International Conference on

Environmental Precarity and Planetary Aesthetics: Voices, Epistemologies, and Geopolitics of the Global South

25 & 26 February 2027

Organised by the Department of English, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, India

Concept note

Environmental precarity is at a critical juncture in the current era of the Anthropocene, infiltrating the popular imaginary and becoming accepted as a feature of everyday life. Are we in the Anthropocene epoch or in the midst of some temporal crisis? With the geologists rejecting the Anthropocene and being voted out of the debate, and with Trump withdrawing from the Paris Climate Treaty, the strategy to accelerate the growth engine through resource extraction becomes all the more evident. However, this does not change the reality for the people living in coastal regions, island nations, forests, and hill areas; people facing natural calamities with increasing frequency; people losing access to clean water, air, and non-toxic soil; animals and birds losing their habitats; and the loss of forest cover, all of which direct us to a critical urgency that turncoat world leaders seek to downplay. The impact of climate change, although planetary in scope, is acutely felt in the Global South, where a majority of the world's vulnerable populations live in conditions of abject poverty. Although various strategies for poverty alleviation have been adopted in the Global South, poverty reduction has also become a dominant rationale for promoting developmental projects and resource extraction in resource-rich areas. However, the outcomes have often been contrary to their stated objectives: rather than lifting people out of poverty and reducing their vulnerability, such projects have frequently contributed to the further enrichment of industrialists and corporations. Moreover, within academic disciplines, the category of the Global South is highly contested, with no agreement on its definition. Russell West-Pavlov argues that the "Global South is a protean term, shifting its meaning chameleon-like, across various epochs and contexts" (West-Pavlov 1). One cannot deny the amorphous nature of the term, yet its gravitational pull can be potentially effective in connecting the different forms of ongoing exploitation – both of humans and more-than-humans. No wonder then that Dwivedi and McGillis argue, "the term Global South can be radically transformative not just to redress historical injustices, but also to render commitments to the injustices, suffering, and precarious lives." (2022, 6)

Jeopardizing of the planet's health and hence the continuity of human and nonhuman life has become the systemic crisis of the 21st century. As uneven impacts increase and impact the planetary health, global warming has seen an irreversible momentum, from the extremes of sudden devastation caused by catastrophic weather events – cyclones, bush fires, droughts and floods – to the slow attritional violence "dispersed across time and space [that] typically is not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2011, 2). The massive environmental upheaval caused by the extractive practices of the fossil fuel industries and the unprecedented weather catastrophes create populations of climate refugees fleeing from destruction of their territories and

homelands. The prospect of such widescale disaster raises concerns about what Rob Nixon (2014, n.p.), referring to "unequal human agency, unequal human impacts, and unequal human vulnerabilities", calls "the Great Divergence".

No wonder then that, Achille Mbembe (2019) demands decolonization on a planetary scale to "reconstruct the world in common" and to "reinvent forms of life in common that go beyond the requisite of the nation state, ethnicity, race, religion" (n.p.). Theorization of a "radical decolonial" approach informs Stuart Cooke's and Peter Denney's (2021) critical framework of transcultural ecocriticism (2), reinforcing their claim that the "critical project [of reading, interpreting and translating data and texts on the planetary emergency] has become planetary, biological, even geological" (1). In the same vein, Pramod K. Nayar (2024), in *Vulnerable Earth: The Literature of Climate Crisis*, issues a clarion call "to rethink species boundaries, and examine the possibilities of multispecies becoming and belonging" (19). The acknowledgement of human geological agency has undermined the very idea of the human and other accepted categories, breaking down the human-nature dichotomy and demanding reconceptualization of human-environment interactions. The very concept "anthropogenic climate change" signals a necessary reconfiguration of human agency: it has generated a need for greater accountability and responsibility as efforts intensify to find solutions to the planetary emergency. The awareness that humans can shape the geological future has driven new ethical concerns and ushered in a renewed political commitment to mitigate negative planetary impacts.

The recognition that not all humans share equal responsibility for the crisis cuts across the universalist assumption of an undifferentiated humanity implicit in the notion of the Anthropocene, even though mankind's collective agency and shared responsibility appear in concepts such as the carbon footprint (Chakrabarty 2021, 57–58). But as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2021) points out, in linking the environmental crisis to the history of capital and interpreting it as a crisis of capital:

> [W]e lose sight of the nature of our present that is defined by the coming together of the relatively short-term processes of human history and other much longer-term processes that belong to Earth systems history and the history of life on the planet. (58)

These processes that preceded mankind's invasive presence and may still be at work in the current crisis should not be overlooked. Yet, the current acceleration of the anthropogenic environmental crisis demands committed responses on a global scale. Postcolonial theories that challenge exploitation and oppression, can extend to the massive social and economic inequities associated with the uneven impacts of global warming, and they target as root cause an economic system that combines the history of global capitalism with present-day neoliberal market forces. Postcolonial eco-critic Johan Höglund (2020), for instance, addresses the precariousness of populations and environmental ecologies, when he asks how far global capitalism is prepared to adapt in the face of such inequality and to provide greater security for large sections of the world's population struggling under the new pressures to sustain the world economy and recover planetary habitability (450).

As an ecological enquiry this proposed international conference argues that the Anthropocene narrative of man's geological force underlying the current climate emergency is a legacy of colonization and the exploitation of territory and labour during the expansion of empire precarity ecocriticism identifies (neo)colonial injustices inherent in the extractive and rapacious exploitation of the environment with the powers responsible for Black slavery and other forms of oppression that render human and nonhuman lives precarious. It recognises with

critic Julia Martin (2017) that "the othering and exploitation of ecosystems and nonhuman beings is inseparable from the othering of people, that the violence of resource extraction is linked with violence against women, that the war against the Earth is a war against ourselves" (177)

The politics of precarity recognize that as a systemic process neoliberalism's roots lie in colonialism with its historic patterns of exploitation. For "if colonialism was symptomatic of increasingly uneven power structures, then neoliberalism can be seen as replacing it, albeit in new forms and shapes" (Wilson, Dwivedi, and Gámez-Fernández 2020, 441). Precarity overlaps with ecocriticism through its reference to modes of resistance and resilience that might bring about planetary repair, and a concerted response to climate injustice, as found in Butler's concept of "precarity as activism"; that is, of challenging those who exploit or wish to dispose of populations (2015a, ix). It has affinities with ecocriticism's advocacy of respect for all living and sentient beings, for affirming close bonds between human and nonhuman by way of protecting and caring for the environment. As a significant framework for thinking through ways of being in the world, precarity and the ongoing planetary catastrophe address the entanglement between humans, nonhuman living beings, and the changing environment, for it "is at once about the precarious lives humans lead in the event of ecological disaster […] and also about the environment itself which is rendered precarious due to human intervention in the Anthropocene."

The questions we may ask and seek to respond to are: should we stay with the trouble, seek alternate futures, or decolonise the planetary takeover by colonialist machinery? We invite proposals that address these questions at the intersection of environmental precarity and planetary sustainability. Papers may engage with, but are not limited to, empirical studies, art forms, literary studies, climate activism, film studies, and theoretical interventions.

Themes:

1. Anthropocene and literary responses
2. Decolonial Ecology and Environmental Justice
3. Climate Activism
4. Decolonial feminism
5. Sustainable Development Goals, national policies, and environmental justice
6. The great derangement and literary studies
7. Academic response to climate change and current pedagogy
8. Precarity and vulnerability studies
9. Research and policy making
10. Science, Technology, and Environmental Precarity
11. Environmental Precarity and Global South
12. Multispecies thinking in art, literature, and culture

Interested participants are invited to submit a 300-word abstract (that must include a research question, and five keywords) along with a 100-word bio-note (including email id and Institutional affiliation) in MS word format (Times New Roman, font size 12, 1.5 line spacing, 2.54 cm margin). Submissions should be sent to dbiswas@buniv.edu.in by 29th October 2026.

Deadline for abstract submission: **29 October 2026**
Acceptance email: **7 November 2026**
Registration: **10-12 November 2026**

Registration Fee (including Tea and Lunch on seminar days): (University account number and bank details will be shared to shortlisted participants via email)

Faculty members: INR 3000 (excluding accommodation)
Research Scholars and Independent Researchers: INR 1500 (excluding accommodation)

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