



WHOSE EARTH, WHOSE MEMORY? ADIVASI ECOLOGICAL RELATIONALITY AND THE POETICS OF CONTINUANCE IN PARWATI TIRKEY'S *BLOOM AGAIN*

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Abstract

Parwati Tirkey's *Bloom Again*, translated into English by Pragya Shukla from the Hindi collection *Phir Uzna*, grows out of the ecological and cultural worlds of Jharkhand's Adivasi communities, forests, rivers, birds, fields, festivals, ancestral stories, and landscapes in flux, all held together by knowledge carried through language, seasonal practice, labour, memory, and human relationships with the more-than-human world. I read *Bloom Again* as an articulation of Adivasi ecological relationality, one in which environmental loss is never only environmental; it is cultural and epistemic loss at the same time. Moving through three stages, relationality, rupture, and continuance, the paper looks at how poems such as "Nakdauna Bird," "Earth," "Rinchi Plateau," "Conversation with Telya River," "Story of HuloPariya," "Granary," "Khoren," "Hunting Festival of Women," and "Return" build up, and then strain, the relationship between people and place. Indigenous epistemologies, Indian ecocriticism, Adivasi land politics, traditional ecological knowledge, reciprocity, and slow violence all inform the reading. Tirkey does not meet ecological damage with nostalgia or a fantasy of restoration. Instead, *Bloom Again* finds renewal in the practices that keep relationships moving forward, cultivation, women's labour, communal life, memory, language, and return. The title says as much: "again" concedes that something has broken, while "bloom" insists that growth is still possible on the other side of that break.

Keywords

Adivasi Ecologies; Ecological Relationality; Indigenous Knowledge; Environmental Dispossession; Ecological Continuance, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

What disappears when a river disappears? Something measurable; water, land, livelihood, but for communities whose history is embedded in a particular landscape, the loss runs deeper: names, songs, seasonal practices, memories, and entire ways of reading the living world. An altered landscape is not simply a new backdrop for an unchanged culture. This can disrupt the relationships that a culture relies on to understand its environment. This is the connection at the heart of Parwati Tirkey's *Bloom Again*, translated by Pragya Shukla from *Phir Uzna*. The collection emerges from the cultural and ecological worlds of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, bringing together forests, rivers, birds, cultivation, festivals, ancestral stories, migration, and shifting



community structures, not as separate subjects but as parts of one lived world, where knowing a place means participating in its rhythms. Shukla's translation carries this world into English without flattening it: culturally specific terms, images, and expressions are retained rather than smoothed into transparency for the English reader (ix–xi). What travels across languages is not just information about a landscape but also traces of the relationships through which that landscape is understood. "Nakdauna Bird" makes this vivid. The bird's seasonal call becomes part of the community's anticipation of rain, and the poem ends on a striking note that the "Kudukh people and the bird forged a dialect" (Turkey, 9–10). It is an image that complicates the usual assumption that ecological knowledge starts with a human observer reading a passive natural world; here, knowledge arises between species, through sustained attention and shared seasonal experience. "Spirits of the Forests", "In Earth's Direction", and "Marriage of Sun and Earth" work in a similar register, folding forests, birds, and agricultural fertility into networks of ancestral, seasonal, and cultural meaning (Turkey 11, 35, 53–55).

Poems like these call for an ecocritical approach that stays alert to cultural specificity. Swarnalatha Rangarajan's account of Indian ecocriticism is useful precisely because it roots ecological thought in the sociocultural contexts from which it emerges, rather than measuring it against a universal idea of "nature". Beggiora's work on Indigenous epistemologies, grounded in relationships between human communities and the more-than-human, offers a related vocabulary, as does Mazumder's writing on how Indigenous literature preserves oral tradition and ecological knowledge. Read alongside these, Turkey's poetry looks less like evidence for concepts developed elsewhere and more like a form of ecological thought in its own right. But the collection is equally concerned with damage. In "Rinchi Plateau", an older place-name survives only through memory and river song (Turkey, 79–80); in "Conversation with Telya River," a once-familiar river becomes an interlocutor marked by change (83–85); in "Story of HuloPariya," industrial transformation registers through the "heat of iron," drying flowers, and the vanishing of the Kharwa River (117–25). None of this is abstract in Jharkhand, where land, displacement, extraction, and development are bound up with questions of livelihood and belonging. Jairath's study of environmental politics in the state shows that Adivasi environmental claims are usually claims to continued access to lived land, not to some untouched "nature." Ranjan's account of land acquisition in Nagri points to the uneven political costs that so often accompany development.

What follows reads *Bloom Again* through three linked movements: ecological relationality, ecological rupture, and continuance. The first traces how birds, forests, rivers, cultivation, ritual, and language build an ecological knowledge of place. The second looks at how extraction, development, migration, weakened institutions, and changing landscapes fracture that knowledge. The third asks what survives the fracture, and finds Turkey turning toward cultivation, women's labour, communal practice, memory, and return. Ecological, cultural, and epistemic relationships in *Bloom Again* are bound together: environmental loss matters because it damages the relationships through which a place is known, and continuance matters because those relationships can still be practised and passed on even after the conditions that first produced them have changed.

Ecological Relationality: Knowing Place through Living Relations:

The opening movement of *Bloom Again* builds a world in which humans participate rather than preside. "Earth" is the clearest cosmological instance: the tortoise, crab, and earthworm help make the earth and the hills, and human beings only enter the story later, as cultivators and irrigators (Turkey, 17–18). Agency is distributed rather than centred. The world does not begin with human intervention; human activity is one thread in a fabric already woven by other kinds of life. This sits close to Beggiora's account of Indigenous epistemologies that resist a hard line between



human and nonhuman, though Tirkey's poem remains grounded in its own cultural imagination rather than merely illustrating an external theory. "Spirits of the Forests" carries this further through ancestral memory. The forest holds the questions earlier generations asked about the sky, the mountains, the rivers, the order of things (Tirkey, 11); it is a physical environment and repository of knowledge at once. Its significance lies in the relationships through which people have learned to live in it. "Chalatonka" does something similar, placing a sacred clearing near the cultivated fields, a space where people encounter spirits (39–40). Agriculture, ritual, forest, and community are not kept in separate boxes; their overlap suggests ecological knowledge is inseparable from the cultural institutions and practices through which people meet a place.

Birds are another kind of teacher. In "Nakdauna Bird," the bird's call becomes part of the community's knowledge of the coming monsoon (Tirkey, 9–10), and the phrase "forged a dialect" does real work here; it makes the knowledge relational rather than merely observational. People are not decoding the bird from the outside; the relationship between the bird and the community produces a shared seasonal language. Kimmerer's writing on reciprocity offers a useful comparative vocabulary: knowledge of the more-than-human world comes bundled with obligations to attend and respond. Tirkey arrives at something close to this, but through poetic and communal practice rather than argument.

The agricultural poems push relationality from perception into labour. "Tumba" sets cultivation within a social world of work, food, movement, and celebration (Tirkey, 24–25). Farming reshapes land, but it still depends on rain, soil, season, and processes no one controls. Dey and Sarkar's study of Indigenous farming knowledge in Jharkhand, soil management, cropping, water resources, and conservation, shows how thoroughly this ecological knowledge is embedded in practical, local engagement (71–79). "Tumba" gives that same relationship an affective charge. "Marriage of Sun and Earth" pushes it further still, imagining fertility as a relationship rather than a production process (Tirkey, 53–55): growth comes from the interplay of sun, earth, season, and cultivation, not from possession. The same knowledge travels through movement and language. "Dancing" ties bodies to seasonal and communal rhythm (Tirkey, 22–23); "In Earth's Direction" reads birds as signs that make the landscape legible (35). "Rinchi Plateau" turns to naming, "Durund da," the plateau's older name, carries river songs, place, memory (79–80). A place-name becomes an ecological archive in its own right. It matters, too, that Shukla keeps terms like "Durund da," "Dhumkudiya," "Khoren," and "Chalatonka" in the original rather than translating them away: the poems' linguistic texture stays tied to particular places and practices instead of dissolving into generic English. What this first movement builds, then, is an epistemology of place, forest as habitat and ancestral archive, field as workplace and ecological system, bird as species and seasonal interlocutor, place-name as language and memory. It is this groundwork that makes the ecological losses register as more than physical damage. When a river disappears, or an institution weakens, something happens to a community's capacity to recognise, remember, and inhabit its own environment.

Ecological Rupture: Dispossession, Development, and the Loss of Place:

The second movement shifts from how these relationships form to how they break down. Tirkey rarely stages ecological violence as a single dramatic event; loss accumulates instead, rivers change, institutions weaken, people leave, familiar landscapes take on new economic meanings, and older names survive mostly in memory. Nixon's idea of "slow violence" is useful here, since it names exactly this kind of environmental harm: gradual and often less politically visible than catastrophe. In *Bloom Again*, damage becomes legible through what people can no longer meet as they once did.



"Soso Bungalow" places historical power directly in the landscape, the bungalow standing as a material trace of altered relationships to land and authority (Tirkey, 76–78). Jairath's account of Jharkhand is relevant precisely because it shows environmental politics rooted in the struggle to keep access to land as the basis of livelihood, social relations, and political identity. The question is not only whether land is damaged but who gets to decide what it means and how it is used. "Rinchi Plateau" approaches the same struggle through language: "Durund da" keeps alive a history that administrative or economic vocabulary cannot hold (Tirkey, 79–80). "Conversation with Telya River" makes the loss even more intimate, addressing the river as a living interlocutor rather than treating environmental change as an abstract decline in water systems (83–85). The river matters because it has been part of a lived world, not despite that.

"Story of HuloPariya" brings industrial transformation into sharper focus — iron's heat drying flowers, the Kharwa River gone, extraction tied directly to a loss of ecological and cultural continuity (Tirkey, 117–25). Kindo's work on the Netarhat Valley gives this a regional grounding: the expansion of bauxite mining in Gumla and Latehar has opened new resource frontiers that reshape Adivasi relationships to land and forest and unsettle existing social structures. Tirkey's poem is not documentary evidence of this particular mining history, but the two illuminate each other; both show how extraction changes far more than the physical environment.

The cultural fallout of this appears in "Dhumkudiya: One" and "Dhumkudiya: Two," poems centred on a communal institution tied to learning and the transmission of cultural knowledge (Tirkey, 72–74). Ecological knowledge does not just reproduce itself; it needs people, practices, institutions, and language. When those weaken, the knowledge becomes harder to hold in the body. Mazumder's account of Indigenous literature makes a similar case for oral and literary forms as repositories of ecological knowledge and cultural memory, and Tirkey's poems do double duty here, recording threatened forms of transmission while becoming another medium through which memory can travel. "Migration" complicates things further. The poem registers what is left behind when people move away from inherited landscapes, but it does not condemn mobility itself (Tirkey, 112–13). People leave for education, work, safety, and any number of reasons. The deeper trouble is what happens when knowledge is separated from the practices that sustain it. You can remember a bird without living through the season in which its call means something; you can remember a field without ever working it again. Memory holds on; embodied familiarity is harder to keep. "Civilisation" makes the ideology behind all this explicit, questioning the standards by which Indigenous life gets called backwards and outside development gets called progress (Tirkey, 114–16). Ranjan's research on land acquisition in Nagri helps clarify what is politically at stake in that kind of language, though it should not be read as evidence that Tirkey has Nagri specifically in mind; its value lies in showing how "development" can redefine land while shrinking the agency of the people who live on it.

Ecological rupture in *Bloom Again*, then, is also a rupture in cultural recognition. The forest becomes timber, the plateau a resource frontier, farmland a project site, the river an infrastructural line item. What Tirkey's poetry restores are the dimensions that those categories cannot hold: stories, names, practices, institutions, memories, attachments. Chiocchetti's recent study of Adivasi Hindi literature makes a related move, bringing ecological exploitation into the same frame as social and political injustice. What *Bloom Again* does is make that convergence felt rather than argued: a river is not just lost water; its alteration reaches into the cultural relations through which it has been known.

Still, memory here is not offered as a substitute for political change. Its work is narrower and more specific — it keeps disappearing from becoming ordinary. Holding on to "Durund da," the Kharwa River, the Dhumkudiya keeps visible what the language of development would rather



treat as beside the point. Which raises the question the final movement takes up: if rupture cannot simply be undone, what can still be cultivated inside changed conditions?

Cultivating Continuance: Labour, Gender, Memory, and Renewal

The last movement does not meet ecological loss with easy optimism. Its sense of renewal comes through work, repetition, seasonal time, memory, adaptation, and the title says as much. Blooming follows interruption, cutting, waiting, and labour. "Again" admits that something has happened between one flowering and the next. Continuance, in other words, is not about restoring an untouched past; it is about keeping relationships alive under conditions that have already changed. "Granary" gives this temporal logic its clearest image. Women harvest the ripened paddy, carry it home, arrange it in the granary (Tirkey, 101–02), storing one season's yield so another can begin. Preservation here points forward, not back. The poem also puts women at the centre of that continuity: their agricultural labour does not just accompany ecological knowledge, it embodies it. Dey and Sarkar's account of Indigenous farming knowledge provides a material backdrop, tracing local practices around soil, water, cropping, and conservation (71–79), though Tirkey is not cataloguing techniques so much as showing knowledge moving through bodies, seasons, and repeated work. "Tumba" and "Marriage of Sun and Earth" circle back to the same idea. Cultivation is productive but never fully in human hands: sun, earth, rain, soil, and seasonal rhythm remain active conditions of growth (Tirkey, 24–25, 53–55). Kimmerer's emphasis on reciprocity is a useful frame: the living world is not a storehouse to draw from but part of an exchange that limits what humans can claim. Tirkey gives that idea a local, material shape: cultivation as participation in a process already underway. "Sakhua Forest" further muddies the line between resource and sacred ground. The forest is materially useful and culturally meaningful at once (Tirkey, 103–04), which resonates with Jairath's point that Adivasi environmental politics is usually about continued access to land rather than protecting some untouched wilderness. Tirkey's forest is lived in, used, remembered, and interpreted — not reducible to either a commodity or a nature preserve.

"Khoren" is the collection's most concentrated image of regeneration. Khoren sweeps leaves, brings white clay from the forest, and uses it to freshen her home; the poem ties this to growth near the cut branches and the rising sun (Tirkey, 105–06). Renewal happens through work. The poem blurs nature and culture in the process; the forest enters the domestic space as raw material, and labour turns that material into care and habitation. Set beside "Story of HuloPariya," "Khoren" works at a different scale of ecological agency. It does not pretend that household labour can undo industrial destruction. It shows instead that ecological care can continue in ordinary acts of tending a place. "After the Sowing Season" widens this into a collective celebration — labour giving way to dance, rivers moving toward the fields, bodies caught up in seasonal time (Tirkey, 108). Celebration is not an escape from ecological dependence here; it is an acknowledgement that cultivation has limits, that human effort is still embedded in processes beyond its control.

Gender is most clearly foregrounded in "Hunting Festival of Women," which places women in a collective forest practice with public, embodied agency (Tirkey, 89–90). This matters because Indigenous women are so often romanticised as naturally closer to nature. Tirkey's women are more complicated than that; their relationship to the ecological arises through labour, participation, memory, and community. The forest is not a symbolic extension of femininity; it is a social and material space where women act.

Read alongside the Dhumkudiya poems, the relationship between memory and transmission becomes clearer still. If Dhumkudiya is the formal communal space for passing down knowledge, then cultivation, festivals, songs, and collective labour are other channels doing the same work. Mazumder helps clarify literature's role in preserving oral narrative and ecological



knowledge, but Tirkey's collection goes a step further, showing that knowledge survives through practice as much as through text. The granary stores grain; the poem stores an account of the work by which grain becomes next season.

This is also why *Bloom Again* never promises restoration. "Migration" and "Return" make the distinction sharpest. "Migration" registers separation from an inherited landscape; "Return" meets a place that has already changed (Tirkey, 112–13, 126–30); roads, markets, children, language, memory, all different. Return is not recovery of an untouched village. It is the reopening of a relationship with a place that has moved on. Language plays its own part in that reopening. Shukla keeps culturally specific terms rather than smoothing everything into English, and her translator's preface says as much directly, acknowledging how hard it is to carry cultural meaning across intact and describing her effort to preserve the poems' texture anyway (ix–xi). The translation does not preserve the original world whole — it cannot — but it gives the poems another route for their ecological vocabulary to travel. Tirkey herself links translation to the wider circulation of tribal relationships with nature (viii).

So the final movement turns continuance into an ecological and political practice in its own right. Agricultural labour keeps knowledge embodied; women's work preserves communal memory; language carries names and meanings forward; stories hold landscapes across generations; return reopens what migration interrupted. None of this undoes dispossession or environmental degradation. What it does is keep rupture from becoming the only available future. The title says this precisely. "Bloom" names growth; "again" admits interruption. A new bloom does not reproduce the last one. A person who returns meets a changed landscape; a surviving language works under new conditions. Continuance asks for change without accepting disappearance; *Bloom Again* locates its ecological resilience in that difficult middle ground, somewhere between loss and restoration, memory and adaptation, inheritance and transformation.

Conclusion:

Bloom Again is best read as poetry of ecological relationships rather than poetry about nature in any general sense. Across its three movements, Tirkey builds a world in which forests, rivers, birds, fields, language, ancestral memory, and human community are bound up with one another. Ecological knowledge here comes through attention and inhabitation: birds signal seasonal change, rivers become interlocutors, place-names hold histories, and agricultural labour answers to forces no one controls.

The second movement shows what is at stake when those relationships break down. "Soso Bungalow," "Rinchi Plateau," "Conversation with Telya River," "Migration," "Civilisation," and "Story of HuloPariya" tie environmental transformation to displacement, altered land relations, weakened institutions, and cultural memory under strain. The Jharkhand context makes this concrete: Jairath shows environmental politics to be inseparable from continued access to lived land, Kindo traces the social fallout of new resource frontiers, and Tirkey's poems remain literary rather than documentary throughout, registering the experience and memory of transformation without reducing themselves to accounts of any one political conflict.

The final movement changes the question, asking not just what has been lost but what can still be practised. "Granary," "Khoren," "Sakhua Forest," "After the Sowing Season," "Hunting Festival of Women," and "Return" find continuity in labour, cultivation, communal participation, gendered agency, memory, language, adaptation — and their hope stays deliberately modest. They do not promise that ecological damage can be undone or that an earlier social world can return unchanged. That is what "again" means here. Not repetition, but the distance between one flowering and the next. The collection's ecological hope sits neither in technological mastery nor in nostalgic return, but in the persistence of relationships that still mean something, a seed stored



for another season, a remembered place-name, a communal practice, a woman working with forest materials, a story retold, a return to a changed landscape. Each is its own small act of continuance.

This is where Tirkey's contribution to Indian environmental humanities lies. Her poems do not merely illustrate ecocritical concepts developed elsewhere; they ask critics to attend to the linguistic, cultural, and material conditions in which ecological knowledge actually grows. Survival, in *Bloom Again*, is more than life going on — it is a connection going on: among people, place, memory, labour, and the more-than-human world. To bloom again is to keep inhabiting a damaged, changing world without letting its relationships disappear.

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Article Received: 14/09/2026

Article Accepted: 20/09/2026

Published Online: 30/09/2026

To Cite the Article: Parmar, Sandhya and Bhandari, Savita. "Whose Earth, Whose Memory? Adivasi Ecological Relationality and the Poetics of Continuance in Parwati Tirkey's *Bloom*



Again.” *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VII, Issue-2, September, 2026, 197-204.
www.literarycognizance.com

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