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Yemapoetics: Towards a Theory of Healing in Indigenous Poetry from Sikkim

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Abstract

Literature that is being composed from or about the politico-geographical category of Northeast India focuses on violence and ethnic movements in major ways (Hazarika, 1996; Barpujari, 1998; Baruah, 2005; Paula, 2008). While Weberian understanding of indigenous cosmology has led to archiving, documenting and research on ethnic epistemologies from Northeast India, in the absence of indigenous literary theories, literature from this region faces the challenges of homogenisation or becoming case studies for ethnographic documentation and anthropological inquiry (Karlsson & Subba, 2006; Subba, 2009; Lepcha et al, 2020 in the context of Sikkim). This paper intends to propose a theory of reading that upholds the role and participation of the poet(ess) as a shaman- a transforming agent and a transformed individual herself. This theory is being named Yemapoetics, deriving its epistemic framework from the figure of shamaness or Yema in the Limboo healing tradition in Sikkim. Yemapoetics is an attempt to propose a new indigenous paradigm for indigenous literary expression around the world. This theory identifies stages of poetic composition as well as reception, ranging from purification, possession, and communication to catharsis. An indigenous literary theory like this will provide contexts for locating the poet(ess), examining her/his role as a community healer who connects the modern, urban psyche of individuals with communal, archetypal symbols. This enables a process of retracing and remembering through the poetic act that is essential to healing and recovery. Just as Limboo cosmology recognises women as first humans to be created, this paper argues that women's psychospiritual agency should be at the centre of poetic theories to accord validity and applicability of feminist spirituality to indigenous literary theorisation. For this purpose, an illustration of the proposed theory will be made with reference to select indigenous poets from Sikkim.

Keywords: Limboo-Literary Theory-Feminist Spirituality- Northeast-Sikkim.

Introduction

In northeast India, the topographical contours are intrinsically linked to similar yet distinctive epistemologies that shape the ethnic diversity and indigenous identities of the inhabitants. The eight states that are identified as belonging to the political category of Northeast India possess a range of indigenous worldviews that are distinctive in symbolism and rituals yet connected by shared cosmological structures and ceremonial significations. In *Northeast India: A Place of Relations* (2017), Saikia and Baishya (Eds.) argue for continuities, intersectionalities and solidarities in the political, cultural and lived traditions in the geopolitical category of Northeast India. In *Oral*

Traditions, Continuities and Transformations in Northeast Indian and Beyond (2021), Sarkar and Modwel (Eds.) argue for the need to reassess the continuities, exchanges, interdependence and influences between lived cultures of 'Asian Highlands' to recontextualise the folk knowledge systems and their relevance in the wake of modernity, to understand the frontier geopolitical challenges and richness of the 'shatter zone' called India's Northeast and to locate the political and cultural history of the region in its negotiation with external as well as internal colonialism and rapid globalisation. Recent studies like these are incorporating newer methodologies of interpretative politics, cultural geography, material culture studies, eco-ethnography and trans-indigenous comparative frameworks to revisit the cultural and literary knowledge traditions of Northeast India. As the indigenous philosophies of Northeast India do not possess a textual or metaphysical nature, they are evolutions out of lived experiences and oral knowledge transmission. These communication models are largely based on intergenerational preservation and distribution of knowledge. The nature of this knowledge is transpersonal and environmental involving the participation of human and transhuman entities in the nature of elemental deities, spirits, ancestor personas, animal and plant spirits, and the relationships of reciprocity and interdependence between them. The 'indigenous religion paradigm' (Maarif, 2019) necessarily involves a web-like relationality between these participants that is epistemologically different from a hierarchical paradigm of divine-human nature in Western religion. This paper incorporates an ethnopoetic approach that aims to locate indigenous poetics in ethnospiritual terms of reference by focusing on a specific healing ritual in the Limboo spiritual tradition in Sikkim.

In Indian Adivasi literary and cultural discourse, concerns of sovereignty, knowledge of orature, and archiving and documenting ethno literature are major concerns as reflected in the work of critics and scholars such as GN Devy, Anand Mahananda, Ganga Sahay Meena, Ramdayal Munda, Ramanika Gupta and Ruby Hembrom and others. In contemporary Adivasi literary discourse, there is space left for exploring dimensions of human and nature interdependence, communal identity formation through participation and trans-indigenous philosophical and political solidarities are being highlighted as counter-narratives of sustainable development and ecofeminist activism (Chaturvedi, 2021). As northeast India is home to indigenous communities varying in ethnic and spiritual identities, the literary discourse can gain much from such theoretical investment in trans-indigenous solidarities and spiritual poetics. The development of research and its directions in Northeast India became visible only after the late 1980's when some scholars started probing into the diverse contemporary issues of ethnicity, identity, conflict, inclusion, violence, political inequality, cultural imagination and the nation-state as represented in the literature composed from or about the politico-geographical and ethno-political categories of Northeast India. Scholars such as Udayon Mishra (1988) and Apurba Baruah (1991) examine the ethnicity and identity-based conflicts; Geeti Sen (2005) and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (2005) reflect on the conflict between states and the country, the brutality of political oppression, violence, cultures in transition, psychological and social difficulties in the contemporary poetries etc. Otojit Kshetrimayum (2009) critical analysis on the role of shamanism in establishing women's power and autonomy and also provides trans-ethnic, trans-indigenous reading. Tilottoma Misra (2011) explores the dimensions of the multi-ethnic and multilingual cultures reflected in the Northeast literature; Mark Bender (2012) employs ecocritical theory in ethnographic poems of Northeast India and Southwest China. Watitula Longkumer & Nirmala Menon (2017) seeks to understand the multicultural aesthetics in

the literary works of the region and Amit R. Baishya (2019) on political terror and survival in contemporary literature of the Northeast. Populated by numerous and distinctive ethnic groups that share international borders with China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, this landlocked Northeast Himalayan belt of the Indian subcontinent has witnessed and withstood all kinds of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic clashes and conflicts. Therefore, the focus of research on Northeast Indian studies has been located mostly on the issues of terrorism, ethnic clash, ecological degradation, historical and socio-political issues, insurgencies, and related others (Baruah, 2005; Nongkynrih, 2005; Sen, 2006; Mishra, 2011; Ray, 2015; Baishya, 2019). However, the abundant narratives of "indigeneity" and "ethnicity" in the contemporary texts are often overlooked or side-lined in a complex history of migration, colonization, conflicts and unrest (Menon & Longkumer, 2017). In this view, this paper attempts to sketch a theoretical framework for the literary criticism of Northeast Indian poetry through the paradigm of indigenous poetics. It is developed to study and understand the indigenous existence and realities by linking it to the Mundhum narratives (Limboo ritual oral narratives) that are foundational to Limboo culture and tradition. As Neal Mcleod asserts 'Indigenous poetics is the embodiment of Indigenous consciousness'(Mcleod 2014, p.4) just as the oral narratives of the Mundhum that are the source of inspiration, information and enlightenment for 'Limbus' and guidance of way of life, customs and rites-de-passage. (Chaitanya Subba, 1995)

This paradigm emerges from the ground-up by deriving its conceptual structures and vocabulary from indigenous spiritual ritual practices of women, specifically that of the Yemas who are women healers of the Limboo community of Sikkim. The stages of the spiritual experiences, the links between language, sound, rhythm and poetry, and the centrality of their spiritual experiences are the foundations of the theoretical propositions in this paper. In seeing the Yemas perform their social roles bearing responsibility and sacrifice as mediums, one can revisit the social and cultural roles that poets of Northeast India perform in the context of transition from oral to written literature, preserving oral knowledge traditions and undertaking writing to counter underrepresentation in history as being similar. The poets can be seen as undertaking the roles of community healers and channels for communication between the ancient realms of ancestral wisdom and present layers of modern experience.

A predilection for images and motifs drawn from nature is proof that Northeast poetry in English is deeply rooted in the land. 'Nature' is not an impassive witness to the existential despair of men and women as in the contemporary wasteland of modernist poets, but a living presence for the Northeast poets, where hills and rivers are also deities and the fates of natives are inevitably intertwined with them. Thus, in spite of the trappings of modernity, the life of most communities of the Northeast is defined by their folk origins. The mythic world still survives at the frontiers of the civilised world, and the 'folk' still continues to assume the 'intensity of reality' for many. Myths provide a key to the cultural behaviour of a people, but when communities seem to be losing their way in the midst of cultural colonisation, mythopoeic poets, out of a deep-seated desire, step in and try to emulate the traditional storytellers and shamans by recalling the lore of the tribe.

For elaborating on this role and experience, the experiential knowledge and expressions of women have been focused upon with the intention to highlight feminine epistemology as being capable of encompassing the range of human experience, much as masculine epistemology has been recognised for years. While shaman, *yogi, jogi, jhankri, yeba, phedangma, ojha*, medicine-

man, magician and many other terms have used a masculine gender vocabulary to designate and reflect on the spiritual agency of the healers, the feminine healers have either been subsumed within a masculine vocabulary or been relegated to a position on the margins. It is either argued that the word 'shaman' naturally includes a shamaness too, or that shamaness is a rarity hence the word must not be used to denote a generalised designation or role. While interviewing a yema, when this question was posed, she concurred that a *yema* (woman healer) is also a *yeba* (male healer) to indicate that even in spiritual vocabulary, the masculine denotative is all-encompassing while the feminine is used to denote the spiritual agency of women which is not distinctive but can be easily subsumed within the masculine. As observed, women's spiritual agencies and the complexities of their experiential language are often assimilated into a universalised masculine vocabulary or even ignored in cultural and literary discourses. It is possible and desirable to locate the poetic structures of writing as well as reading in women's spiritual experiences and language matrices thereby facilitating a feminine poetics that recognises the psychoemotional vocabulary of women's lives and words and paves the way for seeing the poet as "a mad shaman(ess), a Yema". The recognition of the validity of women's spiritual experiences can serve two purposes which may not be mutually exclusive. Firstly, the vocabulary that emerges from this, such as Yemapoetics, will point to the significance and range of women's spiritual lives, and secondly, it will enable a feminine-centered grammar of psychopoetics that will counter the marginalisation of women's psychological and literary lives. The Yema will stand as a model for all indigenous poets who are trying to be healers and mediums for their ethnic communities, for their land and for all women (and men) who share in the collective spirit of a place.

Who Is Yema and What is Yemapoetics?

In Sikkim, Limboos is one of the indigenous tribes who have inhabited the region even before the Namgyal dynasty was established in 1642 (Sinha, 2005). Though they are considered the earliest settler of Sikkim, having a distinctive linguistic and cultural identity, they have been denied and deprived of Indigenous rights and justice over centuries (Khamdhak, 2019).

Straddled between the two countries of Nepal and India, this fringe tribe has sustained a fluid identity under the changing history. The flexibility of the geographical boundaries, battles of conquest, conspiracies and acquisition, and the theories of their originality have confused this community and have caused them to search for their identity. The onset of democracy has further marginalized them. The Limboos have been classified as Nepali linking this community with the later Nepali migrants in Sikkim, which the Limboos consider a threat to their distinct identity. (Subba, 2013).

Limboos are traditionally nature worshippers, animist and have their own religion – Yumaism and their literature in oral form – Mundhum. Mundhum is a broad umbrella term that incorporates legends, myths, folklore, prehistoric accounts, sermons and moral and philosophical exhortations in poetic language (Limbu, 2010). It encircles and enriches Limboo ontology, customs and rites are recited during rituals and ceremonies by the Limboo shamans/ shamanesses that are known as Phedangma, Samba, Yeba, Yema, Mangba or Ongsi.

'Yemapoetics' derives its epistemic framework from the figure of Yema, a Limboo shamaness who recites Mundhum while performing shamanic rituals to heal an individual or a community from certain diseases and the spells of evil spirits to restore the health and harmony. This paradigm

makes an attempt to reorient the study of indigenous literature with the intention to restore the poetic and philosophical dimensions of the writings themselves. It is developed for the non-western analysis of indigenous poetry, spirituality and worldviews for putting our indigenous realities into perspective. As a new paradigm of reading poetry by indigenous poets, this approach sees the indigenous poet/poetess as a shamaness who acts as a transforming agent for her community and a transformed individual herself.

In 1964, Mircea Eliade published *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, a work that brought into academic focus the figure of the shaman as a healing spirit, a medium between this world and the other. Many poetic theories have since looked at the figure of the shaman as being similar to the figure of the poet, and have identified patterns of similarities in their roles and powers of communicating with the unseen, as it were (Henighan, 1979; Synder 1985; Rothenberg, 1985; Chung, 2005; Mortuza, 2013; Lima, 2014; Paneka, 2018). Referring to 'late-modernist poetics' as essentially curative, Shamsad Mortuza quotes Anthony Mellors:

Late modernist poets write on the brink of the postmodernist abyss. Distinct, if not entirely separate from mid-to late-twentieth-century poetries which are indebted to modernism but which return to highly, individualised, bardic modes of expressions, such as the neo-romantics of the 1940s, the Beats of the 1950s, and the counter-cultural visionaries of the 1960s, they continue to affirm a redemptive aesthetic that links poesis with the occult power while disowning the reactionary politics of high modernists such as Yeats, Eliot and Pound. Art remains the alternative order to rationalising and inevitably comprised political systems. (Mortuza, 2013, p. 7)

In this book *A More Beautiful Question: The Spiritual in Poetry and Art* (2011), Glen Hughes, drawing inspiration from the philosophies of Lonergan and Eric Voegelin, identifies the problem of modern times as a case of "imbalance in consciousness". According to him, the fact that for many people, art continues to hold meaning because it is capable of keeping alive a sense of mystery, "an invitation to feel the unbounded surplus of meaning in the depths of reality in an age when both institutional religions and their materialist and atheist critics have become less and less effective in doing so" (p.130) Hughes categorizes kinds of imbalances, and points to the need of contemporary times to a balanced consciousness, one that retains the intimations of childhood along with the maturity of adulthood. Like Gadamer, Hughes also stresses the curative, balancing power of art, in taking individual consciousness closer to the realm of knowing the unknowable, of apprehending the infinite and supreme principle of consciousness. Indigenous literature and philosophy reorient us to recognizing the role of women's spirituality as therapeutic, balancing and restorative. From the work of Paula Gunn Allen (1986) to that of Molly McGlennen (2014), indigenist feminist scholarship has recognized indigenous philosophies and trans-indigenous feminist solidarities as offering balancing epistemological discourses to the global urban and capitalist discourses. Native American, Aboriginal, Adivasi, African and other indigenous traditions are inviting us to locate feminist spirituality in literature, especially in poetry and associated rhythms and sound-based therapies that are also finding a place in the emerging field of narrative medicine. In the context of northeast India, there lies promising scope in exploring the spiritual-poetic contours of oral, ritualistic and even written audio-visual signs for identifying models of reconnection, restoration and regeneration that these texts provide. The Yema is an archetypal poet- one who has mastered the art of distancing, reconnecting, transcending and restoring the self with contemporary realities. This paper presents Yema as an archetypal figure of poetry and

her specificities of spiritual experience outline a model for structured therapy, one that can be naturally applied to indigenous poetries from Northeast India. In this proposed theory, the poet(ess) is seen as a Yema, a medium through which ancestors communicate, a leader through whom the individual is able to retrace her/his steps to reconnecting with the ancestral traditions, to receive wisdom and to locate oneself in the community. Poets like Joy Harjo, Louise Erdrich, Jacinta Kerketta, Mamang Dai, Joram Yalam Nabam and many others who see their contemporary identities as primarily located in their indigeneity, have talked about the need to retrace one's steps to one's ancestral spirits. This retracing is also a reclaiming of history and identity, a healing of the wounds of colonial history. As a poetic framework, Yemapoetics identifies stages of poetic composition as well as reception, ranging from purification, possession, communication to catharsis. These stages encapsulate the spiritual journey of the poets as well as that of the readers, whose own fractured modern selves find ways of healing in the act of reading. The Yema, though specific, is being presented as a generic figure- an archetype of feminine spirituality, upholding a tradition wherein a woman becomes a community leader, keeper of memories, speaker for ancestors, and healer for the young. Yemapoetics is therefore a generic theory that can aid in recognising and situating the role of poets in any community by upholding the woman as a representative of the mediumship and catharsis as a challenge to the universalising vocabulary of men's roles and experiences.

Purification

When Yema prepares herself to transpose from this world to the worlds of spirits, she detaches herself from the contemporary realities with the help of meditation, ritual objects and paraphernalia such as brass plates, Ya- Gay (small drums), Wasang (head dress decorated with bird feathers that acts a weapon to fight evil spirits), pona (necklace made of stones, beads, bones of birds and animals), Kaplak (Shell) and chanting of mundhums (Subba, 2021). The language of the Mundhum recited by Yema helps her to symbolically dislocate herself with a violent shivering of the body, her eyes closed and going into a trance. There is a fundamental link between the rhythm of language and the state of depersonalization: "The very language of the shaman, the music or the melody of it, can alone have healing properties. The music can put listeners, as poetry can put readers, into a state of trance, which is a pre-requisite for healing" (Panecka, 2018).

Similarly, a poet in the process of creating her poetic work dissociates from the contemporary, modern realities of this world and goes into a trance-like state in the creative world that is her unconscious mind. She is symbolically displaced from this physical world and enters into an imaginative world. T.S Eliot's theory of poetic creation asserts this process of displacement or depersonalisation of a poet. To create poetry, a poet dissociates from this world- 'continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' and journeys back to the past (tradition) to modify (heal) the present. A poet thus remains merely as a medium between poets' present personal feelings and emotions and the impersonal elements i.e. knowledge and wisdom of the past in order to create a new thing i.e. a poem. Yishey Doma, an indigenous English language poet from Sikkim disconnects from this modern world of realities for "it only takes a whiff to get me there as I love climbing amidst your tranquillity" in her poem 'Tashiding'. Tashiding also known as "Heart of Sikkim/ Denzong" is one of the oldest monasteries of Sikkim built in the mid-seventeenth century known for its Bhumchu Ceremony that prophesize the events for Sikkim every year. "Every

stone, every corner/ Every soul, everything, from your/ Four saintly course reflect gods/ The gods of Tashiding has come to me/ I want to proclaim it to all.”

Possession

Yema symbolically dissociates herself from this world and enters into a state of possession after chanting, dancing and beating drums and brass plates. R. L. Jones (1976) describes this spirit possession in Limboo shamans as altered state of consciousness where the spirit may be the soul of the departed individual, gods and goddesses, natural divinity, household or clan divinity or even souls of the animal kingdom as the master spirit. She can communicate with spirits and ancestors retreating into the prophetic vision or ancestral calling. She asks help from seven generations of ancestor spirits to fight against the evil spirits. The poets can be seen as the shamaness who with the help of their creative powers and poetic language help to transform us to greater conscious and integration, and help us to go on an inner journey. They, like shamaness, can help the reader establish contact with the spirits that are connected to the power of inner senses – a spiritual world that lies within us. Thus in the hands of shaman(ess)-poets, the oral text becomes the tool of prophecy and mediation (Dana, 2004) who use ancestor spirits, indigenous worldviews and cosmivision by transcribing them in her poems that play a significant role in the healing process in this present-day crisis. With reference to Robin Ngangom’s views on the role of indigenous poets from Northeast India shared earlier in this essay, we can think about the poetry of Temsula Ao, an indigenous poet from Nagaland. Writing in English, Ao evokes ancestor spirits often in her poems: “Stone-people/ The worshippers/ Of unknown, unseen/ Spirits/ Of trees and forests, / Of stones and rivers, / Believers of soul/ And its varied forms, / Its sojourn here/ And passage across the water/ Into the hereafter” (‘Stone People from Lungterok’).

Sanjay Sawaden Subba is a young emerging indigenous poet from Sikkim who writes both in English and Limboo. His poem ‘Last Talk with Grandpa’, recalls his last conversation with his grandfather that ‘brought vigour to (his) sleepless eyes’ which he considers ‘the most precious frozen memories’ that gives ‘leisure to (his) stressful mind’. The indigenous poets composing poetry in different literary and linguistic traditions in Northeast India show that reconnecting to one’s ancestors, tradition, culture and spiritual values can play an important role in the healing process.

Communication

The Mundhum contains rhythm, incantation, versification that is similar to poetry: “It is composed of couplets; the two lines having an identical rhythm with same number of syllables” (Khamdhak, 2021). Yema recites *sogha* (evil spirits of unnatural death) myth from the Mundhum (Limbu, 2010) along with her ritual instruments during a séance or shamanic rituals to ward off the evils/ diseases. The effect of rhythm and movement marked by the beating of brass plates, small drums, dancing, and chanting leads up to the state of trance or spirit possession to intercede with the spirit world on behalf of her community.

The poet too with her special language, metaphor, rhythm and imagery records the prophetic dreams/ visions in her poetry and transmits this knowledge to the readers through her poems. Therefore, we see how this special knowledge of healing is expanded from individuated consciousness to communal consciousness. Manprasad Subba, a well-known indigenous poet

from Darjeeling writes how talking about our indigenous self and our way of life is vital because our thoughts and voices 'Are colonized by wild cockroaches' in 'A Talk of Self', a poem translated into English by the poet himself. He adds that now it's time that we rise with our own voices by 'overcoming others' noises' and finally 'Self's endless offspring sprout and spread/ From the earth's womb wet with the heart's fluid/ The oppressed self has now realized-/ Save self/ To save others.'

Healing

After the shamanic ritual/ séance are over, there is a sense of consolation and tranquillity that persists among the people of her community. The evil spirits are warded off to restore health and harmony among the people of her community. Yema's use of evocative language of the Mundhum during rituals and ceremonies to cure or heal her community can be compared to poets who with their creative power of language bring about new awareness among the readers.

The contemporary Native American poet Joy Harjo, a member of Muscogee Creek Nation writes for survival and continuance for her people, repairing and re-establishing their lost identity and redefining political, cultural and spiritual spaces for the restoration of the whole. In a transcript recorded by Jim Lehrer in PBS NEWS HOUR, Harjo asserts, "So when I began to listen to poetry, it's when I began to listen to the stones, and I began to listen to what the clouds had to say, and I began to listen to others. And I think most importantly for all of us, and then you begin to learn to listen to the soul, the soul of yourself in here, which is also the soul of everyone else". This kind of awareness/ consciousness gives rise to a deep confidence that we will survive any crisis we are facing in this modern world.

In the context of indigenous literature from this region, the poetry of Mamang Dai, an Adi poet from Arunachal Pradesh also reflects the trauma and negative experiences of historical and political influences and restrictions in the Northeast parts of India. By voicing her thoughts through her poetry, her writing acts as a healing process not only for herself but for her community as a whole. She provides an excellent example of this understanding in her poem 'The Wind and the Rain': "And our dreams have been stolen/ by the hunger of men travelling long distance,/ like bats in the dark./ Soft fruit, flesh, blood./ There is a war and directly now/ it must be about guns, metal, dust/ and the fear that climbs the trees every night/ when our names are written/ without will or favour in the present,/ watching the frailty of our lives/ spilled in the blood of these hills/ right before our disbelieving eyes".

Manprasad Subba emphasizes the importance of re-establishing our indigenous selves in his poem 'Mainstream and Me'. He makes an effort to give voice to his community who are still struggling for identity in one's own land. He writes: "Now/ I don't want to sing what the/Mainstream wants me to/ Until my own melody is not given/ A chord in its composition/ I won't be mesmerized by its glittering words/ That usually come/ To benumb my own words". This poem functions as healing object as it accentuates the strengths of his community. Further, the readers are transformed with this new awareness of no longer submitting to the 'Mainstream' but to strive for one's own voice and identity. He concludes the poem by saying, "No/ I no longer crave for mainstream/ Instead, mainstream should come/ Out of its own whirlpool/ To know and feel my face/ And heartbeat".

Conclusion

In the context of indigenous literature in India, indigenous poetics offers an engagement with narrative and poetic complexities and a historiographical focus on literary criticism which can be a complementing approach to ethnographic and archivist approaches. From Northeast India, numerous studies of ethnographic mapping, archival documentation and socio-political discourses of marginalization and violence have emerged. In these discourses, the intrinsic quality of writing, the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of creative art, the psychoemotive dimensions of writing and reading and the deep links between spirituality, ritual, aesthetics and the written word do not find adequate discussion. Literature tends to become case studies and social/political documents presented through ethnographic, folk and ecocritical lenses while fundamental questions of poetic inspiration, metaphorical metaverse, transethnic dialogue, multigeneric intersections, aesthetic processes, affective stages of cognition and behaviour get sidelined or ignored. A major reason for this is the absence of a comprehensive and consolidated indigenous literary critical tradition. Yemapoetics is an intervention in indigenous literary criticism that aims to cover some of these lacunae by locating poetry in ethnopoetic paradigms with a psychospiritual feminist framework. In this paradigm, the ethnic knowledge traditions of the women shamans are recognised for the poetic coordinates of rhythm, chanting and transpersonal experiences leading ultimately to recovery and healing. In mapping spiritual experiences with poetry, understanding the stages of this process becomes significant to uphold the experiential episteme of the feminine and to understand the emotional, spiritual and psychological nuances of the process itself-both for the healer and the healed.

Further, Indigenous Spirituality offers a dynamic and progressive space for women. For instance, in the Mundhum Creation of Universe myth known as the Yehang Se:ma, the first human to come to life was the female idol named Tungutlisa Simbumasa created by various creator gods with the blessings of the Supreme Goddess Tagera Ningwaphuma. After the creation of the first woman, she was weighed by the god of faith and destiny on a weighing balance known as 'ninduli pasanga'. When she weighed lesser than the first man that was created after her, the gods decked and decorated her with various gold, silver and other precious ornaments so that she weighed equal to the man (Subba, 2012). This myth validates that the indigenous women's experiences are distinct from the western feminist construction of universal female experiences. The western feminist contesting that women are treated unjustly in the man-centred and dominant world is debunked in the Limboo creation mythology. Yemapoetics that emerge from this indigenous feminist spiritual cosmovision enables us to re-imagine the role of contemporary women as being vital and central in their community. It also upholds women's psychospiritual agency keeping it at the centre of poetic theories in order to accord validity and applicability of feminist spirituality to indigenous literary theorisation. Further, this paradigm presents a model derived from engagement with Yemas as well as other indigenous shamans in the Rai community in Sikkim. The purification-possession-communication-healing model has been conceptualised from ground-up as an attempt to create indigenous poetic frameworks based on lived experiences of spirituality that are participatory, communal and integrated with everyday living, including the transitory processes of illness, death and other traumatic ruptures. This framework is not being theorised as exclusive to the Limboo or any other ethnic community but is being presented as a theoretical model for indigenous and even non-indigenous poetry if it be of the nature of reconnection,

regeneration and restoration. This model may serve to inspire other models of indigenous poetics in different parts of northeast India as well as other Adivasi regions in pedagogy in literature classrooms, research and deliberations at the university levels. This is in recognition of the urgency in enlivening indigenist literary criticism so that students, scholars and researchers from northeast India do not continue to rely on borrowed and disjointed poetics when reading literature from the region itself. Such models as Yemapoetics should pave the way for integrating the poetic vocabularies of storytellers, clowns, riddle masters, magic women, trickster men, spirits, man-beasts, highland deities, herbologists, seers, fortune tellers and other spiritual role players in the communities inhabiting the mountains, hills, forests, plains and even the cities in Northeast India. Finally, this paper concludes with the hope that the grammar of indigenous poetics will find its rightful place in the discourses on poetry and may even generate models for the reading of mainstream, non-indigenous, non-tribal poetry that has exhausted and transcended organised, compartmentalised and sanitised vocabularies of poetry itself.

Postscript^[1]

As a Limboo indigenous woman scholar, exploring the paradigm of healing in indigenous poetry enabled me to contextualize my indigenous perspectives and experiences from my location-Sikkim. By reading and researching the Mundhum and Limboo myths, I could reconnect with the ancestral tradition of my community which enabled me to understand my roots and cultural identity. It was a therapeutic experience for me to be cognizant of Limboo myths that acknowledge the feminine goddess as the Supreme and recognize the role of women as equal to men. Yemapoetics apply this indigenous epistemology in the literary discourse of healing and recovery. The study of the non-western perception of female spirituality helped me re-establish and reassert my own indigenous spirituality.

To trace the psychospiritual process a Yema goes through, I got an opportunity to witness a community healing séance very recently on 27.11.2021 at Lingding, Gangtok, Sikkim. I interviewed Yema and Yeba (Limboo Shamans of the female and male gender respectively) to map their spiritual experiences with poetry that corroborated with the Yemapoetic theory proposed in this paper.

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^[1] This note is written by Swarnim Subba, the first author of this paper.

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Interviews and Community Participation:

Witnessed a séance (Community Healing) at Lingding (Gangtok, Sikkim) on 27.11.2021.

Interview with a Mangpa (name withheld) (Rai Shaman) at Lingding community healing and driving away the evil spirits on 27.11.2021 at 10.00 pm.

Interview with a Yema (name withheld) (Limboo Shamaness) at Daragoan, Tadong, East Sikkim on 09.12.2021 at 4.00pm

Interview with Yeba (name withheld) on 16.12.2021 at 10 am at NurBahadur Bhandari College, Gangtok, Sikkim.

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