



BITS Pilani
Pilani Campus



An International Conference on

Climate Change and Epistemic Recovery: Indigenous Pathways

6-7 February, 2027

Organised by

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani,
Pilani Campus

in academic collaboration with

Department of English, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

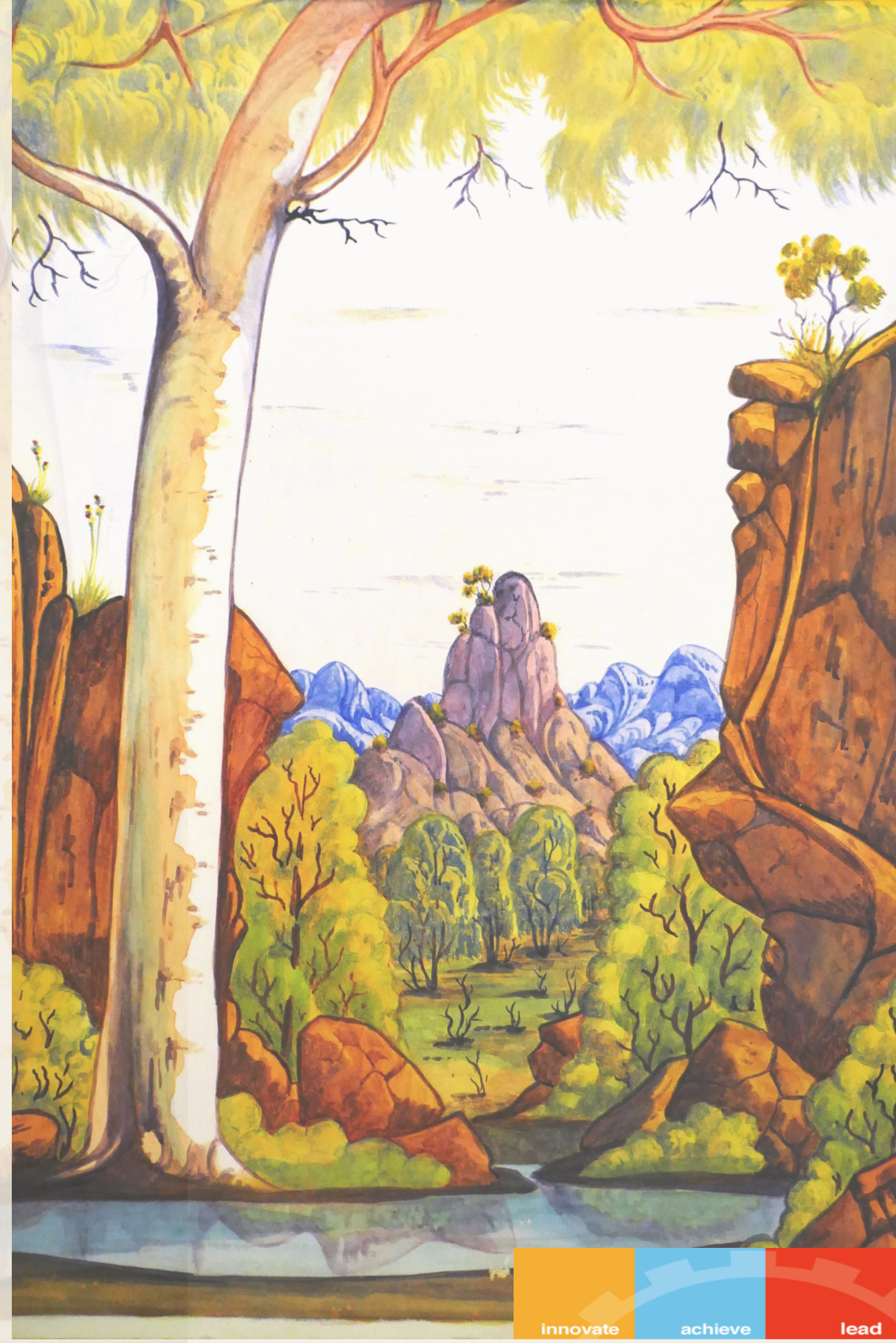
Timeline

Submission of abstract:

1 October 2026

Notification of Acceptance:

7 October 2026



innovate

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lead

The politically loaded term “Indigenous” is widely used by ethnic communities to reclaim their rights. This approach seems to divide the world into two halves: one half (Indigenous) resisting the hegemonic forces of industrialisation-driven society and economy; the other half (non-Indigenous) caught in the cross-current of modernity. John A Grim explains, “Who are indigenous peoples? In a straight forward manner Indigenous means anything produced, growing, or living naturally in a particular region or environment. Yet, there are semantic and political difficulties involved in determining who is Indigenous” (2017, xxxvii) because of the geospatial making of territories since the beginning of colonisation in fifteenth century. Given this, when human communities are relocated to new environments, following colonisation of Indigenous spaces and places within the country, can they be considered Indigenous? Another difficulty in determining Indigeneity is the phrase “particular region,” because many ethnic communities had settled, resettled, and moved from one place to another before modern nation-states came to being.

A closer look into the politicised identity of Indigeneity in South Asia will familiarise us with the precarious state of being of the Indigenous communities who constantly face persecution by ethnic militias for contesting ethnicities. Therefore, in postcolonial nation-states, will the Tripuri, Chakma, and Rajbangshi communities lose Indigeneity due to their displacement from Bangladesh when they are forced to migrate to India due to ethnic violence? Grim points out that according to the United Nations, “Indigenous refers to ethnic groups with clear cultural, linguistic, and kinship bonds who have been so marginalized by modern nation-states that their inherent dignity and coherence as societies are in danger of being lost” (Grim 2001, xxxvii). Many of these Indigenous communities have suffered cultural loss as the traditional way of life waned under new socio-political and cultural influences following the colonisation of Indigenous lands, although some practices remain in residual forms. Following the occupation by the Dutch VOC, Indonesia’s Banda Island was peopled with indentured nutmeg-plantation workers from other Asian countries including India, who now have become Indigenous people there (Ghosh 2021). While writing about the darker side of Modernity, Decolonial scholars like Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Dunford Robin have argued that coloniality made possible the accumulation of capital that depended on the disposability of the Indigenous bodies. Therefore, the modern world, which is an extension of the old order and is based on the matrix of coloniality, signifies the imposition of global coloniality that remain coercive.

In order to contest this coloniality of power one must look into the different sites for recovery of the epistemes of indigenous cosmologies, because these communities preserve some practices rooted in local traditional culture. In settler colonies, the problem emerged differently. In Canada, the US, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, White-settler colonialism has eroded the cultural identities, traditional knowledge systems, and sovereignty over lands of Indigenous communities. Māori, Native Americans, and Aboriginal Australians have been deeply impacted by colonialism and modernity because the colonizers, through coercive dispossession of Indigenous territories, imposed a foreign legal and economic system, and social structure thereby marginalizing the Indigenous cultures and excluding them from decision-making process about their land and resources (Simpson 2004). According to Wolfe (2006), settler colonialism is characterized by a logic of elimination, where the primary aim is not just to exploit Indigenous peoples but to displace them to establish settler societies. This displacement has resulted in a loss of access to traditional territories and resources, which have been vital to Indigenous ways of life. The slaves and indentured labourers who were brought to these countries during colonial times are also doubly marginalized.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous communities have shown remarkable resilience and agency. Many are actively revitalizing their languages, reclaiming traditional knowledge, and fighting for legal recognition of land and cultural rights. There is a growing movement among Indigenous scholars and activists to decolonize research and education, seeking to re-centre Indigenous perspectives and narratives that were long suppressed by colonial histories (Smith 2012). According to the United Nations, “200 groups of Indigenous Peoples currently live in voluntary isolation and initial contact ... They choose to live detached from the rest of the world and their mobility pattern allows them to engage in gathering and hunting, thereby preserving their cultures and languages” (United Nations). Apart from these Indigenous communities, there are others as well such as the Marshallese, who live in societies deeply impacted by nuclear testing legacy of the United States and rising sea levels. Indigenous communities are oftentimes split between those in favour of the economic benefits of these sorts of projects and those concerned about the impacts of development on land and culture.

The impact of such transformations could be psychological (Albrecht, 2011), social and cultural (McGregor, 2012), and economic according to the United Nations (Climate Change). Indigenous people's deep connection to the land, traditional ways of living (see Ford, et al., 2016), and unique knowledge systems make them both exceptionally vulnerable to the effects of climate change and critically important to understanding its nuances. For instance, "From a Māori perspective forests, rivers, and oceans can have their mauri restored through rituals of conservation accompanied by appropriate ritual prayer forms and ceremonies" (Henare 2001, 209). In much the same way, nature worship and rituals among Hindus (Porteous 1928, 199; Biswas & Ryan 2024) and ethnic communities like the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and Bodos of Assam (and other places where they inhabit) explain the reverence of humankind towards the environment. This reverence finds concrete expression in the ancient Indian tradition of sacred groves, "tracts of sacred forests which have been completely or nearly completely immune from human interference on grounds of religious beliefs" (Gadgil and Vartak 1974, 313).

Nature conservation stems either from awe toward a superior power, or from a sense of equality that confers respect on all human and non-human life forms, as embodied in Bishnoi conservation philosophy, which regards trees and animals as entitled to the same right to life as humans. Considering that the lure of modernity and its escalating impact on the globe are now an unalterable reality, there is a need to re-envision a sustainable way of life based on an eco-friendly system by revisiting the wisdom of Indigenous communities. Indigenous knowledge systems certainly have much to offer as a way of remedy (Houde 2007). According to the UN, "Climate change poses threats and dangers to the survival of indigenous communities worldwide, even though indigenous peoples contribute the least to greenhouse emissions. Indigenous peoples are vital to and active in, the many ecosystems that inhabit their lands and territories and may therefore help enhance the resilience of these ecosystems. In addition, indigenous peoples interpret and react to the impacts of climate change in creative ways, drawing on traditional knowledge and other technologies to find solutions which may help society at large to cope with impending changes."

We invite scholarly responses that can offer critical insight into the following thematic lines:

- Indian Knowledge Systems and climate change
- Indigenous knowledge systems and climate change
- Folk-traditions, folklores, biocultural knowledge, and the non-human
- Performance traditions, such as theatre and ritual, as sites of ecological and cosmological knowledge
- Psychological impacts due to climate change and land degradation
- Stories of resilience, resistance, recovery, and hope
- Role of national and international forums in addressing the impacts of climate change on Indigenous communities
- Role of literature, music, film, pop culture in articulating the discourses of environment, and Indigeneity
- Pedagogical interventions to spread awareness of Indigeneity
- Spirit of nature/ and the Earth as a living entity in Indigenous cultures of South and Southeast Asia
- Decolonizing modernity in the Anthropocene and its alternatives
- Religion, environment, and Indigeneity in the Anthropocene
- The Capitalocene and climate change
- War, conflict, migration, and climate change
- Environmental and biocultural justice
- Vitalism and Indigenous cosmologies

Submission Guidelines:

The international conference will be held on February 6 and 7, 2027, at **Pilani, Rajasthan**.

Participants should send their abstracts of 200 words (MS Word, Times New Roman, 12 Font) with five keywords and a biographical note to **bitsbodoconference@gmail.com**.

Participants whose abstracts are selected will be notified by 7 October 2026.

Registration Fees:

Faculty Members: Rs 4000

Research Scholars/Students: Rs 2000

Support with accommodation will be provided upon request.

(The Registration Fee covers only food and registration kits)

Publication:

Only a handful of papers presented at the conference and selected through a rigorous anonymous peer-review process may be published in an edited volume. De Gruyter Brill has expressed some interest in publishing the volume, and we are also in consultation with reputable journals. It is therefore possible that, in addition to the edited volume, a special issue of a Scopus-indexed journal may also be published.

Conference Convenors:

Dr. Prateek (Convenor)

Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus.

Prof. Debajyoti Biswas (Co-Convenor),

Professor, Department of English,
Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

For inquiry, write to: **bitsbodoconference@gmail.com**

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Balaljaka (*Tree Ant*).” Bark Painting. Yirrkala Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia. Hood Museum. <https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/objects/2006.109.1#>

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