



# ENERGY, LAND, AND RESISTANCE IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

N R Gopal

*Professor, Dept. of English, CUHP, Dharamshala.*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper is an analysis of Native American literature as a response to energy colonialism and extractive development. It claims that Indigenous lands have been long subjected to mining, dams, and oil pipeline projects, which hurt sacred landscapes and the lives of communities. These projects are not purely economic activities but also cultural and social violence with the backing of the state power and policy. Native authors challenge the notion that this extraction constitutes progress or sound development. Their resistance literature reveals the way the destruction of land and human beings is condoned under the excuse of energy demands. Instead of merely explaining loss, such texts present Indigenous knowledge which uncovers the ethical, cultural, and ecological losses of imposed energy systems.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Native American Literature, Energy colonialism, Resource extraction, Ecological imperialism, Environmental humanities, Literary resistance.*

## INTRODUCTION

Energy colonialism is the exploitative extraction of resources from Indigenous lands, which has socio-economic and environmental impacts on Native people. This occurs due to history, which dates back to the initial colonization of America when world powers sought to utilize Indigenous lands for natural resources without recognition of tribal sovereignty. Through literature, resistance towards energy colonialism is portrayed through narratives which re-envision the ways in which Native people have been affected by colonialism and resist the colonizer by revealing the relationship between Native people and the land, as well as countering the rhetoric of progress which is made at the expense of environmental exploitation. By having such Indigenous representations in literature, Native writers exhibit the ways in which energy-related interventions disrupt and negatively impact landscapes and cultural interconnections to space and place. This flattens the contributions of energy interventions to economic infrastructures, which ignore Native existences and relationships with their homelands. As the resistance towards energy colonialism has mainly gained momentum through environmental activism, which has been heavily pursued by Indigenous activists, the #NoDAPL protests and other initiatives have shown Indigenous activism efforts which protect homelands and the greater environment. Therefore, to combat energy colonialism, looking at Indigenous resistance within a holistic lens is necessary to understand efforts which protect the people and the environment as Native people fight for their homelands and rebuild for an interdependent future which protects the intricate relationship between nature and everything else. This analysis of energy colonialism and Indigenous efforts of resistance and activism reveals how colonial power operates and the role of Indigenous peoples in literature and activism, as representations that provide equal strength to cultural knowledge and environmental resources in preserving culture and adaptation. As scholar Franziska Müller argues, modern energy systems remain deeply entangled with “colonial or neocolonial power dynamics” that disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples (Müller 701).

## Historical Political Context

U. S. westward expansion had negative impacts on Native American culture as a result of the exploitation of Native land and the violations of treaties, and the formation of state-corporate relations. The DAPL, fought by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, exemplifies such policies as it disregarded Native sovereignty and environmental concerns (Estes 47). This project is an example of how these state-sponsored corporations ignore Native sovereignty and place the reservation lands and important water sources at risk, which, as a result, sparks such large protests while contributing to the question of the environment. Similarly, the story of uranium mining in Navajo country is evidence of the effects of U. S. expansion (Brugge and Goble). This operation violated treaty rights and failed to adopt safety practices, resulting in many health risks and injuries. The pollution made the Navajo vulnerable to uranium’s negative effects and was detrimental to the present population’s cultural and spiritual values. Both DAPL and the uranium mining in Navajo country reveal the long-term consequences and effects of U. S. expansion as they prioritized the economic development and infrastructure over Native



sovereignty. These events illustrate a key theme about how state-corporate relations neglected concerns for Native American populations and proceeded to profit from these tribal lands throughout these and other periods of history.

### **Literary Cartographies of Extraction**

Today, Native American authors write literary geographies to articulate their relationships between extraction landscapes and their Indigenous identities. Through narrative complexity and imagined worlds, authors resist colonial narratives that attempt to erase particular indigenous experiences as they reclaim customary relationships between the land, water, and cultural identity. Native American authors imagine geographies that include physical locations and ecological degradation that link resource impacts to their Indigenous identities. Extraction assumes its position as a narrative of progress, but Native American authors imagine stories that resist this idea. The authors locate extraction landscapes in areas of unrest only because the landscapes symbolize the extraction paradigm the authors seek to depict. The narratives reveal toxic conditions created by extraction industries, as authors work to illustrate the ecological destruction resulting from industrial resource capture within capitalist economies. Native American authors instill a sense of irreparable harm that extraction caused for landscapes and also spiritual ideologies and belief systems. Literary geographies written by Native American authors juxtapose colonial accounts with Native perspectives in order to expose readers to alternate ways of understanding landscapes. Economic worth and instrumentalist perceptions of nature depicted in colonial narratives directly oppose the inherent value Indigenous ideologies place on landscapes and waterscapes, as these ecological features radiate in spiritual meaning and cultural survival for Native Americans (Brugge and Goble 1414). Juxtaposed narratives allow readers to decipher present assumptions about extraction while discovering how indigenous peoples live with landscapes. Literary geographies address the landscape as a living organism that needs managing because the landscape provides for them.

### **Energy Colonialism and Cultural Interpretations**

Native American literature uses mapping as a method to restore Indigenous control over their cultural stories, which European colonization had suppressed. Through their writing, Louise Erdrich and Linda Hogan demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge systems stay important for prevailing environmental discussions (Todd 8). The literary maps function to restore control over territories which colonial stories have attempted to hide or alter Native American relationships with their ancestral territory. The artists create an opposing story which shows both historical suffering and the enduring strength of their culture, together with its potential for continued existence:

This ecological consciousness, embedded in myths, rituals, and storytelling traditions, provides valuable insights into alternative frameworks of sustainability that challenge dominant anthropocentric paradigms. (Saren 38)

The literary cartographies reveal the necessity for immediate healing, which requires restoration of both the damaged environment and the communities which extraction has affected. Environmental justice battles and the recovery of indigenous ecological methods appear throughout narratives as essential elements for cultural revival. Healing is thus tied to Indigenous language and narratives recovery, and re-centering Indigenous relationships with the land and water in ways that naturalize connections between the past, present, and future. Indigenous literatures construct literary cartographies that act as a necessary literature for readers to navigate extraction, ecology, and Indigeneity. Their narrative representation of extractive harms to nature foregrounds a novel understanding of land-water relations, demonstrating the ways in which Indigenous thought resists these harms. Native American writers mobilize their literary agency to represent both their ethnic reality and their literature that benefits humanity.

### **Literary Counter-Discourses and Testimonies**

In general, Native literature is a significant testament to witnessing environmental crises, as it draws our attention to the endurance of American Indian environmental presence and directs our efforts toward ecological restoration and healing processes. Narrative forms, including American Indian oral literatures, indigenous poetry, and community-based rhetoric, can be viewed as important records either to prove the intimacy between American Indians and Mother Nature or to protest against environmental degradation. They can be read as Native testimonies of witnessing environmental crisis, because their voices are both speaking on behalf of nature and indigenous communities. In reading their testifying status, I suggest starting with the significance of oral literature to their physical and cultural survival. It helps them re-envision the relationships between American Indian identities and the surrounding environments. They often narrate the importance of natural conditions like clean water, green forests, white snow mountains, and wildlife. By interconnecting the land and human in oral literatures (including elders' stories, traditional ceremonies, and myths), they raise public awareness of the importance of the locale and encourage people to treasure tribal histories (Vizenor 112). Also, due to its easily accessible and repeatable



features, Indian oral narratives help retell environmental stories and let the listeners learn the sense of responsibility for the land, and also the impacts nature has on indigenous life. The oral transmission of their traditional ecological knowledge remains enduring. It means that oral storytelling is still consistent and influential on indigenous people in contemporary society, which inspires people to get involved in the practice of tracing cultural roots and healing the Earth. More generally, the point is that rhetorical witnessing of endangered Earth and human existence through native oral narratives emphasizes the spiritual parts of indigenous life, in which they see, feel, and narrate landscapes of the world as alive. They learn to cherish nature and get motivated to respect their ancestors' culture, as they show that erosion, dislocation, and abandonment are not yet forgotten.

Besides, the poetic form is often used in American Indian writing to record their nostalgic feelings of the beauty of nature, like crystal droplets, rivers' ripples, and the white snow-capped mountains. Among these writings, the imagery of nature in the poetry compacts the meaning of land, forges a closer relationship with the reader, and successfully testifies to the fact that Native Americans are genuine inhabitants of nature.

In addition to nature-related poems, bilingual writing contributes to the Native American ethos for use in environmental deliberation by creating affection at the initial stage of poetic reading and viewing as rhetorical acts. Their affection testifies to the authenticity of American Indians' dwelling and viewing the land in a poetic way, which makes the readers feel the depth of their love of nature. Similar to oral narratives, poetic testifying is crucial for influencing the current generation and inspiring them to continue valuing environmental existence and cultural heritage.

Also, community-based story-listening and storytelling forms of testification contribute a lot to contemporary environmental discourses, because the outpourings of common memory, particularly stories of flood, encroaching survivors, wildfire, and recovery, emphasize affected subjects' mutual responsibilities and inform the public of chaotic ecological conditions. These stories help build the notion of the indelible nature-human connection, because they share memorable experiences and common identities. In their stories, communities and personal lives become inseparable. Their stories simply demonstrate the importance of collective power and communal identification with the land. In this way, their casual communications about life can be read as witnesses of either environmental damage or aspiration for change. Community stories like these occupy crucial space among modern environmental writings, because local storytelling and listening produce valuable data for solving social and economic problems. Bill Paul who lives in the Plains and Mary Louise Defender Wilson from the Standing Rock Indian Reservation can be seen as storytellers connected to environmental traditions. Their comments can be used for testifying the ongoing environmental crisis, because community-based rhetoric is very open and accessible.

The above aspects of American Indians' writing (including oral and bilingual narratives, testifying to community nature-human maladies, and native ecological writing of land and viewing) can be viewed as powerful testimonies of witnessing nature and past memories, because their oral narratives and poetry testify to common experiences of environmental crises caused by colonialism and Western influences. American Indian contemporaneous writing, speaking, and listening, in resisting forced migration, function to stabilize the community's ethos against siding-devastation. Their documents can be rhetorically interpreted as counterarguments to seeing environmental problems and the crisis of survival. Continuing the endurance of their environmental and cultural presence, their writing functions as a counterpoint to resisting Eurocentric and the dominant rhetoric of witnessing. Their witnessing literature matters to prevent the uncontrollable expansion of forced Indian removal, which, to some degree, is raising people's awareness of change. They are rhetorical testimonies, rather than emotional prose of past lives, because they really involve everyone as eyewitnesses of contacted nations in the face of natural disaster and crisis of human survival. Testifying can raise people's global awareness of environmental change and shed light on the ongoing efforts to heal the damaged Earth. Such enduring influences are named presence, which forges a continuum of oral, poetic literature, and indigenous writers, so that the land, as the mountain, can speak.

### **Fossil Capital and Industrial Modernism**

The aesthetic of modern industrialism is negated in indigenous literatures on extraction through the pipeline, dam, and grid because these images are produced by the extraction of materials from Indigenous lands, and thus, enact an often violent and unwelcome arrival of modern life as constructed through industrialization. Through the use of the pipeline, dam, and energy grid as mediated symbols of extraction that are representative of other materials, services, and aesthetics in a larger modernist culture of industrialization, indigenous poets and fiction writers are able to produce a strong narrative of extraction that lays resistance and restoration of land at the heart of indigenous engagements in progress. Specifically, pipelines are transformed from images of connection and progress to a reminder of environmental degradation and the displacement of the community. While they usually have an



infrastructural function in order to transfer oils or gases from one place to another, here, pipes are a sign of colonialist violence enacted by large companies and/or government by cutting through indigenous territory in ways that resemble the process of cancer, damaging the surrounding environment, and displacing and disrupting everyday social and economic practices. Dams, on the other hand, tend to be a deliberate interruption of natural patterns used by the colonialist state to enact a form of power and control; in indigenous literature, they weaken the bond between indigenous peoples and the land through their weakening of the life force and natural order of the environment, just as larger patterns of extraction in industrial life reduce the Earth's force to a mere resource.

Finally, energy grids are traditionally seen as essential for modern comfort, yet here identified as tools of power and control extracted from the environment and used to order, organize, and homogenize Indigenous lands and peoples. Thus, through the pipeline, dam, and energy grid, modernist images of industry dominate indigenous culture, and, at the same time, are critiqued, deconstructed, and reconstructed, and used as alternative symbolic representations of core beliefs in indigenous society on the selective nature of extraction and the position of the people within nature, advancing an agenda of resistance and restoration to the center of an important space for indigenous narrative construction in contemporary environmental justice literature. Thus:

Throughout history, the US Government has repeatedly sidelined treaties and Indigenous voices in order to expand its power. In the past, this came in the form of oppressive legislation as well as military action. In the modern day, however, the government continues to exploit Indigenous communities and lands for economic or academic gain. From both pipelines to the Thirty Meter Telescope, it is clear that this mistreatment of Indigenous lands and ignorance towards Indigenous spiritual beliefs and their relationship with land continues. ("Pipelines Are the Latest Development in a History of Exploitation of Indigenous Lands and Resources")

### **Water Wars, Scarcity, and Spiritual Geographies**

In Joy Harjo's "*Rain*" or "*The Flood*" and Leslie Marmon Silko's narrative of Laguna cosmology, water can be regarded as a fluid representation that signifies multiple sacred and commodified meanings through water scarcity (Harjo 45; Silko 73). Joy Harjo starts her song of water as the spirit, which implies the power of divinity as the energy of human regeneration and spiritual baptism. Harjo's rain can be viewed not merely as images of the elements but also as metaphors that signify the sustaining power of water and the social and spiritual attributes of water as important, distinctive features of Indigenous peoples. Even though water is sacred for people, the commodified attributes of water supply imply the importance of water as a socio-environmental commodity that can be controlled by those who possess it and can privilege people who have opportunities for water usage. Through the narrative of Laguna cosmology, we can examine the importance of water supply as the circulation of life, its distinctive attributes, and its role as a means of religion, which is the baseline of people's culture. As the narrative introduces us to the power of Spirit water as the living body of the Earth, water becomes the fundamental force that connects the terrestrial and the spiritual worlds and maintains the living circulation of the bio-environmental system of the Earth. The true renaissance of Laguna, as born from water, implies the signification of water as the endless seasonal cycles of the world, and it stresses the prominence of maintaining the balance of the Earth through the regulation of water usage. Even though water is sacred for Indigenous people, the commodified attributes of water supply contradict their beliefs by treating water as a socio-environmental commodity that can be controlled by those who possess it and privilege people with opportunities for water usage. The two narratives can be examined as testimonies for understanding the sacred and commodified attributes of water, which are refracted through the significance of water scarcity and the indelible marks of water as the basis for the transformation of earthly spirits among Indigenous peoples. According to Pushparaj E:

Nature plays a vital role in *The Flood*, both as a witness to colonial destruction and as a source of healing. Indigenous worldviews often emphasize a deep connection between people and the land, viewing nature as a living, spiritual entity rather than a mere backdrop for human activity. In *The Flood*, Harjo uses natural imagery to underscore the protagonist's emotional and spiritual transformation. The floodwaters, while initially destructive, also symbolize the potential for renewal. This duality reflects the Indigenous belief that, even in devastation, there is the possibility of rebirth. (219)

### **Conclusion: Decolonizing Energy Futures**

Literature plays a significant role in reimagining a decolonial energy future through its emphasis on land-based relationality that identifies human-earth interconnection as a natural process and the role of people as cohabitants (Whyte 154; Escobar 6). The relational approach critiques the prevalent colonial narrative that propagates an energy future based on the exploitative use of natural resources while failing to prioritize the human-earth relationship based on sustainable methods. Indigenous perspective-based creative writing emphasizes the existence of an alternative energy production sector and the community's capability to pursue an



energy economy based on community prioritization and the preservation of human–nature relationships and the material and symbolic resources of the colonized ancestral landscape. Literary texts work as a critique of the prevailing energy discourse and policy, and contribute to a decolonial justice model policy for people that prioritizes sustainable technological innovation. Land-based relationality’s focus on how people perceive nature enables environmental humanities to critique existing methods and develop a decolonial energy future of inclusion and justice. Literary engagement with interpretive methods develops an acknowledgment of diverse perspectives and emphasizes community prioritization to sustain an energy model that fits community culture and preserves the human–nature relationship. The reimagining of a decolonial energy future based on intercommunity collaboration recognizes the agency of people to reclaim the role of informing discourse and systematically initiating policies that accommodate their basic requirements. Theorizations about literature entail activism and contribute to social engagement through an adopted focus on narrative potential to motivate intergenerational and intercommunity networking in the construction of a justice model policy. Literature works as an intervening force that promotes public awareness of the significance of land rights and possession in the construction of a model energy future and policy. Literary inquiry develops a justice model through its corrective potential and advances an alternative energy future based on sustainable development and the coexistence of people through the acknowledgment of community prioritization and rights.

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