

**Title:**

*Author:*

# Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story  
entry*



FORMAS





*Loktak Lake, Manipur, image by Joseph Len Haokip*

**Imphal city**  
by Sochuiwon Priscilla Khapai

**Triptych**

*The past as she sees it:*

Mother was prone to breaking into reveries during the months of her decline. I was there to witness these episodes as no one was around during the day and it was my duty to watch her. She was asleep most of the time but I couldn't leave her in case she woke up with one of those fever dreams liting on the horizon of another consciousness. She was not aware of my watch, or that I was her child, but I could sense that she registered my presence. And this was enough for her to cling on. She spoke about her past at the peaks of daylight, long stretches of family histories compressed into neat vessels of sunken memories. Unravelling gently like the contents of a capsule de-shelling in her mind. Beginnings, she saw a series of its early arrangements.

The men.

The men were not always together.

They needed to see each other to think of togetherness.

A tree, an old tree, whose thick branches elided the need for naming, the place where two men caught sight of each other. Voice and language piercing through the air as they battled for the right to genesis.

*Ena nali thei reiye!*<sup>1</sup>

Rituals and social formations are glimpsed in this first exchange. This is how she situates herself. This is how she keeps her time. Things remained inaccessible to me for the most part and I accepted it. On occasion, however, I'd climb up and lay beside her, my head on the pillow as if trying to follow the movement of her thoughts. Once, I asked if she could lead me into the future, 200 years from where we currently stood. To this she said,

*The future is cocooned inside the present which comes from the past.*

*Where is your sight?*

As I closed my eyes, the heat from her head streamed into the veins of my curiosity and opened up a landscape. My feet were cold and naked, the grass was thick and wild with impatience and there was a great wind blowing against a rapidly declining sky. I was led by the light of a very dim moon and felt completely alone, yet I kept going. Soon I found myself in a harsh and unsparing region, slopes and ridges punctuated by jagged rifts of large rocks. I had the sense that they could cut me open if I wasn't careful in this darkness. So I moved slowly, amongst the undergrowth and trailed behind a network of rivulets interwoven with the wild grass, flowing finally into a large lake. I was struck by the surface of this lake, placid

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<sup>1</sup>'I saw you first' in Tangkhul Naga.

and crystal clear, absorbing the columns of moonlight streaming into its body. Standing at the edge of its mouth, I peered into its innards and found myself recognizing some of its parts. One of them was my mother's girlhood. She wanted me to care for it as one would care for a family heirloom. To take from it what I would need later in life. I discovered that she'd grown up much like me, far too obedient and devoted to her elders, one of whom was a beloved uncle. He had been gifted in the ways of hunting and building, materials such as wood and stone turning outward, when in his hands at the right season. Once during her fifth year at the village school, she solved all the problems on the board and came home with the grand news. As a reward, he gave her some seeds which she was advised not to underestimate. She took this advice to heart and guarded the seeds zealously, away from local birds and prying siblings. Every week she found a new hiding place for its future. But that winter, she decided to put herself to the test.

## I

A small corner of the field  
more marginal than spatial  
offered up for the clearing  
after weeks of weeding  
the larger crop-fields  
a fragile spot  
earned with the rigor  
of newfound desires  
her mother  
watching from afar  
eyes aslant  
the look of suspect  
a curious pit  
in the ambivalence of transit

## II

she went on tilling the soil  
the late November sun  
dry and unforgiving  
but youth was on her side  
by the time nativity set in  
she had completed the task  
every seed carefully laden  
with the weight of her longing

III

*spring spring*

*when was it to arrive*

where she would discover

alas

the explosive force of those tiny implants which had overtaken every inch of the vast family terrain, submerged fragments of yam and wild potatoes, thwarted from ripening by a sea of fresh grass unleashed from that tiny corner where she'd planted her belief  
a wild directionless growth demolishing everything that came its way

still

in that moment, swaying under the moonlight

a river of emerald

as if good fortune of another kind could forge that old alliance between man and earth

this supercilious new stranger

the color of *greed* itself

alien to her mother's eye, novel to hers.

***The future: 2200***

Shortly after, a soft rain coming in, the droplets erasing this image, of her past unravelling on the surface of the lake. Then a whirlpool, deep as it was dark, opening in the center. I was pulled into the magnetic loop of this torrential portal and swallowed whole by its force field. Inside, I discovered that what I'd perceived to be a water body was in fact an underworld.

a timekeeper

the numbers 2-2-0-0

asking for the co-ordinates

of a place in time

*Imphal*

nascent forever

in the believer's mind

descending into the underbelly of time itself

a narrow ravine

gave way to his boat

the thickness of silence, clogging my senses

soon enough we enter the scene

at the peripheral beginning of this ringlet, there was the glimpse of my mother's vision

the shape of antiquity

in the form of that landscape

where land and sea and sky

communed as the body of Nature

Is this a virginal zone?

Is this the place of first contact?

The river of emerald coiling in her eyes  
the ring of possibility it contained

but as the future is not yet arrived  
*still contingent*  
only fragments of its endings  
suspend in mirage

a few threads unspooling

*on one end  
the earth dry—  
wilted and desolate  
scorched with the remains of extraction  
the tropical foilage  
a scar of the past*

*riverbeds unleashing  
the end of (re)sources  
where once the snake had mingled  
with the winding snail  
and the croaking frog  
nested in the high delight  
of an early rainshower*

*now all but emptiness  
flayed out in the open  
the shapes of fossil  
hollowed in  
by caskets of civilization  
entrails of a city  
once been*

Is this Nature's revenge?  
can she purge us of our presence?

*the cosmic balance of motion  
undone by greed—  
species madness*

Where does it end?  
Who does it belong to—  
this fate?

*The present as passing*

Another clearing, more familiar, closer to this moment. This is our front gate, this is our colony, this is our father's limit, this is the residue of his merciless city job, this is the lake of reason.

It swells up during the monsoons

It distracts us from the city's violence—

perpetual  
like the buzz of insects  
at the edge of nightfall

A temporal lake pooling in seasonal rainfall

A mask of beauty over the currents of doubt

In my early years when I was someplace far away  
mother came for me in a dream

The city was burning  
The rivers were flowing  
The birds were leaving

out on the streets  
mobs of collusion  
formless and faceless  
*lethal* in their deception of victimhood  
majoritarian peculiarities  
insatiable  
invincible  
out and about  
hunting for the unspeakable  
What is this evil? (*I asked*)  
It has no name (*She said*)

The rivers—flowing  
The birds—leaving  
The trees—moving

How to speak of redemption,  
of saving the planet—  
in whose name?

amidst the terror  
of blood curdling cries  
human acts

fire all around  
ruthlessly consuming  
the thin veneer of civility  
as we weave through the smog  
she is holding my angst  
limp with disbelief

the city of my youth  
crumbling into ashes

The neighbors are leaving  
Their gardens are yawning  
The leaves are falling

In the shade of an old bamboo grove  
where some of our memories are nested  
I fish up an old Roethke poem, its music still intact:  
“I learned not to fear infinity,  
The far field, the windy cliffs of forever,  
The dying of time in the white light of tomorrow,  
The wheel turning away from itself,  
The sprawl of the wave,  
The on-coming water.”

A single river bird flashes by  
pristine white against the thick grey of cynicism  
I lay down inchoate  
I pledge allegiance to her beauty.





Haipi Village, Manipur, image by Joseph Len Haokip