

Negotiating Roots and Routes in Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches***Dr.S.Snekha Sri**

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The paper intends to analyse Northeast home and climate in Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches (ELT)*. The *ELT* is a complex of cultures, tradition and identities of the northeastern region of India. Through the lives of her character, Pariat explores the nuances of northeastern identity, navigating the intersections of history, memory and belonging. Pariat's novels are woven into the fabric of the narrative and the struggles of rural livelihoods where the characters engage with farming and face challenges related to climate change and economic instability. Thus this paper delves into portrayed of the identity of northeastern people, examining how the region's cultural heritage and its complex history and its relationships with the rest of India shape the lives and experiences of inhabitants.

Introduction:

Northeastern Indian literature is a diverse and evolving body of work that reflects the region's unique cultures, histories and socio-political realities. Many communities in Northeast India have a rich history of oral storytelling, mythology and folklore. These stories have passed down through generations and are now being documented in writing. Khasi poet U soso Tham was an instrumental in translating Khasi tradition into written form. Modern Northeastern literature is receiving national and instrumental attention. Janice Pariat and Daribha Lyndem have used novels, poetry and short tales to show the region's specific storytelling traditions. Thus the Northeastern literature stands out and is significant in Indian literary debate because of its combination of folklore, history and modern topics. Thus, the research paper intends to analyse Northeastern home and climate in Janice Pariat's ***Everything the Light Touches (ELT)***.

Everything the Light Touches is a complex of cultures, tradition and identities of the northeastern region of India. It combines the narrative of the natural world a backdrop for her story and shaping the characters experiences and emotions. Through her interpretation of nature Pariat explores identity and the human condition, emphasising the interconnectedness of all living things. The title of *ELT* suggests a sense of admiration for the natural world and the ways in which it light up transforms our lives.

Everything the Light Touches tells about a young woman Shai in contemporary India, who travels to Meghalaya. Her journey contrasts with that of a European botanist, a student

of

Carl Linnaeus, who arrives in India during British rule to categorise plant species, representing the Western scientific approach that seeks to control and classify nature. She questioned dominant Western knowledge systems critiques the impact of colonialism and tradition. The story begins with Shai at the Delhi airport and she has waiting to board her flight to Shillong. She worried about leaving her hometown, her parents had urged her to leave her birthplace and venture to the bustling city to escape from the constant confusion caused by local violence and novel encompasses both cultural and political issues.

Shai contemplated how Meghalaya is being swallow up by Assam and finds it ridiculous that their regions referred as “Meghalaya,” *the abode of clouds*, in Sanskrit a language that the locals have neither spoken nor understood. Shai’s mother is as sensible as ever and her father’s open argument is preserving native flora confused her she cannot quite understood her environmentalist husband’s views in talking trees, memory and being creatures of heightened intellect. Shai is as if the most of us who lived the city, is unaware of her people’s opposition to uncontrolled natural resource exploitation. Following a journey, motivated by the illness of her childhood nanny, Shai learns about the stories and traditions that maintain life in Meghalaya as well as what it truly means to come home.

In next section Evelyn on her, journey to Edwardian England. She is British woman who travels to India in the early twentieth century. Evelyn, a student of Goethe’s radical ideas, is dissatisfied by her country’s lack of academic chances. In order to avoid balls and insistent marriage talk, she boards a ship and sails to India, where she plans to explore the magical jungles of the Lower Himalayas. She investigates and vessel other worrying truths, women are not the only ones who have been neglected in scientific studies. Western sciences, with their inflexible beliefs on what and who is worthy of scientific investigation, provide a narrow view of the Natural world. Goethe travels to Italy in the late eighteenth century under the identity of Johann Philipp Moller. He has taken in by the fantastical beauty of Sicily and Rome and falls in love with a charming woman the Metamorphosis of Plants.

The next section of the novel *ELT* talks about botanist Carl [Linnaeus'] 1732 voyage to Lapland. His expedition is presented in verse, poetry and prose, as Pariat plays with structure and form. A poem about trees structured like a tree, while one about Christ had built like a cross. In the middle of the novel is a good idea because it appears to be a convergence of the other three desires and finds the solace in one’s roots, embarking on a journey to new lands in search of scientific knowledge. Finally, the right balance between philosophy and modern science for a fuller understanding of our own existence. Meghalaya’s indigenous knowledge is Northeast India is past and present. It is about the oral traditions and ecological wisdom of the Khasi people in Meghalaya. Their way of relating to nature as a living, interconnected entity stands in contrast to the extractive mindset of colonial and Western scientific traditions.

As the cities Shillong and Guwahati expand migration from rural areas has led to cultural shifts and identity negotiations, the rapid pace of urbanisation has resulted in both

economic opportunities and social challenges. In an interview, Pariat talked on the power of storytelling in addressing climate change, emphasizing the importance of indigenous perspectives and the human- nature bond (futureverse.earth). In the “Futureverse” podcast episode titled “Ep. 6: Janice Pariat. Nature, Indigenous Perspectives and Climate Hope” Pariat discuss her relationship with nature and how it influenced her writing.

Alienation and the Search for Belonging

In *Everything the Light Touches* Shai struggles with a sense of alienation. Living in Delhi a fast-paced metropolitan city and she feels distant from her indigenous roots. Despite having an independent life and a job she experiences a deep sense of emptiness. She decides to return to her native place. She realises the extent of her action when she recalls her father walking through the pine forests many times yet she never stepped into them. Now she regrets not experiencing nature more deeply. She reflects as “I wish I could say I find peace here or joyous communion but apart from some sort of measured contentment, I don’t “(17-18). The narration emphasises her struggle to reconnect with nature and her roots. Her realisation matures during a walk in a Delhi park when she questions her life’s direction. What am I doing? Is this, I thought, as I rounded another curve to take me back exactly to where I began, all of my life? (23). This lines shows how the sudden moment of reflection forces the reader to think about life’s meaning. Driven by an “inner voice” (23) Shai embarks on a journey to Mawmalang a remote village in the Khasi Hills to rediscover herself.

The Environmental Struggle of Mawmalang

Mawmalang is a remote village in Meghalaya, India. Shai travels to take care of her nanny and the natural environment unnoticed by the mainstream media has now become a symbol of resistance against uranium mining. The first explorations in the region began in the 1950s and uranium have officially discovered in 1984. For years, mining operations continued but the local people were unaware of what extracted. They only knew it as “yellowcake.” (62) Meghalaya is a state in northeastern India that is rich in mineral resources such as coal, limestone, kaolin, clay, granite and uranium. The novel describes the pain and suffering of the indigenous people whose land and traditions destroyed in the name of profit. The villagers, voice their concerns “Our nation is this the hills we see around us, the rivers we know as well as our loved ones, the trees we call by name. And what happens if it’s in the interest of the nation but not in ours?” (62). “Yellowcake” is a concentrated form of uranium ore typically appearing as a yellowish powder. It is approximately eighty percent of uranium oxide the damaging impact of mining soon becomes clear. Shai describes, “Then we noticed our birds were dying our cows and dogs were going mad our bay tree wilting our fishes floating. Then our people started bleeding” (63).

The people of Mawmalang had initially misled by officials who assured them that mining was safe and would not cause harm. As a result, their displacement from their own land was gradually normalised. Local intermediaries who once belonged to the community became agents of exploitation. Pariat defines this betrayal through a character who regrets “We find we must protect our land not just from the center but even from our own people” (63). This line emphasizes the theme of internal corruption where even local individuals

participate in the destruction of their homeland. Through Shai's journey the novel reviews the exploitation of indigenous land and emphasises the urgent need for environmental awareness and cultural preservation.

Eco-philosophy emphasises the need to open one's senses and awareness to the surrounding landscape develop ecological literacy and articulate one's connection with other life forms. These elements are essential to understanding place-based existence. Shai's father referred to as "The Treeman of Shillong" (20) reflects on humanity's tendency to overlook and undervalue plant life calling it "our species' greatest and gravest crime" (11). He possesses a deep philosophical and spiritual insight into the layers of the natural world and his love and concern for the land express the true essence of home. The novel also explores the mysterious Diengiei a sacred tree mentioned in ancient Song and mythological tales. This tree embodies Goethe's idea of "seeing in wholeness" (123). Local legends describe its magnificence "It was magnificent each leaf a different leaf and in this way it carried all the world" (481). This tree is said to all other trees with each of its leaves representing a different species.

The Diengiei serves as a metaphor for the character's personal journeys toward fulfillment and self-discovery. The tree's mysteries must first pledge to protect it. Using, the tree represents the interconnectedness of all life forms with its roots holding the technology that sustains existence. Yi Fu Tuan a renowned geographer introduced the concept of *topophilia* that literally means "love of place." This term encompasses the bond between people and their environments and shows the emotional connections individuals form with specific locations a modern bioregional term that refers to a deep sense of connection with all life forms within a life-place. Indigenous communities the Khasi have embodied this perspective for generations experiencing nature as an inseparable part of their lives. Pariat argues that humans must establish a closer and more faithful relationship with nature to understand refusing to explain something and take moral responsibility for its preservation. The final line in Evelyn's section suggests a hopeful return to humanity's natural roots. "The day will brighten and hour will come when she must rise and to step upon the earth and make her way through the forest" (404).

The major part of the *ELT* opens through journeys that initially seem familiar but take unexpected turns, challenging narratives of exploration and self-discovery. Shai prepares to visit her suffering from illness "Bougie urbanite makes a trip into rural Meghalaya, also known as the great big unknown" (35). Shai's life in the city has left her feeling not her friends are settling into marriage and parenthood while she remains uncertain about her path still she borrowing earrings for weddings (5).

Shai's journey shows the contrast between urban the fact of indigenous ecological consciousness. In her world, nature is often reduced to a mere resource land is mined for uranium, forests are cleared widely development prioritises profit over sustainability. Yet as she leaves in the village, she begins to see the world differently. Engaging with the people

around her she gradually embraces an alternative way of understanding nature one that sees it not as a commodity to be used but as an interconnected, continuous and living entity. This transformation allows her to reflect on what truly matters learning when to hold onto the past and when to let go (478).

Shai return to Meghalaya marks a transformative journey, as her contrast with Evelyn who came before her with a scientific perspective. Engaging in activities like tending to the vegetable garden, she reconnects with the land, embodying the essence of biophilia. This reconnection shows the healing and grounding journey influence of nature on the human spirit. Evelyn begins on a journey inspired by Goethe's botanical writings. Her journey to the sacred forests of the Lower Himalayas reflects a deep-seated desire to engage with nature beyond academic study. Evelyn's exploration signifies a yearning to experience the natural world and, fostering a relationship transcends traditional scientific observation. Yet, Pariat does not suggest that either approach fully captures our relationship with the environment. "I feel deeply unknowing of the world," represents this tension she is caught between her urban disconnection and the indigenous wisdom that views nature as an extension of self (18).

In Conclusion *ELT* does not offer a singular answer to humanity's relationship with nature. Rather, it urges people to remain open to the complexities and constant changes of the world around them. The novel advocates for an awareness that exceeds the scientific definitions and colonial perspectives, embracing a way of seeing that is fluid empathetic and deeply connected to the rhythms of the natural world. As Evelyn experiences true growth and discovery, she exclaims, "It's whole new ways of seeing" a sentiment that defined the novel's broader call for ecological awareness and soul searching.

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