

Environmental Mayhem in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*: An Ecocritical Study

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Abstract

Ecocriticism is an emerging arena of literary criticism that questions humans' anthropocentric tendency to dominate nature. This study scrutinizes Bangla writer Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aranyak* (1939) from the ecocritical perspective. The Bangla novel *Aranyak* was translated into English by Rimli Bhattacharya in 2002, and she titled the translated novel *Aranyak: Of the Forest*. A qualitative textual analysis approach is adopted to conduct this study. Primary data is collected from the translated version of the novel. This study also gathers required information from several authentic sources, such as journals, newspapers, websites, and books. The novel revolves around the central character Satyacharan, who works as an estate manager. Satyacharan's anthropocentric tendency is expressed throughout the novel since his only task is to lease the forests among the tenants. In an exceptional way, Satyacharan's biocentric feeling also develops with time when he feels that he is accountable for the ecological apocalypse. At the end of the novel, Bibhutibhushan emphasizes a biocentric view as all forms of things (living and nonliving) possess intrinsic value. *Aranyak* is a narrative of giving up contemporary urban life in an effort to return to nature and rejuvenate oneself. Overall, *Aranyak* is about a city man falling in love with the forests. A melancholic tone of reminiscence and repentance focusing on environmental destruction adds a profound depth to *Aranyak*'s plot.

Key words: Ecocritical Study, Textual Analysis, Environmentalism of the Poor, Anthropocentric and Biocentric Approach, Shallow and Deep Ecology

Introduction

The crux of the study is to evaluate the novel *Aranyak*¹ by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay from the perspective of ecocriticism. Even over 80 years after its publication, this novel still enthralls the readers. Bandyopadhyay is closely associated with rural Bengal and those who live there. The present researcher scrutinizes how Bandyopadhyay promotes environmental issues in his novel *Aranyak*. *Aranyak* is a novel originally written in the Bangla language. The novel was later translated into English by Rimli Bhattacharya in 2002. Rimli Bhattacharya titled the translated novel *Aranyak: Of the Forest*.² *Aranyak* was composed between 1937 and 1939 and was

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¹ B. Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, Kolkata: Kattayani Book Stall, 1939.

² R. Bhattacharya, translator, *Aranyak: of the Forest*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002.

published in 1939. Since its premiere, scholars have commended Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* for its antique, social, and ecological significance. It is not an exaggerated statement to opine that there is no protagonist in the novel *Aranyak*. Instead, it could be argued that the forest itself is the vital character of the novel *Aranyak* since the forest drives the action of the plot. This study reveals how the tenants are dependent on the forest for their livelihood. All the characters in the novel are intimately connected to the forest. Moreover, this novel vividly depicts the struggles of outcast life. Ecocriticism examines how natural resources and lands are used and abused,³ an argument central to *Aranyak*. There is a notable instance of land abuse in *Aranyak*. This paper seeks to illustrate the extent of environmental mayhem caused by cultivation and highlight Bibhutibhushan's eco-consciousness regarding Bengali nature and culture.

Ghosal and Modak unearth ecological identities by exploring place/self in Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*. They have explored how an individual like Satyacharan manifests a profound sense of place attachment.⁴ Moreover, Fakrul Alam, a renowned Bengali professor and writer, scrutinizes Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* ecocritically. Alam opines that Chinua Achebe discloses through his writings how the advent of colonization instigates a sense of tension in the native Africans' linking to nature. Several inherent things of the Africans fall apart, such as the oneness between African nature and culture and their closeness to the environment. Alam argues that Africans must be reconnected with the environment to make themselves 'complete' again.⁵ Likewise, in *Aranyak*, the Bhagalpur estate falls apart due to environmental mayhem. Satyacharan, the crucial character of the novel *Aranyak*, falls apart emotionally when he finds himself liable for the destruction of the Bhagalpur estate. As an estate manager, Satyacharan's task is to lease the land. So, he is bound to abolish the creation of the forest-goddess though he is reluctant to lease the land among the tenants. Finally, the biocentric notion arises in him. Satyacharan and his partner Jugalprasad, two nature-loving souls, embellish the forest by planting many rare species of basils and plantlets. So, it could be said that *Aranyak* is a mix of diligence as well as repentance, as Satyacharan points out: "By my hands was destroyed an unfettered playground of nature. I know too, that for this act the forest gods will never forgive me".⁶

³ C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm, (eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. 81.

⁴ A. Ghosal and A. Modak, 'Unearthing Ecological Identities: An Exploration of Place/Self in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*', *ASIATIC*, Vol. 17, No. 2, December, 2023.

⁵ F. Alam, "Reading *Things Fall Apart* Ecocritically", *Metropolitan University Journal*, Vol. 3, 2022.

⁶ Bhattacharya, Op. cit., 2002, p. ix.

In *Aranyak*, poor tenants suffer greatly due to a lack of environmental justice. Joan Martinez-Alier's concept of 'the Environmentalism of the Poor' aligns deeply with 'environmental justice' approaches. Environmental justice is a US-based social movement that began in the 1980s in response to environmental injustice.⁷ Environmental injustice happens when contradictory environmental policy, resource extraction, hazardous production, and the use of other natural resources such as air, land and water negatively impact impoverished or marginalized communities.⁸ The environmentalism of the poor declares 'social justice'⁹ and promises that the battle for human rights and environment is unavoidable.¹⁰ It is obvious that environmental justice challenges man's insatiable desire to dominate nature. It is a myth that human beings are superior to other nonhumans. We ought to modify our self-destructive intentions because nature is not a subordinate but a co-inhabitant of the ecosystem. Human beings are just a minor part of the ecosystem. Our attitude to nature must be ethical and sensible to avoid ecological disasters. In *Aranyak*, the poor tenants and tribal communities of the estate are the victims of environmental injustice.

Broadly speaking, this study endeavors to explain how marginalized people depend on the environment, scrutinize how environmental change destroys human comforts, and inquire how deforestation causes ecological degradation, focusing on *Aranyak*. It is a qualitative study. The researcher has adopted a textual analysis method to analyze the novel critically. Textual analysis is the "process of decoding messages for overt and covert meanings",¹¹ and this method implicates "understanding language, symbols, and/or pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences".¹² Primary data has been collected from the novel's English-translated edition by Rimli Bhattacharya who titled the translated novel as *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (2002). The secondary data for this study is also collected from several reliable sources, including books, journals, newspapers, websites, and other publications. The use of imagery, written words, symbols, similes, metaphors, and the allegorical elements of *Aranyak: Of the Forest* has been textually analyzed from the perspective of the ecocritical canon. The literal and figurative meanings derived from textual analysis have been strongly bound up

⁷ J. Sze and J. K. London, "Environmental Justice at the Crossroads", *Sociology Compass*, Vol. (2/4), 2008, p. 1331.

⁸ Ibid., pp.1335-1337.

⁹ D. Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements and Nature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, p. 4.

¹⁰ J. Martinez-Alier, "The environmentalism of the poor", *Geoforum*, 2014, p. 240.

¹¹ M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, Sage Publications, 2017, p. 970.

¹² Ibid, p.1753.

with different notions of ecocriticism, such as anthropocentric and biocentric approach, shallow and deep ecology to perceive the representation of environmental mayhem in *Aranyak*. Additionally, many critics argue that *Aranyak* can be interpreted through the lens of sustainable development because it challenges the typical idea of 'development'. Ecocriticism also intends to promote the notion of 'sustainable development'.

Satyacharan's New Home: Transition from Metropolitan to Aranya (Forest)

Aranyak is not only the story of Satyacharan, a metropolitan man forced to live in a remote area due to poverty; it is also the story of the "Aranya" (Aranya means forest) on which he and other outcasts depend for their sustenance. A typical unemployed boy, Satyacharan, searches for a job in Kolkata city. Abinash, Satyacharan's college friend, offers him a job as an estate manager. Satyacharan gets the responsibility of taking care of "thirty thousand bighas of Jungleland"¹³ as an estate supervisor. The estate is located in Bhagalpur, Labtulia and Purnia in India. Initially, he struggles to cope with the jungle life due to his upbringing in Kolkata city. At the very beginning of his journey toward the estate, he feels a sense of loneliness and he utters: "The life I was about to begin was going to be very lonely—as lonely as the winter evening, the melancholy spaces before me and the bluish line of the distant forests".¹⁴

In the opening scene of the novel, Satyacharan encounters an unpleasant atmosphere in his new home, referred to as a katcheri, made of wood, straw, and bamboo. He works in a place devoid of friends, theatres, films, and music. Moreover, his stay in the jungle incurs traumatic experiences. He describes his sufferings by stating that "those first ten days were excruciating... it was far better to stay on half-starving in Calcutta than stifle to death here".¹⁵ It seems that Satyacharan's destiny takes him to a place where life and death instinctively coexist since he finds the forest stifling. He is unable to perceive the local language. Moreover, there is also the fear of robbery. His heart reverberates with dreadful loneliness since he is entirely friendless in the deep jungle. He shivers with the cold and has no idea how to handle the savage winter. Ghosts and uncanny sounds haunt him constantly. He realizes he has trespassed into an unknown fairy kingdom devoid of human beings. Furthermore, Ramchandra Singh, one of the amins (surveyors) of the estate, has gone mad because a white dog disturbs him every night. It is a nightmare for Ramchandra. In addition, Satyacharan discovers a strand of a woman's black hair under Ramchandra's bed, though a woman is not supposed to enter Ramchandra's tent. Likewise, Satyacharan handles the weird

¹³ Bhattacharya, Op. cit., 2002, p.8.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.9.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.10.

incidents in the Bomaiburu jungle. Ramchandra and his son rent out a stretch of char in the jungle. The older man, Ramchandra, notices that a woman often sneaks out of their house at night. He suspects that his son has an illicit relationship with the woman despite not knowing her. Surprisingly, his son replies that he often sees a dog and a woman slowly moving out of the room in the blink of an eye. This eerie incident ends unexpectedly when the old tenant's son dies in the Bomaiburu jungle. Ashrafi Tindale, Ramchandra's peada (a peon assigned for postal duties), also witnesses the uncanny phenomenon. In addition, Tindale hears disturbing rumors about the Bomaiburu jungle. So, he reminisces about his surrealistic experiences by telling strange stories: "I'd heard my grandfather..... found a group of beautiful young girls holding hands and dancing away in the moonlight..... If they chance upon a human..., they kill him too".¹⁶ Moreover, Satyacharan's katcheri walls are so thin that even a dog pushing against them from the outside can make the walls collapse. During the dry season, he faces wildfires burning through the woodland or grassland of the forestscape. Severe droughts and heat waves make their life miserable. For instance, one afternoon in Baisakh (first month of Bangla Calendar), Satyacharan hears the crunching sound of the fire killing several wild animals.

The Emergence of the Biocentric Approaches of Satyacharan and Others

However, as the narrative progresses, Satyacharan gets overwhelmed with the beauty of the Lobtulia-baihar or Ajmabad. He deeply feels the late-night moon and celebrates the exquisiteness of nature by saying: "this was the first time I experienced the overwhelming beauty of a moonlit night in Phulkia-baihar..... that was frightening even to look at".¹⁷ Likewise, one quiescent afternoon, Satyacharan savors the splendor of the setting sun on the western skyline. In the prologue of the novel, the ecstatic beauty of nature is also expressed through the melancholic tone of Satyacharan as he emits: "when I think now of the forestlands of Lobtulia-baihar or AjmabadI feel as though.... there is no such land to be found in all the world".¹⁸ The desolate and majestic landscape deeply influences Satyacharan's narratives. He starts to feel that he cannot return to the hustle and bustle of Calcutta. Additionally, he cannot avoid the fragrance of the sun-scorched earth and the freedom and freshness it epitomizes. It is obvious that Satyacharan's nostalgia centers on rural life and its grandeur.

One of the intents of *Aranyak* is to portray a landscape that is full of natural exquisiteness and resources. Nature provides the inhabitants of the estate with food

¹⁶ Bhattacharya, Op. cit., pp. 66-67.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

and shelter. Cattle grazing on the open landscape is a familiar sight in the estate. Ganu Mahato, a poor tenant, earns his livelihood by farming in the forestland. He pays the landlord in exchange for the privilege of grazing his buffaloes in the desolate jungle. He gets milk from his buffaloes. He churns butter from the milk and then turns it into ghee, which he sells in the market. The jungle also provides them with the necessary food. Ganu Mahato's words show nature's role in providing necessary food: "I boil the kheri grains and pick the bathua greens that grow wild in the jungle. I boil with a bit of salt and these I eat".¹⁹

At the beginning of the narrative, the old accountant, Goshto Chakrabarti, foretells that Satyacharan will fall in love with the jungle. As predicted, Satyacharan indeed falls in love with the nature. The jungle gets inside him since he is entranced by the lush green landscapes, woodlands, pile of stones, flocks of parrots, groups of neelgai, and the sun's rays. Satyacharan's attitude towards the animals indicates his respect for animal life. Once, he observes that two neelgais on one side of a pond and on the other, a pair of hyenas. But he refused "to riddle with bullets the innocent bodies of those thirsty creatures of the wild".²⁰ The way *Aranyak* depicts the tight ties between the inhabitants and their physical surroundings sets it apart from other novels.

Satyacharan's haunting depiction of the forest is the manifestation of his exotic experience. He visits a village fair held beyond his territory. It is around a thirty-mile journey. He gets mesmerized by the beauty of the jungle while passing the territory riding his horse. In addition, the landscape's exquisiteness engulfs him to the point that he has almost forgotten his native land and seems on the verge of forgetting his family and friends. Satyacharan affirmed that by saying: "What a strange place it was—so rude and wild, yet so beautiful".²¹ Satyacharan returns from the fair in the evening. He could not resist his "temptation of riding on his own through the uninhabited hills and forests on the night of spring when the moon was so resplendent"²² though there is a fear of attacks by ruthless predators like tiger, bear and wild buffaloes. His horse rides through the moonlit forest are so ecstatic that he "would not wish to interchange this contentment for all the prosperity in this world".²³ Undoubtedly, Satyacharan is intimately connected to the wilderness. He proclaims that the elegance of our planet will never be visible to those who do not appreciate the forest's elegance or have never been seduced by the beauty of the skyline.

¹⁹ I. Bhattacharya, Op. cit., p. 24.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

²¹ Ibid, p. 56.

²² Ibid, p. 59.

²³ Ibid, p. 61.

Arne Naess, founder of environmental philosophy, developed the notion of deep ecology in the early 1970.²⁴ Deep ecology's fundamental belief is that the entire living environment of the universe must have moral and legal rights to live and embellish independently. It is referred to as "deep" because it is thought to delve into the essence of human interaction with the natural environment.²⁵ One of the tenants, Raju Parey, desires to restore the forests. He is emotionally connected to nature. Deep ecologists might consider his connection to nature as the development of his 'ecological self' as we see his life-long lamentations for environmental loss. He rents some land to grow crops in the jungle. He clears only fifteen kathas of land in a year and a half, though he is allocated two bighas in the dense forest of Lobtulia-baihar. Actually, Raju does not like destroying forests indiscriminately. In his words, when the air becomes polluted, "the gods choose not to stay on any longer"²⁶ on earth.

Satyacharan serves as a bridge between the jungle and the typical civilized world. It is nature that has forced him to abandon his home, giving him a feeling of wanderlust. Satyacharan's journey from a municipality to the immense territory of forest land helps him achieve pastoral spirituality and environmental sagacity. He wanders amidst the hypnotizing wilderness of nature. He describes the ecstasy of a typical Lobtulia-baihar night using the following words: "Beauty that makes one mad.....such fierce beauty is not for the faint-hearted".²⁷

Moreover, Satyacharan often visits a vast lake called Saraswati Kundi (a body of water). Saraswati Kundi is surrounded by dense forest. The vast blue waters of Saraswati Kundi, like a half-moon, are exceptional beauties that captivate the eyes of Satyacharan. The sight of "clear blue water, the blue strips of the sky, and the blurry sketches of mountains"²⁸ enralls Satyacharan's mind to the fullest. Furthermore, Satyacharan is utterly disillusioned with the mild and calm breeze, the bird's song, and the fragrance of flowers. The jungle also shelters homeless people like the old sadhu, who is accustomed to eating the boiled cores of bamboo, ripe gooseberries, and custard apples collected from the jungle. Additionally, the jungle provides medicinal roots and herbs that serve as panaceas.

Jugalprasad, one of the mystic characters in *Aranyak* and an eco-activist, attempts to plant trees in the dense forestland of Saraswati Kundi. He is assigned to work at the

²⁴ B. Taylor, M. Zimmerman, B. E. Taylor, (ed.), "Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, London: Continuum International", Vol.1, 2005, pp. 456–60.

²⁵ M. Smith, "Deep Ecology: What is Said and (to be) Done?", *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2015, pp. 141–156.

²⁶ Bhattacharya, Op. cit., 2002, p.74.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 95-96.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 102.

Ajmabad Katcheri as a mohuree (a clerk), but his heart belongs to the groves and caverns of Saraswati Kundi. He introduces English creepers and different wildflowers. He endeavors to beautify the vast landscape of Saraswati Kundi using his resources—time and money—even though he has no legal claim to the forests. Reflecting on his eco-consciousness, he remarks: “I’ve collected them from far off places,....in another two years they will come up and start flowering”.²⁹ In addition, Jugalprasad tries to introduce different kinds of flowers, creepers and trees that are not commonly found in the estate. For example, he is the first to plant Bhandi flowers in his village. He collects Bhandi flower seeds from the banks of the Kushi River, 15 miles from his village. On top of that, it is impossible to make a profit by dispersing seeds around the forestland. Even though he is needy, he makes no profit from this arduous work. However, he has a strong desire and constant effort to boost the beauty of the forests. Jugalprasad's joy is limitless, observing that Satyacharan has heavily seeded the forests of Saraswati Kundi with English wildflowers, yellow Dhatura-like flowers, and wild Jui creepers. Moreover, Jugalprasad covers lake Saraswati Kundi with wild Baira creepers collected from Purnea. The watercroft and the lotuses enhance the beauty of the lake. The plantation project costs Satyacharan a great amount of money. Satyacharan has an interest in a mysterious flower named Dudhia. He is keen to have the flower because it has a lovely appearance and an exquisite aroma. Jugalprasad spends considerable time searching through the dense Jayanti-Hills forests before returning with a number of Dudhia plant tubers.

After spending three years in and around Lobtulia and Ajmabad, Satyacharan has forgotten his hometown. Instead, he feels suffocated by the city life when he visits Patna for a few days. He suffers greatly from the narrow road. He feels a yearning to return to Lobtulia-Bihar. Satyacharan starts living in the khupri (thatched hut) in the forest. Even in a four-story home in Calcutta, he has never experienced such ease and contentment. After being in this jungle for so long, he starts acting somewhat out of control. The open forest and nature affect his preferences and attitudes. He further asserts that the tranquility of these desolate areas incurs a feeling of delight in his mind—not to be found anywhere else but in such places that are unpeopled and untouched.

Satyacharan portrays environmental mayhem through apocalyptic imagery. His employer constantly sends him letters to expedite land leasing. His prime task is to settle the tenancy agreements. He laments that in any other country, this landscape would have been nominated as a reserve forest. Satyacharan is reluctant to settle people in the area and interrupt the balance of the forests because he is aware that:

²⁹ Ibid, p. 108.

“those who would rent the land would certainly not be doing so to keep the forests pristine..... everything else would be transformed into human settlements”.³⁰ As instructed by the employer, Satyacharan travels through the estate to establish new settlers. However, instead of destroying the forestland, he falls in love with it. When alone under the open sky on a shiny night, he wonders if his hands can damage the glorious forests. The jungle magnificently woos him like a crafty seductress. Nevertheless, his employer gives him the mission of cleaning the forest. In addition, he is asked to complete his mission promptly.

Satyacharan leases the jungle land in Narha-baihar and Lobtulia to the tenants over time. This land is too fertile for cultivation. This woodland in Narha-baihar is considered one of the most attractive locations on earth. There are many different creepers, birds, and animals in Narha-baihar. Nevertheless, people clear forest trees by setting fires to make the forest suitable for cultivation. It ends with a tragedy since the tenants start fighting among themselves over the demarcation of the plots. Satyacharan becomes disheartened to see his forest burning. He expresses a sense of agony, stating that: “From far, I heard the forest crackling as it burnt; ... I could not bear to go in the direction of the fire”.³¹

The Clash between Biocentric and Anthropocentric Approaches of Satyacharan

The environment is treated as a commodity when nature is described as a product for human use. This statement implies the principles of shallow ecology that “the earth is merely a geological support for human activity”.³² Likewise, the landscape of Lobtulia, Ajmabad, Narha-baihar, Saraswati Kundi is described in terms of its usefulness, such as merely a product for human consumption. Shallow ecology highlights human-centered policies to dominate nature. Shallow ecologists disagree that the environment should be given the same rights as human beings. Additionally, shallow ecology asserts that environmental codes and principles should not exist.³³ Bandyopadhyay's evocative portrayal of the estate's landscape manifests environmental loss and the disruption of natural symphony. Most of the estate has been leased over the years. The savage hands of the encroachers chop down the trees, leading to extensive deforestation. Satyacharan squeezes out his heartache by saying: “What had taken fifty years to develop was obliterated in a matter of days.”³⁴

³⁰ Ibid, p.112.

³¹ Ibid, p.120.

³² A. Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art*, University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

³³ E. Katz, “Envisioning a De-Anthropocentrised World: Critical Comments on Anthony Weston's ‘The Incomplete Eco-Philosopher’”, *Ethics, Policy and Environment*, Vol. 14, No.1, 2011, pp. 97-101.

³⁴ Bhattacharya, Op. cit., 2002, p.207.

The evocative narrative of the novel, combining autobiographical elements, shows the extent of the environmental desecration caused by deforestation. Satyacharan never agrees to lease out the forestland around Saraswati Kundi. Moreover, Jugalprasad works strenuously to enhance the ecstasy of the forest by planting so many known and unknown flowers and trees. Frequently, Satyacharan receives requests from settlers seeking to hire the land near the Saraswati Kundi because the land is highly fertile for cultivation. He is firm in his decision not to rent the land around the lake. Nevertheless, he is asked again and again to rent the land. Satyacharan purports human ravenousness by asserting the following words: "Human beings are only too greedy; their only concern was to fill their stomachs and to survive".³⁵ On the day of his departure from the forest, nothing could stop Satyacharan from feeling culpability, which comes with the self-realization that he is liable for environmental mayhem. Satyacharan's self-realization blooms over time. Here, his "self-realization" echoes the philosophy of deep ecology since he seeks to uphold a harmonious relation with nature. He comprehends that leasing the land to settlers would result in substantial deforestation, which fills him with guilt. Besides fulfilling his duties as an estate manager, Satyacharan finds pleasure in wildlife's prettiness. He is entranced by the beauty of sunrise and sunset and the calmness of full-moon nights. Finally, Satyacharan returns to Kolkata and never goes back to the Bhagalpur estate as an employee. However, he promises to recall "the line of trees along the lake, and above all, the quietness, the all-enveloping loneliness".³⁶

At the very end of the novel, Satyacharan asks himself whether humans want infrastructural development or peace of mind. He questions the purpose of development that fails to attain happiness. In this case, we can refer to a query raised by the eminent columnist Dipankar Roy. He asks, "Does the path taken by the 'modern' man, which, through genetic engineering, heavy industry, nuclear power plants, service industry, global capital, and informatics, take him to happiness"?³⁷ The answer might be a big "no". That is why Satyacharan opposes conventional development that destroys the physical environment or our inner peace of mind.

‘Environmentalism of the Poor’ and Environmental Justice for the Poor

The environmentalism of the poor refers to 'actions and concerns in situations'³⁸ where the environment provides a means of sustenance. Martinez-Alier focuses on

³⁵ Ibid, p. 208.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 209.

³⁷ D. Roy, "Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* (1939): the "Modern," the "Non-modern" and the Nation-state", *The Daily Star*, 29 September 2018.

³⁸ Martínez-Alier, Op. cit., 2014, p. 240.

the 'environmentalism of poor' and Indigenous populations' worldwide involvement in resource extraction conflicts. The cases of 'resource extraction conflicts' in poor or Indigenous communities mirror the harsh realities of the contemporary capitalist world.³⁹ Moreover, Gerber's study reveals that "corporate control over land results in displacements"⁴⁰ and the disruption of local ecosystems. Likewise, Bibhutibhushan portrays the disruption of the ecosystem caused by the landlords' colonial attitude. In *Aranyak*, he dramatizes the illegitimate benefits of bribes, gifts, and nepotism. The character of exploitation is the same everywhere, whether in a jungle or a city. In *Aranyak*, the poor tenants are afraid of prosperous tenant Rashbehari Singh since he plays the role of a colonial character. According to Sen, the powerful and the poor tenants fight over the possession of 'diara land'.⁴¹ Those who lose are forced to leave their place. The displaced and disoriented people represent the plights of the poor tenants. 'Diara' refers to the elevated strip of land when the river changes its path. The exhibition of sociopolitical condition in Bibhutibhushan's *Aranyak* is shaped by the fortunes and the misfortunes of those deeply entangled with this 'diara' land.⁴² The zamindars maintain the 'katcheris' to collect taxes from the tenants who cultivate the 'diara' land. When the amount of crop production rises, so does the tax rate. Unable to cover the increased revenue, the ryot (cultivator) is forced to leave the 'diara' land he once made productive. As per Rusati Sen, this kind of land settlement called 'hal-hasila' was common in India. Sen notes that the same issue caused the Santal Rebellion in Birbhum in 1859. In *Aranyak*, we observe that the prosperous tenant, like Rashbehari, grabs the 'diara land' due to the displacement of the poor tenant and perpetuates extreme exploitation.⁴³

The concept of 'environmental justice' advocates the morals of 'environmentalism of the poor'. To ensure environmental justice, a comfortable environment is more important for all living things than a superfluity product. Sunita Narain also discusses the 'environmentalism of the poor' in *Business Standard*, saying that "when the land is mined and trees are cut, their water source dries up or they lose grazing and agricultural fields".⁴⁴ Likewise, at the end of the *Aranyak*, the author shows that all the forests have been cleared and covered with small slums. There is no sign of green. The notion of 'environmentalism of the poor' is closely attached to other

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 239-241.

⁴⁰ J. O. Gerber, "Conflicts over industrial tree plantations in the South: Who, how and why?", *Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, February 2011, pp. 165-176.

⁴¹ R. Sen, 'Aranyapad O Manabgatha' (1993), In: *Bibhutibhushan: Dwander Binnaysh*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1998, pp. 17-44.

⁴² Bhattacharya, Op. cit., 2002, p. xv.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Martínez-Alier, Op. cit., 2014, p. 240.

issues: the defense of Indigenous territorial rights following Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the right to the purity of natural components, for instance, a mountain, a forest, or even a tree.⁴⁵ In *Aranyak*, we see how the natural elements are destroyed. The impoverished and rural people of the global 'South' are more attached to the environment than the affluent colonizers of the 'North'.⁴⁶ The British colonizers coming from the global 'North' came to the 'South' to rule the Indians. The novel *Aranyak* was written during British rule in India. In *Aranyak*, the forests are leased in time to collect revenue. First, the cultivators cut down all the trees to make the land suitable for cultivation. Local zamindars collect taxes from farmers in exchange for allowing them to farm the land. The zamindars are bound to pay most of that tax to the British government. In *Aranyak*, the zamindar system carries the colonial legacy by demonstrating how zamindars served as mediators, extracting taxes from local cultivators to support British rule. Many, unable to pay the extra tax, are forced to give up land to a lathial (a goon) like Rashbehari Singh. Undoubtedly, the poor peasants are the victims of 'environmental injustice' in *Aranyak*.

Environmental Mayhem and the Contemporary World

The tree is one of the benefactors of the environment as it plays a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. However, trees are being cut to provide people with food, clothing, and shelter. The environment loses its balance due to the lack of forests. The sensual and spiritual relationship between natural components and people is deteriorating daily. Nowadays, environmental pollution is constant. As a result, we persistently face many natural calamities, such as heat waves, landslides, cyclones, floods, and avalanches. It is said that the recent terrible coronavirus pandemic is the result of polluting our Mother Nature, and the heat of corona fever is the reality of the 'new normal world'.⁴⁷ Environmental degradation is a key concern for ecocritics, who aim to raise eco-consciousness through their works. While technology plays a vital role in advancing human civilization, its application is often misused. For example, the development of modern lethal weapons, which contribute to the loss of innocent lives worldwide, questions the ethical usage of technological knowledge. Ecocriticism deals with how the texts represent the misuse of natural properties—such as plants, soil, air, and water—and technological tools, including

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ I. Davey, "Environmentalism of the poor and sustainable development: an appraisal", *JOAAG*, Vol. 4.1, 2009, pp.1-10.

⁴⁷ O. Chikere and O. O. Wosu, "Human-Nature Interactions in the New Normal World: A Study of Selected Pandemic Poems", *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 7, 2022, pp. 1-8.

industrial waste and deadly weapons. By encouraging sustainable practices and raising ethical apprehensions, the eco-conscious novel *Aranyak* encourages readers to adopt more ecofriendly approaches.

Conclusion

The novel *Aranyak* juxtaposes a 'substantial' and an 'imaginative' position simultaneously as it demonstrates a melancholic narrative on the one hand and a potential environmental apocalypse on the other. Environmental apocalypticism is not about anticipating the end of the world.⁴⁸ Some critics have claimed that Indigenous peoples have already experienced the demise of their world as a result of colonization several centuries ago.⁴⁹ Evidently, the phenomena of 'end of the world' have already happened to Santal Pargana in *Aranyak*. Additionally, the narrative of *Aranyak* is about the demolition of plants, animals, birds, farmers, and outcasts.

Undoubtedly, Satyacharan feels immense regret for the ecological apocalypse. The dichotomy of the anthropocentric and biocentric tendency of Satyacharan is concurrently allured in the novel *Aranyak*. His anthropocentric view is revealed when he takes the initiative to lease out the lands. Simultaneously, his biocentric thought is also exposed when he introduces tree plantation plans in the forest. He has nothing to do but lease out the lands. Satyacharan's employer continuously summons him to sort out prospective lessees and draft fresh lease agreements and contacts until the whole forestland is leased out. At first, Satyacharan's urban lifestyle rebels against the forlorn forest life, but over time, nature hypnotizes him. He gradually falls in love with nature. Satyacharan and Jugalprasad take the initiative to beautify the forest. Again, nature is destroyed due to Satyacharan's assigned job, which makes him feel guilty. To sum up, Satyacharan's bifurcation of inner feelings and outer actions portrays his eco-consciousness.

Moreover, well-known columnist Roy reckons that in *Aranyak*, 'imposing agriculture' is a significant threat to the ecosphere of nature. Satyacharan's narrative portrays that the tenants of the estate rush towards modern commerce and agriculture, leaving their hunter-gatherer culture. Some are reluctant to clean the forest and work in the farmland, but they are demolished due to the consequences of colonialism. Dobru Panna, the erstwhile king of Santal Pargana, is the victim of colonialism because he and his clans avoid practicing 'colonial agriculture'. In *Aranyak*, the paradigm of agriculture is to serve the purpose of colonialism as the zamindars, who control large tracts of land, give money to the British government, and the local

⁴⁸ S. Alt, "Environmental apocalypse and space: the lost dimension of the end of the world", *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 5, 2022, pp. 903-922.

⁴⁹ K. P. Whyte, "Indigenous science (fiction) for the anthropocene: ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises", *EPE: Nature and Space*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, 2018, pp. 224-242.

tenants pay taxes to the local zamindars.⁵⁰ So, it is a vicious cycle interrelated in a triangular format of tenants-zamindars-colonialists.

In *Aranyak*, the struggles associated with the “Santal Rebellion” echo the trope of “dwelling” proposed by Garrard in his eminent book *Ecocriticism*. “Dwelling” infers the prolonged “imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry, and death, of ritual, life and work”.⁵¹ The Indigenous people, like Santals, dwell in a harmonious relationship with the environment until the advent of colonial power. However, there is nothing left, as Buddhu Singh, a local of Santal Pargana, asserts, “whatever was left was all gone in the Santal Revolt of 1862” in *Aranyak*.⁵²

⁵⁰ Roy, Op. cit., 2018.

⁵¹ Garrard, Op. cit., 2004, p. 108.

⁵² Bhattacharya, Op. cit., 2002, p. 70.