the natural environment in relation to the emotional landscape of the characters is concerned, no text of Kālidāsa is as evocative and important in its usage than *Meghadūta*, where Kālidāsa uses the imagery seen by the *megha* or cloud to inform the reader about the Yakṣa's emotional world. As the *megha* travels to Alakāpuri, every bit of the natural landscape becomes a potent symbol for the Yakṣa's love and longing for his wife, showing just how intertwined emotion and nature are in Kālidāsa's works. As Roychowdhury (1978) notes about Kālidāsa's writing style: “Things in nature, objects and images, become resonant to each other and as though tuned to our own sensibility” (1978, p. 36). Kālidāsa's imagery morphs the poetic image onto the emotional. His poetry underscores a worldview where humans are humbly integrated within the intricate fabric of nature, rather than being superior to it (Roy, 2016). The text becomes a way to both delight readers with the beauty of the verse and simultaneously, create awareness of ecological imagery and symbols within them. Therefore, Ecological Intelligence is a vital part of Kālidāsa's oeuvre, something that informs and expands upon the thematic and emotional dimensions of both his characters and landscapes in relation with each other.

An Overview of Manipuri Literature:

Early Manipuri Literature consists of ritual hymn, cosmogony, history, folks in Prose and Poetry. Most of the ancient Manipuri literature was written in archaic Meiteilon, comparable to the old languages of Sanskrit and Latin. Oral narratives and poems sowed the foundation of Meitei Literature, passed down through generations despite cultural shifts that happened in the following century. The history of the Meiteis of Manipuri was chronicled in the Puyas or Puwaris through the Ningthou Kangbalon, Ningthourol Lambuba, and the Panthoibi Khongul, all written in the ancient Meitei script. These historical accounts were recordings from the eyes and the judgment of the Meitei Kings and Maichous or Meitei scholars (Ch M. Singh, 1996).

In 1729, during King Pamheiba's reign, many Puyas were burned in a mass event known as 'Puya Mei Thaba', following the forced conversion to Vaishnavism by the influences of Hindu missionaries (Ch M. Singh, 1996). This shift replaced indigenous beliefs with Hindu practices, introducing the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the Bengali language and script. It also marked the beginning of translation in Manipuri literature, notably with Angom Gopi's translation of *Kiṣkindhā Kanda* from the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Dr S.I. Singh, 2010). The development of literature from this period onwards can broadly be divided into different periods, as the Middle Period (from 1709 to 1891) when Govinda Mishra Pandit's *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā* was translated by Longjam Parshuram in this period. This was followed by the Romantic Period (from 1892 to 1960) when remarkable texts of Mahākavi Kālidāsā like *Meghadūta* were translated as *Kalidas kee Megh-Dut* by Kh. Gourakishore Singh in 1958 and *Abhijñāna Śakuntalām* as *Abhigyan Shakuntala* by Ph. Basudev, from Sanskrit to Manipuri in the Bengali Script. The language used in these translation works is in old Manipuri, interlaced with Sanskrit and in a poeticised verse form (Dr S.I. Singh, 2010). Ningthoucha Mangisana translated Gourakishore's *Kalidas kee Megh-Dut* into the Meitei Script later in 1996 as *Kalidas ki Meghdoot*, which is used in this paper. It was also in this period when poets like Dr. Lamabam Kamal revived Manipuri Literature, restarting Meitei literature after a long period of Bengali and Hindi literature. The Modern period (from 1960 to present) followed, where movements like Feminism and Modernism reached Manipuri Literature and the majority of the translation works were shifted to English or Hindi.

Ecological Intelligence in Manipuri *Meghadūta* in Manipuri

Mangisana's *Kalidas ki Meghdoot* captures our emotions not only with its story of longing for his beloved by the exiled *Yakṣa*, but also in how it presents nature as a feeling being, through poetic imagery as a source of description. The translated verses act as an environmental memory which speaks of a time when nature was not just a functional, but a friend, an entity that lives alongside and is beyond humanity. When read today, especially under the lens of Manipur's shifting landscapes and the gradual ecological imbalance in the state, the poem becomes a way to reflect on how we have lost our emotional connection with nature. At present, Manipur is facing unpredictable climate patterns, sudden floods, pollution in Loktak Lake, deforestation, and a deeper loss of harmony between communities and nature. In this situation, *Meghdoot* invites us to return to a way of thinking where feeling with nature is just as important as living with it. Reading *Meghdoot* in Manipuri alongside Kālidāsā's *Meghadūta* (Tr. By M.R. Kale) provides insights into the themes of environmental consciousness and how it connects with Manipur's landscapes, revealing how Emotional Intelligence is deeply interlinked to the landscape of poetic imagery. For instance, one can note how the cloud is asked to behave while collecting moisture. The *Yakṣa* gently warns:

ਟੇਯਟ ਸ੍ਰੀਯਾਯੀਯਟ ਯੇਯਟਯ ਯਯੇਯਟ ਯੇਯ ਟਯਯਾਯੀ ਯਯਯ ਯੇਯਯ
ਯਯਯ ਯਯਯੀਯ ਯਯਯਯਯ ਯਯਯਯੀ, ਟਯਯ ਯਯਯਯ ਯ ਯਯੀਯ ਯਾਯੀਯਯੀ,

তুলাচ পৰাফলোণ নলিথি ডায়াসে ; নং টৈসিণ পুয়াণি গায়েয়াপ্নএচ
অলৈফচ্যৱজ্ঞ শেটৈল নুফজোয়াচ, ফলি ৱেজ্জচৰি লৈচকল নয়াগাৱলি ॥ (Mangisana, 1996, p. 5)

Translated into English, the paragraph reads as:

When you grow light, after shedding your rain,
You sip from Narmada's scented streams,
Fragrant with wild elephants' musk,
Where Jambu trees blockade the waters.
O Cloud, as strong as rock
Only hollow forms can ride the wind;
Those filled with liquid are meant to stay.¹

Whereas Kale's translation is read as follows:

With your showers poured out, suck up the water of the river, scented with the fragrant ichor of wild elephants, and having its current obstructed by the clumps of *Jambū* trees the wind will not be able, O cloud, to shake you when thus inwardly full of substance. Everyone void of substance becomes light; fullness contributes to heaviness (respect). (Kale, 1934, p. 118)

This verse becomes powerful when seen through today's ecological lens. It teaches us that even the rain must come with restraint. Rainfall is no longer predictable in Manipur. In some seasons there is drought, in others, sudden destructive floods. Moreover, the rise of average temperatures in Manipur points towards a clear sign of climate degradation of the state (Manglem, 2021). The stanza becomes a reminder in climate change, telling us that balance is a form of compassion, even in nature. The translation also enables a deeper connection with Manipur's landscapes. The lines about the cloud: “তুলাচ পৰাফলোণ নলিথি ডায়াসে ; নং টৈসিণ পুয়াণি গায়েয়াপ্নএচ/ অলৈফচ্যৱজ্ঞ শেটৈল নুফজোয়াচ” (Mangisana, 1996, p. 5) are translated to be similar in poetic structure to Manipur's traditional monsoon songs, adding a layer of cultural specificity. The cloud's gift of rain is not just taken as something where “Everyone void of substance becomes light” (Kale, 1934, p. 118) but as a process of inevitability, a cosmic cycle that brings hope of the rain as a divine entity in itself.

The forests in the poem are also alive with feeling. In the following excerpt, the *Yakṣa* describes how the scent of forest flowers and the presence of animals help the cloud find its way:

গালেফলৈৱচ অলিচ ফলফচ টৈথোণি ফলটে ফলুগাণি টৈথিৱা ৱায়াফল
গায়েয়াপ্নএচ নংচ টল্ল গায়েচাণি অলৈচ ফলৱৈ ৱৈথ ৱৈথ ফল
পল্লফ এঁচফ ফলফ পুয়াণিচাি টৈগায়ে টৈফাণি ফলফ পলফল
টেজট স্মিথল স্মিথল সফসিচ পোণি লটি লম্বৈ লিথল স্মিথল টিগল ॥
(Mangisana, 1996, p. 5)

(Gazing at the floral routes of budding Kadamba flowers,
Eating young banana shoots rising along the lake's banks,
Tracing through the scented soil stirred by the showers you poured,
Even faunas and fawns stir at your passing rain).

¹ All translations of the Manipuri text, unless otherwise stated, are done by the second author of this paper.

Seeing the *Kadamba* flowers green and brown on account of half-grown filaments, eating (the leaves of) the *Kandalis* on marshy banks, with the first buds appearing on them, and smelling the strong odour of the ground in forests, respectively, the bees, the deer and the elephants will indicate the path of you, showering drops of water. (Kale, 1934, p. 118)

In Manipur, *Umang Lai* once played this role in real life. These forests were seen as homes of spirits and protectors of the community. The *Umang Lai* - known as a part of the Sacred Groves of India - are forest spirits that safeguard these sacred groves. These sacred groves are celebrated in a procession known as *Lai Haraoba*, where “Every Manipuri enters into an 'ecological essence' during and after the festivity period because the idea of a sacred grove where the deities reside signals a higher consciousness of man and nature relation and interaction” (Premchandra, 2022, p. 45). Like the *Daivas* revered as a cosmic force of consciousness, the *Umang Lais* retain a spiritual connection with the natural environment for the Meitei people, who “understood the umbilical cord attaching the human forms to non-human forms in an ecosystem” (Premchandra, 2022, p. 56). These forests or *Umangs* also harbour vegetation specific to their regions and also have years of religious and cultural history that are being threatened, many of them being cut down or ignored in the name of expansion and development (Khumbongmayum et al, 2004). Reading *Meghadūta* in Manipuri reminds us that forests are part of our emotional world, and their loss is not just an environmental problem, it is also a spiritual and cultural loss. As Premchandra (2022) notes, “This elimination of cultural codes enshrined in the very fabric of the Manipuri worldview will disrupt an entire cultural entity's socio-cultural and environmental history...we live in artificial environments that disconnect us from ecological realities” (p. 57).

The poem also presents mountains as places full of memory. When the *Yakṣa* speaks of the Nirvindhyā mountains that his wife loves, he says:

সুখেযতীৰ্ণী পৰিহৰি লগীয়া গাৰোখাৰু, নম্বাৰী নলিডৰ টেঙ্কসুখটকু
 নৱৈকৰ খেয়ালী গাৰোখাৰ লেডলি; সীয়াৰী সীয়াৰী নলিডৰ টেঙ্কসুখটকু
 নলিডৰ টেঙ্কসুখটকু সীয়াৰী, পৰিহৰিডৰ টেঙ্কসুখটকু
 টেঙ্কসুখটকু গাৰোখাৰ টেঙ্কসুখটকু টেঙ্কসুখটকু
 টেঙ্কসুখটকু টেঙ্কসুখটকু টেঙ্কসুখটকু টেঙ্কসুখটকু ॥
 (Mangisana, 1996, p. 6)

(Like a waist gem-garland howling in between the streams,
 A group of swans playing in the middle of the stream, when barraged by the hill's wall,
 Showing translucent whirlpools along with the Nirbhindhya river,
 Sip the love-dews of that river—gentle gestures are women's love language).

Having come in contact, on your way, with the Nirvindhyā, having for her waist-band the row of birds noisy on account of the turbulence of the waves, moving on (gliding) in a manner graceful by her stumbling and manifesting her navel in the form of the eddies, do you become the enjoyer of the flavour (of her love, water); for, with regard to their lovers, amorous gestures are women's first expressions of love. (Kale, 1934, p. 120)

This idea is especially significant in the context of the landscape of Manipur. Mountains like Koubru, Thangjing, and Nongmaiching are the homes of ancestors, gods, and childhood memories. But these hills are now being affected by quarrying, plantation of poppy, landslides, and gradually shrinking forest cover (Mazumdar, 2024). The stanza shows that mountains, like people, carry the past. If people destroy them, they are not only changing the land, we are breaking emotional connections that have lived for centuries. Emotional Intelligence is thus

tied to the natural landscape, the history and the lived experiences of the people shifting alongside the ecology of the place.

One comparable point of Ecological Emotional Intelligence appears in the Manipuri folktale called “Uchek Langmeidong” sourced from Boramani’s anthology of Manipuri folktales (2008/1997), where the story of a young girl named Hayainu similarly begs on nature to help her to get freedom. Her story presents a separation from a family turned cruel, while Kālidāsa’s *Yakṣa* from a lover. In the early verses of *Meghadūta*, he mourns his distance:

Anxious to support the life of his darling, as the month of Srāvaṇa was at hand, and therefore wishing to send the tidings of his own welfare to her by the cloud, he, delighted (at the thought), presented an offering of fresh Kuṭaja flowers to it, and bade welcome to it, couched in terms of affection. (Kale, 1934, p. 114)

choosing the cloud as his confidant and carrier of emotion. Hayainu, too, directs her plea to nature, to the birds. As per the folktale:

“ইমানা পোক্তবীগী মনাক্তা লৈরগা কণ্ডুনা পুন্নি লেনগদবগী শরুকপুদি চেৰুলা নখোয়গী নরক্তা তিনজরগে, নতু খরা থিকথবিরম্মু” হায়রকপা হৈয়াইনুগী বাদু তাবদা য়াই পুবা চেৰুলা লাংমৈ নিংখোনা মতু থিকথবিশ্মী।” (Boramani, 2008/1997, p. 96)

(Rather than languish in tearful servitude beneath my stepmother’s merciless hand, I would seek refuge among you noble birds—grant me your feathers, and at her earnest supplication, the gem-crested hornbill sovereign released a few in solemn grace”.

While the *Yakṣa* pleads to return to his beloved, Hayainu seeks escape to survive. What binds these narratives across cultural distances is their mutual trust in the natural world to mediate human pain. Hayainu, in her world, listens to the whisper of her dead mother through the wind and responds to the kindness of hornbills as her only remaining comrade. While the *Yakṣa* dreams of reunion, Hayainu achieves release. Both, however, are shaped by an emotional ecology where trees, clouds, feathers, and rain become the speech of sorrow and resilience.

Returning to the first stanza of *Meghdoot*, the poem introduces the setting as a sacred forest where the *Yakṣa* has been sent to exile:

সংজ্ঞেয় সংজ্ঞেয়ং সচচাৰ্ণ সঁধৈয়াং সৰ্গে ধ্বংসে অক্ষ ফলৈর্ ষষ্ঠোহু
ফলৈর্গাণ্ডাৰ্ণ্যে ফলৈৰ সচচাৰ্ণ, গাৰ্হেণ্ণ টেক্ণেৰ্ণাৰ্ণ সঁচৰ লক্ষ্ণেৰ্ণ
ক্ষাৰ্ণক্ষা গাৰ্হৈৰ্ণ গাৰ্হে ষষ্ঠোহু স্ৰাভেহু স্ৰাভেহু টেক্ণাৰ্ণ চৰ্ণেহুহু,
ধ্বংসেৰ্ণাৰ্ণ ষষ্ঠে সৰ্গাৰ্ণ অক্ষাৰ্ণেৰ্ণ টেক্ণেৰ্ণাৰ্ণ ষষ্ঠোহু অক্ষাৰ্ণ (Mangisana, 1996, p. 1)

(For his neglected task, exiled for a year from his beloved,
Stripped of his powers, in the calm holy shade,
Where sacred streams flowed as once touched by Sita’s bath,
On the Ashram of Ramagiri hill, a Yakṣa lives).

A certain Yakṣa, who had grossly swerved from his duty and was (therefore) deprived of his greatness (superhuman power) by his lord’s curse to be suffered for a year and unbearable owing (as it led) to his separation from his beloved wife; took up his abode among the hermitages on Rāmāgiri which had a thick growth of Nameru (or- shady) trees about them, and the waters wherein were rendered holy by the ablutions of Janaka’s daughter (Sītā). (Kale, 1934, p. 114)

This beginning reminds readers that the poem is not just about exile, but also about living in a sacred natural space where the ecosystem is strong, as the *Yakṣa* sends his message to his beloved through the cloud. Like the *Yakṣas*, Meitei people believe in the *Umang Lai* who live in groves and protect the land. The divine *Umang Lai* shows how there's recognition of Emotional Ecological Intelligence as a facet of reality, of the nature that brings the human, the supernatural and the environment together. When people cut down these spaces, they break the home of the spirits. The destruction of such spaces denotes the destruction of history and culture. Another example are the *Hellois*, natural spirits who live in sacred natural bodies and are deeply rooted within the Manipuri ecosystem of Meitei beliefs. These *Hellois*, though not as integrally connected to nature like the *Umang Lai*, are still perceived to be under threat of the larger climate crisis and the crises of years of cultural loss from the shift to modernization and digitalization, resulting from a belief that culture and history are not as important enough to be passed down.

Today, Manipur's Loktak Lake, renowned as the largest freshwater lake in North-East India, presents itself as a site under ecological threat, a vital part of Manipur's ecosystem and history that has defined the people and their culture. The lake, recognised as a Ramsar site, is a deteriorating ecosystem threatening the fisherfolk, whose livelihoods depend entirely on Loktak for sustenance (Rajesh, 2022). Climate change is also disrupting the weather patterns and causing fish habitat reduction (Anand et al, 2025). The Loktak, an icon of the Manipur ecosystem, is also slowly losing its ties to cultural history in the wake of modernization.

The acknowledgement of the divine in relation to nature, in an Ecological Emotional sense, is not that the supernatural inscribes meanings on the landscape; rather, the landscape itself inscribes the supernatural and the divine. *Meghadūta*'s vivid descriptions of water bodies and their deep, complex connection with emotion become a point of both connection and contrast to Loktak Lake. The lake's significance as a site of ecological and socio-cultural importance is severely shadowed by the threat of climate crisis. The scale of man made ecological threats to the lake has brought hardship to the people (M.A. Singh, 2017). The rise of commercial tourism has only exacerbated such difficulties. To give another comparison, in Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies A Lake* (2014) about the slow death of the Kolleru, the largest freshwater lake in India, Sarkar (2025) points how the loss of the lake is a "relational disconnect with the memory of overflowing Kolleru evokes ecological depression and mourning within the people" (p. 166). Sarkar further notes how "narrating a damaged waterscape highlights the importance of conservation through literature and art" (p. 168), starting action to alleviate ecological damage. Kālidāsa's text helps us remember the importance of keeping sites of ecological importance like the Loktak within the weavings of our cultural history; to preserve their beauty through verse, to connect with the powerful emotions of love and loss through these sites and to learn to go back to our traditional roots and think of natural landscape and human emotion as one, so that we act upon the threat of ecological disruption with more motivation, spirit and reverence.

Conclusion

Manipur, as a state wracked by ethnic crisis, has seen drastic change within the years on its landscapes. There's a looming threat of ecological distress in places like Loktak Lake while the state is affected more and more by the unpredictability of climate change and man-made extractive policies like dam-building and commercial tourism. By connecting this ecological crisis with literature, we can learn to preserve and be aware of our link with nature, and what we need to look at to conserve culture and nature. The Manipuri *Meghdoot* reminds us that ecology and spirituality are deeply connected. Through this, we understand that nature is not just something to be studied, used, or observed, it is something to be felt. The cloud, river, hill, forest, and even the spirits in the poem all remind us that Ecological Intelligence must begin

with an emotional connection with nature.

Classical texts thus offer us profound insights into universal human concerns, with their teachings becoming increasingly relevant to many of the environmental challenges we face in the contemporary world. By employing interpretive and comparative reading frameworks, classical texts like the *Meghadūta* allow us to unearth their wisdom on humanity's relationship with nature, especially regarding our Emotional Intelligence in association with our environmental habits. Through engaging and reflecting critically on these texts, we learn how to make informed decisions and sustainable practices in our modern world and bridge ancient knowledge with present-day needs, by reconciling the literature of the past with the situation of the present and acknowledging the role of ecology in human affairs, facilitating a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of the roles of non-human entities and the intricate interplay of cultural and mythical narratives within lived ecological contexts.

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Bio-note

Abhinav Sarangthem is an undergraduate student at Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi currently pursuing a Bachelor's in English Honours. He has an interest in sociological and literary research, film and music. He was awarded a Certificate of Distinction for his contributions at the Undergraduate Research Aptitude 2024 by the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS).

Email id: work.abhinavsarangthem@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0004-0774-6419

Nadeem Yumkhaibam is an undergraduate student at Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi, currently pursuing an English Bachelor's degree. His academic pursuits include cultural research, identity studies, poetry, and art. He also received a Certificate of Distinction for his work at the Undergraduate Research Aptitude 2024 by CIKS.

Email id: nadeemym786@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0009-0010-9157

