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The Department of English
University of Rajshahi

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writting.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed

Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication

Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

Contents

Ecological Consciousness and Indigenous Wisdom in Bengali Literature: A Deep Ecological Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*

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Abstract

This paper examines the ecological narratives in *Aranyer Adhikar* by Mahasweta Devi and *Aranyak* by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay through the lens of Arne Næss's deep ecology framework. Both novels challenge anthropocentric worldviews and emphasize the intrinsic value of nature, interconnectedness, and ecological egalitarianism. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi depicts the collective struggle for the rights of the Munda tribe and how the colonial and capitalist exploitation of Indigenous communities and natural resources upsets the ecological balance. On the other hand, *Aranyak* narrates the transformation of the protagonist, Satyacharan from an urbanite into someone concerned with ecological well-being, being influenced by the Indigenous Santhal philosophy of life's interconnectedness with nature. The paper discusses how these novels engage in a critique of the 'commodification' of nature and plead for an ecological and harmonious mode of existence. Further, it looks at how Bengali literature, represented by these works, has been concerned with themes of deep ecology, and the Indigenous symbiotic lifestyle long before contemporary environmental movements. The paper places the Indigenous contexts within the broad ecological discourse and asserts their pertinence to contemporary ecological and social crises.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Indigenous Wisdom, Deep Ecology, Ecological Egalitarianism, Nature Relatedness.

Introduction

Ecocriticism has been largely missing from serious literary narratives. For this reason, in *The Great Derangement* (2016), Amitav Ghosh criticizes contemporary literature for its failure to engage with the pressing reality of climate change, stating, "climate change casts a much smaller shadow within the landscape of literary fiction than it does even in the public arena. It is not hard to establish ... novels and short stories are very rarely to be glimpsed within this horizon" (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement,* 2016, 13). It can be pointed out that writings on climate change are often relegated to nonfiction or "science fiction", genres that are either seen as 'didactic' or as having limited audiences (*The Great Derangement*, 2016, 13). As a result, the mainstream 'literary imagination' fails to engage with the enormity and immediacy of the "climate crisis" (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 2016, 14).

Ghosh (2016) also argues that climate change is an "inconceivably vast" phenomenon that defies conventional narrative structures (*The Great Derangement,* 2016, 64). He compares this phenomenon to a 'cultural crisis', wherein humanity grapples with the challenge of reevaluating its position in a world that is progressively shaped by environmental instability. Therefore, Ghosh calls for a thorough transformation of fictional narratives. According to him, dealing effectively with the climate crisis is not possible through just technocratic innovation or

policy change; it needs a whole reevaluation of the human relationship with the environment in which very old desires and values are questioned and faced head-on (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 2016, 150). Ghosh (2016) emphasizes the need for literature and art to take on climate change, not as some distant possibility, but as an urgent, immediate reality. Only in this way can these forms of expression help affect the cultural transformation necessary for dealing with what he terms the most "powerful challenge" of our time (*The Great Derangement*, 2016, 118).

Though Ghosh's perspective on ecological awareness diverges from the principles of deep ecology in several respects, he criticizes literature for its inadequacy in addressing the crisis. However, much of the critique continues to operate within an anthropocentric framework. Deep ecology, conceptualized by such thinkers as Arne Næss (1986), rejects 'anthropocentrism' by emphasizing the "intrinsic value" of all living creatures and ecosystems, regardless of their usefulness to human beings (Næss, 1986, 4). It calls for biocentrism instead of the presently dominant, human centric view of the world. In contrast, Ghosh's critique of 'cultural imagination', though revolutionary, seems to put human concerns and human agency at the forefront. Ghosh puts forth climate change as the great question of our time, not only because it affects the very fabric of nature but also because it threatens the very existence of human civilization. From this perspective, it may be argued that he views nature mainly from an anthropocentric viewpoint. His appeal for such a cultural transformation, one that places literature, imagination, and storytelling at the forefront in confronting the climate crisis, while persuasive, is framed within a human-centered understanding of nature's value. As a resource it is to be protected for future generations, or as something humanity must conserve to ensure its own survival. This contrasts with the deep ecological perspective, which emphasizes the need to save nature for its intrinsic value, regardless of "human interests" (Naess, 1986, 16).

Bengali literature has often looked at the strong connections between people and nature, something that resonates with the ideas of deep ecology. Over time, this body of literature has changed to reflect the shifting social, political, and environmental situation in India. In his article, Sambhu Nath Banerjee (2024) notes that the mindset of the Bengali authors is now different from that of the authors who lived and wrote during Tagore's times (Banerjee, 2024, 39). The earlier literature in Bengali frequently portrayed serene rural or natural scenarios. After the industrial developments and independence, the contemporary Bengali authors reacted to the "vicious shift" in urban existence brought on by industrialization (Banerjee, 2024, 39). Forests and rural landscapes emerge as soothing locations for escape and adventure for the Bengali middle and elite classes. Banerjee (2024) notes that Bengalis often "cast aside the monotony of the city life and quotidian boredom; Bengali middle or elite class people enjoy taking a fancy to go out into forest areas to breathe fresh air" by visiting forests in areas like "undivided Bihar, Central India" and the "hilly parts of North Bengal" (Banerjee, 2024, 39). These places give not just a feeling of escape but also a strong basis for literature that deals with environmental problems and the complicated connection between people and nature.

Bengali writers have created a large body of novels and stories reflecting this deep ecology concern of connectedness and how things interrelate with each other. In most of them, forests are not a mere backdrop but have important roles in the story line, depicting the diversity of ecological systems. Banerjee (2024) points out that people who go to these areas "tend to get entangled with adventures and incidents," which writers use to make "spicy and entertaining" plots while also touching on environmental and human problems (Banerjee, 2024, 39). This growing style of writing shows a greater understanding of how important nature is, connecting with deep ecology's call for a deeper understanding of the values of nature.

Two prominent Bengali novels of the 20th century that take ecology as their pivotal theme are Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* (1979) and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* (1939). The paper establishes a connection between these works' ecological concern, indigenous contexts, and the ideas of Arne Naess on deep ecology. Because both books criticize anthropocentric ways of thinking and present the relationship between humans and nature, they also deal with complex issues like social stratification, colonialism, and exploitation, which make them integral works in the study of ecology.

The ecological and sociopolitical narratives of *Aranyak* and *Aranyer Adhikar* are grounded in the landscapes they describe, as well as gesturing toward larger battles against exploitation and environmental degradation. Though separated by many decades, these Bengali novels explore deeply complicated relationships binding humans, nature, and systems of power. *Aranyer Adhikar* depicts the development of collective resistance by the Munda people, under the leadership of Birsa Munda, against the colonial and capitalist exploitation of land and identity. *Aranyak* tells the story of Satyacharan, a young man who was accustomed to city life. It chronicles his struggles with isolation after becoming the estate manager of a forested area in Purnia, and his gradual embrace of ecological harmony.

The article has used concepts of deep ecology to create a framework for understanding both novels. Deep ecology, coined by Arne Næss (1972), a Norwegian philosopher, emphasises how every living thing is important on its own and has "intrinsic values" (1986, 12). This ecocritical theory connects people with everything else in nature. More specifically, it emphasizes placing the world in a perspective not for our gain or exploitation of nature. Næss (1986) criticizes "shallow ecological" views that narrow nature down to a resource for human use, instead of promoting a holistic approach and what he terms "ecological egalitarianism" when it comes to the environment (1986, 7). These two novels contain a plethora of ecocritical themes and they challenge ideas that come from colonial times and capitalistic systems. Instead, both books describe the forest as a living entity. It is sacred, and precious all on its own. In doing so, they are going beyond the usual idea that nature is just something to use.

Additionally, this article also goes over the historical and cultural realities of the time the novels deal with to contextualize the narratives. The forests of Purnia in *Aranyak* represent ecological devastation brought about by capitalist exploiters; in *Aranyer Adhikar*, the symbolic forests of Chotanagpur rise against colonialist intrusion. The latter especially brings to light the sufferings of the Munda, whose 'symbiotic' existence with their lands was disrupted by the exploitative practices of the British Raj. As records would say, it is from this exploitation of natural resources and marginalization of Indigenous communities that movements such as the Jharkhand rebellion emerged to reclaim their ecological identity.

Overall, this research analyses how these two novels reflect the precepts of deep ecology as a method for tackling climate change and other ecological disasters. One of the main purposes is to show how the novels contest anthropocentric and colonial frameworks and highlight the meaningfulness of the indigenous way of living amidst nature. The research also strives to show how two novels written in the 20th century, mirror many of the contemporary concerns about sustainability, biodiversity, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This research underlines not only the ecological and social knowledge hidden in Bengali literature but also how remarkably applicable that Indigenous knowledge is within the context of contemporary debates over ecological harmony and social justice. By giving an account of the forests and their dwellers in minute detail, Bandyopadhyay and Devi urge readers to reimagine the position that humanity has with nature, and to choose for a more inclusive and equitable coexistence.

Despite such richness of environmental themes, not many studies have been done on Bengali literature from a deep ecology perspective. Sambhu Nath Banerjee points out that the viewpoints of Bengali writers have undergone tremendous changes in the course of history, reflecting the 'socio-economic' and 'environmental' changes initiated by 'industrialization' and 'urbanization'.Therefore, applying the principles of deep ecology to Bengali literature, particularly in Indigenous contexts, opens a new avenue for understanding how these texts engage with broader ecological concerns. This research analyzes how the selected novels embody Arne Næss's concepts of the intrinsic value of nature, ecological interconnectedness, and egalitarianism. It further examines how these narratives critique colonial and capitalist exploitation of both natural resources and Indigenous communities, revealing the inseparable link between social justice and ecological balance. By tracing the movement from anthropocentric to biocentric worldviews, the study highlights the profound ecological consciousness within Bengali literature—an aspect often overlooked in favor of its socio-political interpretations.

Timeless Wisdom and Nature: Exploring Deep Ecology in Indigenous Contexts

Deep ecology, at its core, deals with the intrinsic value of all living beings. Næss (1986) says, "all organisms are knots in the biospherical net" (1). In *Aranyak*, this is voiced through the transformation of Satyacharan, who at first sees the forest in capitalistic terms but later is fascinated with the Santhal community's appreciation for the intrinsic value of life. He says, "For the sake of my job, and in serving the interests of my employer, I had leased out almost all the land in the estate, but I had not been able to bring myself to let the virgin forests of Saraswati Kundi—with its hundreds of varieties of flowers, plants, trees and vines" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 252). The transformation recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human entities independent of their use value for human beings.

This is presented similarly in Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar*, which deals with the trials and tribulations of the tribal leader Birsa Munda, who sources his life from the forests of Jharkhand. She presents the forest as more than a backdrop to the action going on but as an active element in the story deeply related to the culture and survival of the Mundas. The Mundas viewed the forest as their "mother" then wanted to protect it from the Zamindars (Devi, 1975, 2). The quote, therefore, has its association with Næss's call for local self-government recognition and power diffusion since the Munda fight against colonizing forces that attempt to relocate these people from their lands.

Additionally, the deep ecology movement supports local autonomy and decentralization. Næss (1986) in his article "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: A summary" states:

> The vulnerability of a form of life is roughly proportional to the weight of influences from afar, from outside the local region in which that form has obtained an ecological equilibrium. This understanding lends support to our efforts to strengthen local self-government and material and mental self-sufficiency (1986, 3).

From that viewpoint, the forest is more than an entity containing different flora and fauna but also culturally and spiritually relevant in describing the 'interdependence' of human beings and nature. Diversity and interconnectedness are the core elements that stand out in both *Aranyak* and *Aranyer Adhikar*, in direct relation to Næss's (1986) remark that "diversity enhances the potentialities of survival" (Næss, 1986, 2). While these novels reflect the philosophical tenets of deep ecology, they also discuss the sociopolitical dimensions of ecological disasters. Both Bandyopadhyay and Devi engage with the exploitative structure of colonialism and capitalism, which exploits natural resources and subaltern communities in a manner that interweaves

environmental and social injustice. For example, in *Aranyer Adhikar*, the forest becomes a site of resistance, where Birsa and his companions try to regain their rightful claims over the land and resources.

Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* contains vivid depictions of the forest, an ecosystem imbued with life, diversity, and sacredness. In the novel, Devi depicted the native people as one with nature, where they addressed nature as up above them, not an object or resource, but a holy, nurturing mother whom they must respect and pay devotion to (Devi, 1975, 2). Their respect for the forest stemmed from the fact that their existence depended upon it. Take away the forest, and their lifestyle would be at risk. Devi, in her novel, has emphasized how the Mundas were living in relative concord with their surrounding natural environment until the British Raj forcibly usurped their lands. Devi narrates how, before colonial land expropriation, life was uncomplicated and mainly linked with the forest, people hunted in the jungle for their food, grazed their cattle in the jungles, and cleared small tracts of land to till for crops (Devi, 1975, 24).

It was not a relationship of utilitarian intent but one which was all the more deep-rooted, being cultural and spiritual (Devi, 1975, 179). The forest for the Mundas meant a living, life-giving mother, who answered to their every need. For them, this sanctity cultivated an eco-friendly lifestyle whereby the resources of the forest are garnered with great discretion so as to preserve it for generations to come. Then comes the colonial force to break the rhythm. The British started claiming vast expanses of forest land for commercial purposes, dislodging the Mundas from their age-old lifestyle (Devi, 1975, 88). Before the 21st century, Bengali literature was covering ideas about the "intrinsic value" of "nonhuman life" on our planet, concepts that align with deep ecology (Naess 4). Bengali authors like Mahasweta Devi portrayed a nuanced understanding of the environment in their works. They stress how Indigenous people are closely connected to other forms of life and stand against humans who use nature only for their own gain. Even before the world started paying attention to global environmental causes in the late 1900s, these works were dealing with topics closely related to deep environmental understanding. Current environmental talks about how to maintain our natural surroundings, the variety of life and the rights of other creatures were foreseen in these works. Moreover, the novel highlights that admiring nature is not just an ideal for how to behave, but an important part of living and preserving cultures. With her book *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi highlights how necessary forests are to the Mundas' way of living, besides being a place they hold sacred. This work shows that environmental ethics have been deeply rooted in Indigenous literature.

According to Andersson et al. (2021) there is a fundamental contrast between the indigenous worldview and the Western worldview (1). This fundamental variation is based on how nature is regarded and treated across cultures. As Andersson et al. reflected, "most Indigenous societies do not routinely differentiate between the realms of humans and the immediate environment in which humans live" (2021, 1). It is the inbred link between people and environment in most Indigenous communities that propels such communities toward treating nature not merely as a resource to be exploited but as something integral to their life. Such a perspective runs 'diametrically' opposite to the currently dominant Western framework, which generally has the tendency to commoditize nature.

The authors believe that this difference is reflected even at a linguistic level. For most Indigenous languages, there are no words regarding "nature" in the way it is defined in English, showing that the very conception of nature apart from humanity is foreign to these cultures (Andersson et al., 2021, 1). In contrast, in colonial and neocolonial practices of land management, nature is notionally opposed to humans in such a way that it has to be conserved or exploited.

This culture manifests in the establishment of national parks and protected areas. Andersson et al. cite that national parks and protected areas are “Often carved out of the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples, national parks have come to represent tragic loci of cultural loss and social marginalization for many Indigenous peoples who previously inhabited these now bordered spaces of nature” (Andersson et al., 2021, 3). These parks, taken from Indigenous lands, often rob communities of the right to hunt, fish, and practice their cultural and spiritual custom.

Similarly, the pain of the Mundas, when their holy bond with nature got broken, has been powerfully portrayed by Devi. Colonial commodification of the forest reduced the Munda’s jungle to a commodity to be used rather than a home to be loved. This upheaval threatened the very physical survival of the Mundas and the entirety of their cultural and spiritual being. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the Jharkhand movement has its roots deeply embedded in the land, people, and culture of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas, regions richly endowed with natural wealth and for this very reason historically subjected to colonialist and capitalist exploitation. For the development of Jharkhand, three major factors can be identified as central to the mobilization of indigenous communities towards resistance: "administrative unity", exploitation by "outsiders", and "ethnic difference" (Sharma, 1976, 37). Mahasweta Devi’s *Aranyer Adhikar* dramatizes this resistance through an account of Birsa Munda and the Munda rebellion, a critique of the colonial and capitalist system for disrupting the ecological and social accord of the region. The book is a historical and cultural record of how these factors culminated in shaping the rebellion and the identity with which Jharkhand today continues to be identified.

Sharma (1976) identifies “the administrative unity of the region” as one of the main causes for the Jharkhand movement, tradition has it that Jharkhand included the "Chotanagpur plateau", the "Santhal Parganas", and parts of modern-day "Orissa", "Bengal", and "Madhya Pradesh" (1976, 37-38). This centuries-old administrative unity was systematically destroyed by the British rulers. Thereby, the disintegration of unity and cohesion amongst the Indigenous people and the exploitation of their resources were furthered. Mahashweta Devi depicts this disintegration through her *Aranyer Adhikar*. This novel delineates how the British destroyed the traditional landholding system of the Mundas and replaced it with the zamindari system, in which all the power was centralized within the hands of the landlords, often outsiders (Devi, 1975, 316). The administrative change did not merely take away their home from the Mundas, it also made way for the lands that they lived in to become grounds for capitalistic expansion and natural destruction.

Devi's portrayal of the Mundas' struggle against these changes consolidates the aspect of administrative integrity. In the novel, Birsa Munda is the unifying figure who tries to regain the unity of his people by struggling against the systems imposed by the British. In his effort to protect this sacred home from colonial forces, Birsa, strives to rouse his people, declaring, "অরণ্যের অধিকার কৃষ্ণ-ভারতের আদি অধিকার। যখন সাদা মানুষের দেশ সমুদ্রের অতলে ঘুমোচ্ছিল, তখন থেকেই কৃষ্ণ-ভারতের কালো মানুষরা জঙ্গলকে মা বলে জানে" (“The right to the forest is the ancient right of the dark-skinned Indians. While the lands of the white man slept in the depths of the ocean, the dark people of ancient India have known the forest as their mother”; Devi, 1975, 84, Self-translated).

This is the second component factor mentioned in Sharma's (1976) article "exploitation of the resources and people from Jharkhand by outsiders", is also one of the central themes in *Aranyer Adhikar* (1976, 37). Richly endowed with forests, minerals, and fertile lands, the Chotanagpur plateau suffered massive exploitation during the period of colonial rule. The British and their intermediaries, the North Bihari zamindars, "businessmen, moneylenders, bureaucrats

and leaders and some of the Punjabi and Marwari businessmen are included in the category of 'dikku' in the Chhotanagpur division" and this exact class of people took possession of large tracts of land, dispossessing the native communities and commercializing their natural resources to themselves for profit (Sharma, 1976, 39).

On the topic of outsiders damaging the lives of natives, Devi (1975) writes, "চারদিক থেকে মানুষ এসেছিল। যারা এসেছিল, তারাই দিকু। ধানী জানত যারা এলে মুণ্ডাদের প্রাচীন খুটকাটি গ্রামবাবস্থা ভেঙে গেল, যারা মুন্ডাদের উচ্ছেদ করে জমি-জেরাত দখল করে নিল, তারাই দিকু। ... বিনা মজুনিতে বেগার খাটতে হত" ("People came from all directions. Those who came were all *Dikus*. Dhani knew that those who destroyed the Mundas' ancient Khutkati village system, evicted the Mundas, and seized their lands and property were the *Dikus*. ... The Mundas were made to work without any wages"; 1975, 26).

In this way, colonial forces have always been drawn to natural resources. When a powerful nation tries to colonize a weaker one they will usually justify their actions in a way that makes them seem noble. Religion and biological rhetoric are frequently used to make imperial ambitions appear justifiable. However, economic incentives are always present in the colonizers' minds. It was no different in, 1621, when Martijn Sonck and his troops arrived in Selamon, "a village in the Banda archipelago", as part of the Dutch mission to control the Banda Islands (Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, 2021, 13). The villagers resisted the Dutch control at first, but Sonck threatened to destroy their village and force the people to leave (*The Nutmeg's Curse*, 2021, 15). He and his troops would then take over the village's mosque and homes, intimidating the locals into obedience. The condition got worse and "while some villagers ... fled into the neighboring forests, a good many … stayed on, perhaps hoping that a mistake has been made", furthermore those that did decide to stay, many of whom were "women and children" had to care not to "give the Dutchmen any excuse for violence" (*The Nutmeg's Curse,* 2021, 15).

Birsa's rebellion, as articulated by Devi, could be nothing but an answer to this exploitative process. He calls upon his people to fight against the "repressive measures of the British" and to reclaim their lands as part of the basic charter of demands of the Jharkhand movement (Sharma, 1976, 39). The fact that this resistance was not essentially an issue of material survival but the right of the Mundas to survive in coherence with nature. The Sámi of Northern Finland, for example, have herded reindeer through the region's forests for generations, thereby creating precisely the wilderness that policymakers today seek to protect (Andersson et al., 2021, 4). However, Sámi herders are excluded from continuing these practices on the Finnish side of the Malla Strict Nature Preserve under the guise of maintaining "pristine wilderness" (Andersson et al., 2021, 4). This, Andersson et al. argue, creates a paradox in which tourism is allowed, yet the very Indigenous Communities responsible for creating the wilderness are kept out (2021, 4). Such policies reflect a lack of comprehension of the integrated relationship Indigenous peoples have with their environment and demonstrate the negative consequences of excluding voices of Indigenous peoples from nature conservation.

Due attention has been paid to these injustices, and the induction of the Indigenous perspective in environmental management has been sought. Drawing on experiences from Aotearoa (New Zealand), the work of Andersson et al. (2021) points to the Te Urewera Act of 2014, which accorded Te Urewera-that earlier in history had been gazetted as a national park-legal personality (2). This piece of legislation recognized the long association of the "Tūhoe people" with the land by recognizing the forest as a "living system" and, thus, not "Crown" property (Andersson et al., 2021, 2) . In this context, in 2017, the Whanganui River was given "rights of a person", enacting the Māori belief in the identity of the river (2021, 2-3). As seen in the following lines:

> For the Māori, Te Awa Tupua has always had its own identity, and, like so many other non-human entities in nature, it has been respected and acknowledged in ceremonies for centuries. And as a result of this historic agreement, now, for the first time, a settler nation's government, operating through a Western legal system and worldviews, found a way to officially accept another way of understanding the world. (Andersson et al. 2021, 2-3)

These are, however, exceptions rather than the rule. Across the world, many Indigenous communities remain excluded and marginalized in land management decisions. The authors note that despite the rhetoric of collaboration, systemic change often does not follow: "The rhetoric of 'collaboration' and 'co-management' are often deployed, but systemic change is not realized" (5). This shows the need for substantial engagement with Indigenous conceptions of nature and for the recognition of their rights.

Devi, in her novel, shows the indigenous Munda movement of not only trying to reclaim the resources but also the cultural and ethnic identity of the area. From Social to Political Movements, Sharma's article points out how the movements in South Bihar and Santhal Parganas were basically social and economic, oriented towards tribal awakening and upliftment. But gradually, the realization arose that one cannot achieve salvation without critically questioning the structures of power and authority dictated by outsiders. This transition has been poignantly captured in *Aranyer Adhikar*. Devi depicts the Munda rebellion as one that begins with social and economic grievances but assumes a political character under the leadership of Birsa. The realization that true freedom for the Mundas cannot be achieved without challenging the British and their lackeys is the larger trajectory of the movement.

The knowledge Indigenous peoples around the world have acquired through centuries of observation and interaction with the environment can provide crucial alternatives to the extractive practices typical of modern industrial civilization. As traditional ecological knowledge among the Indigenous Peoples underlines sustainability, balance, and respect for the interrelation among all life forms. Such wisdom could contrast with the dominant view of nature as something to be exploited. Naess claims (1986) that "Some have worried that the mixture of religion and environmentalism could prove a source of dogmatism, intolerance, and "mysticism" (in the sense of obscurantism). So far, there is no evidence that this is happening" (1986, 13).

At the heart of Indigenous ways of life lies an evolved knowledge system, stemming from intimate relationships with the land, plants, animals, and elements, honed over many generations (Devi, 1975, 24). That knowledge is anything but empiric; it falls squarely within a spiritual and cultural framework that underpins a sense of respect for nature. Many Indigenous peoples think of themselves as stewards or caretakers of the land rather than owners or exploiters of it. Such a worldview sharply contrasts with the exploitative mentality underpinning industrial capitalism, where natural resources are extracted without consideration of long-term consequences.

Traditional Indigenous knowledge systems are often holistic in that they consider not just the immediate surrounding environment but also the social and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Seasonal migration, agricultural practices, and the sustainable gathering and hunting of foodstuffs emanate from an informed understanding of natural cycles and rhythms within the environment. By doing so, these approaches make sure that ecosystems are left intact, with the balance of the land minimally disturbed. It is 'land-based education,' for example, where knowledge has been passed on mainly by oral traditions and through direct contact with the environment. For many indigenous cultures, knowledge of medicinal plants, forests, and animals is unwritten and passed through direct experience, storytelling, rituals, and songs. The kind of transmission of knowledge described means close contact between the person and their

surroundings, developing respect for the land as a living, dynamic entity. As seen in the following passage MacDonald (2023) states:

> Relationship with the land as a central feature or concept rooted in Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. Land-based implies a deep connection with and non-separation between human beings and the natural world. A reference to land includes all aspects of the natural world: plants, animals, ancestors, spirits, natural features, and environment (air, water, earth, minerals). The term can also be used in reference to a physical location or geographical concept. (MacDonald, 2023, 7)

For many indigenous cultures, knowledge of medicinal plants, forests, and animals is unwritten and passed through direct experience, storytelling, rituals, and songs. The kind of transmission of knowledge described means close contact between the person and their surroundings, developing respect for the land as a living, dynamic entity. Næss uses the term "Fourth world," referring to the marginalized people whose way of life is threatened by forces such as globalization, colonialism, and industrialization (7). He acknowledges the environmental harm the “First and Second worlds” are perpetuating on the “Third and Fourth worlds” and how they “cannot afford to pay the total cost of the war against pollution in their regions” (Næss 7).

Næss's view is in line with the general philosophy of deep ecology, in which deep changes in human values are called for. Instead of looking at nature as a collection of resource pools to be drawn upon for human benefit, it should be held that all living things and their ecosystems possess value in themselves. The survival of Indigenous cultures is not only an issue in the ongoing struggle against cultural extinction but is crucial to the preservation of ‘biological diversity’. The knowledge concerning the natural world developed by these societies provides concrete solutions to pressing ecological dilemmas, such as global warming, the devastation of forests, and the disappearance of species.

Furthermore, one of the leading ideas in Næss's (1986) philosophy is that there is an internal connection between ecological and cultural diversity, even those he “personally detest[s]” or finds “nonsensical” (1986, 15). In my opinion, the extinction of indigenous cultures is akin to the extinction of various species. While species are mutually interacting within ecosystems, so too are cultures of humans and their natural environments. The destruction of one influences the other, and the loss of either diminishes the richness and balance of the world as a whole. Because, the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, on the other hand, confer value on maintaining local ecosystems—crop production in agroecological systems and controlled burning in forests. These livelihood practices, developed over millennia, had allowed indigenous peoples to survive without depleting resources and thereby causing long-term harm to their environment. It is industrialization that disrupted these delicate systems, and often, the result is the destruction of the environment and the removal of indigenous peoples from their homes.

In Badnyopadhay’s *Aranyak,* he also deals with themes of indigenous cultures' bond with nature. The protagonist-narrator, Satyacharan, is faced with the jarring contradictions between the world of so-called civilization that he represents and that of the tribal folk who dwell in the forests, as seen in these lines, "I myself, Banwarilal, Buddhu Singh—we were all representatives of that ruthless and vainglorious Aryan civilization. And King Dobru Panna, princess Bhanumati, and prince Jogru Panna represented the ancient, vanquished, primitive people of this beautiful land" (Badnyopadhay, 2022, 187).

Satyacharan muses on the annihilation of the history of Indigenous peoples and their culture in India, in the face of Aryan conquest. He says: “Aryans traversing the perilous mountain passes of the north-west, making their way like an unstoppable torrent into an ancient India hitherto ruled by primitive tribes and clans. The subsequent history of India was composed

entirely of the history of this Aryan civilization. The history of the vanquished non-Aryans was conveniently and promptly erased from human memory" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 187). This proves how the histories of the Indigenous people were systematically suppressed, driven into obscurity through the forces of dominant civilizations. Bandyopadhyay, by having Satyacharan acknowledge this reality, foreshadows his own complicity in the destruction of his once beloved forest.

Furthermore, Bandyopadhyay (2022) brings out the spiritual attachment of the Indigenous people to nature, as preserved in their respect for the god "Tyandbaro" (188). Thus, on coming across a holy site inside the forest, Satyacharan learns of Tyandbaro's role as the guardian of the wild buffaloes: "Tyandbaro watches over us. Had it not been for him, hunters and poachers would have killed every single buffalo in the forest for their hides and horns" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 188). It is, therefore, representative of a worldview where nature and spirituality are wedded to each other, representing a belief system that preserves ecology. Satyacharan contemplated, "What if Tyandbaro really did exist? What if the legend was true?", an afterthought that marked a change in his thinking, and became receptive to the values and beliefs of the very Indigenous people with a low opinion of (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 188). Næss advocates considering religion and spirituality while promoting ecological egalitarianism. According to him, spiritual practice interrelated with ecological values may inspire harmony between human beings and nature. In his terms the "deep ecology movement tries to clarify the fundamental presuppositions underlying ... philosophy, and religion. In the shallow movement, argument comes to a halt long before this. The deep ecology movement is therefore 'the ecology movement that questions deeper'" (Næss, 1986, 10).

Therefore, it can be said religion has a part to play in environment preservation. For instance, Tyandbaro, the god of wild buffaloes, in the indigenous religion was helpful in the conservation of the buffalo and ecological balance. The buffaloes in the streets of Kolkata suffer at the hands of people due to a lack of these belief systems. Bandyopadhyay (2022) writes, "Oh Tyandbaro, I wish these were the forests of Chota Nagpur and Madhya Pradesh; I wish you would come and free these mute animals from their plight" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 188). The following lament by Satyacharn indicates the moral decline in the civilized people, to whom compassion and harmony with nature are absolutely irrelevant.

Bandyopadhyay's novel explores how the capitalist mindset is bound to cause environmental degradation. Through the eyes and interactions of its protagonist Satyacharan, Bandyopadhyay, paints an image of Purnia's gradual decimation, and a general loss of ecosystem. This is most pronounced in Satyacharan's passage through the forests of Narha Baihar and Mahalikharup, as there he saw most clearly what human settlement and exploitation of nature amounted to, and what his work as estate manager enabled. The chapter starts with Satyacharan and Jugalprasad, with the two embarking on an expedition to the Mahalikharup hill in search of rare plants and vines (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 259). Bandyopadhyay (2022) writes how en route, they traveled through the Narha Bihar slums, which had supplanted what once had been thick forestland. Bandyopadhyay writes: "the sound of maize being ground in the mortars," "smoke billowing out of mud houses," and "naked children rolling around in the dirt and dust" (2022, 259). All these images speak of the deforestation and environmental degradation that the human settlements had brought with them. As Satyacharn further remaks, "three-fourths of the jungles of Narha Baihar had disappeared,"thereby facing him with only a fragment of forest in the northern reaches, a far cry to a time when greenery stretched as far as the eye could see (2022, 259). Jugalprasad's lament over the destruction, saying, "These Gangotas ruined it all, Huzoor. These people never stick to a spot, they keep moving around from place to place. Such a beautiful forest, and they had to come and ruin it" (2022, 259). On the other hand, Satyacharan is better

able to get to the heart of the problem, stating that the economic and systemic compulsions may have contributed to such ravaging: “It is the landlords who have leased the land to these subjects, I don’t think we can blame the poor Gangotas for what happened”, And hereby, Bandyopadhyay (2022) points his critiquing pen not only at the settlers but at the big socio-economic structure that puts profit above conservation (2022, 259-260).

Bandyopadhyay also depicts how the indigenous become the first casualty in the case of deforestation and the entry of outsiders. He took great detail in telling the story of a simple forest girl, Bhanumati, along with her family to capture their condition and their link with the forest. Her family is in extremely bad shape financially. They had borrowed money from moneylenders who after their reneging had seized their cattle (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 294). Furthermore, due to their dependence on the forest, its destruction threatened their ability to survive greatly. This is reflected in the scene where a trader used to come to them to buy ghee but no longer does, showing how a breakdown in local ecosystems has an immediate effect on the traditional economies of indigenous peoples. As seen in the following lines by Bandyopadhyay (2022), "A trader from Gaya used to come and buy ghee from them, but even he had not been coming for the last three to four months" (293).

Bandyopadhyay pits the serene beauty of the forest against its approaching disappearance. Bhanumati putting flowers on her head and the group strewing flowers on King Dobru Panna’s grave symbolizes the importance indigenous people place in nature. The narrative encapsulates the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the forest for the indigenous people. Bandyopadhyay hints that the "Tyandbaro tree", a sacred place of the buffalo god, will also one day disappear (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 292). Satyacharan contemplates that one-day people may “crave to see a forest” but will find only “factories, chimneys, cars, roads, houses, and buildings” (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 292). These lines clearly show Bandyopadhyay understands the effects of deforestation and its impact on the Indigenous people most closely connected to the land. Through these vivid descriptions, Bandyopadhyay brings attention to the marginalization of indigenous communities and their last bit of resistance in the face of deforestation and the encroachment of outsiders upon their lands.

However, it does not always need to be this way. Andersson et al. (2021) argue that it is necessary to move beyond the conflict and antagonism in order to enable real collaboration, “The legacy of conflict, dispossession, and marginalization must not be forgotten, but it need not dictate our future” (Andersson et al., 2021, 6-7). Societies can create more holistic and sustainable approaches to environmental protection by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into conservation efforts. This will require not only administrative and legal changes but also a reframing of the very concept of nature, that should not be seen as something separate but as a deeply connected system that includes humanity.

Conclusion

Aranyak and *Aranyer Adhikar* both comprehensively critique the colonial and capitalistic systems that have been responsible for the exploitation of natural and human resources. Further, they inspire an imagination of an alternative future in which the values of ecological harmony, Indigenous wisdom, and social justice are deeply ingrained. Engaging with both individual transformation and collective resistance, the texts bridge the personal and the political by showing that ecological awareness and action necessarily involve both aspects.

Their relevance is far from being confined to their respective historical and cultural contexts. As the world hurtles toward ever-worsening environmental crises, these stories provide lessons of enduring relevance to ecological and social regeneration. Their indictment of

anthropocentrism and advocacy of ecological egalitarianism align with contemporary voices calling for sustainability and environmental justice. These Bengali works call for indigenous knowledge and perspectives to enter the global environmentalist discourse.

The novels *Aranyak* and *Aranyer Adhikar* thus demonstrate ways in which literature can explain complex ecological and socio-political issues. By analyzing them through deep ecology, the research has tried to demonstrate not only how their continuing relevance works but also points strongly toward an ecological conservation approach that would be holistically indivisible for human and nonhuman life and foster an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable world.

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