

Ecopoetic Notions in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's "Aranyak"

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Abstract: This study attempts to discuss the relation between human and ecological atmosphere in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's "Aranyak" where Bibhutibhushan's awareness in nature (forest) and the changing of nature in the era of capitalist world is clearly shown. The main concern of this study is to analyze Bibhutibhushan's eco-consciousness and the relation between human and nature which presented in "Aranyak" depicting some important characters of the society. To analyze the topic of discussion, this study applies Expressive theory. This study finds out that Bibhutibhushan explores nature as the source and the core of human being's solace and tranquility. He emphasizes that the natural environment must be protected and conserved to sustain human's life and our existence. This relation between human and nature influences Bibhutibhushan in writing his reputed novel "Aranayak" as the portrayal of his feeling toward nature and social condition in his period.

Keywords: Aranayak: Awareness; Ecological; Nature, World.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Aranyak is a Bengali classic novel written by one of the great novelists of Bengali literature Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (1894-1950). It was composed between 1937-1939. *Aranyak* is based on the journey of the protagonist Satyacharan and his subsequent valuable experience in the jungle of Purnia district in Bihar. Like Satyacharan, Bandyopadhyaya, the writer of the novel had left Calcutta to work in the world in the same place described as *Aranyak*. From 1924 to 1930, he worked as an assistant manager for the Pathurighata Zamindari Estate in Bhagalpur, North Bihar. In his novel the author tells the story of the struggling lives of the impoverished jungle people and an exquisite and perfect wilderness which seems to be in dire environmental crisis. In the novel, the narrator Satyacharan, is modeled largely on the writer himself. Important aspect of the novel is that by giving expression to the writer's forest experience he intentionally showed, in many cases, his environmental consciousness; so from current environmental point of view we can get much information that show the author's eco consciousness.

The plot of '*Aranyak*' does not deal with so many characters and Bibhutibhushan does not complicate the plot. It begins with Satyacharan, the protagonist's getting job with the favor of a rich friend and Satyacharan's decision to go to Purnia district to give out thirty thousand Bighas (33 decimal = 1 Bigha) of forest land to the poor subjects, as an estate manager. His job was to provide the homeless inhabitants some land for settlement and cultivation. Initially Satyacharan felt bit lonely after coming from bustling Kolkata city but the nature of Lobtulia with all its wonder gripped his mind gradually and at last he becomes mesmerized entirely. From the outset the pantheistic nature of Satya seems to be in a tug of war between his fascination for the natural beauty of Lobtulia and demolition of the forest. However, not his assigned duty of allocating land but his love for forest Goddess, in which he found a motherly affection, is central to the novel. So we find instead of the act of 'Deforestation' Satyacharan shows more interest in environmental preservation. Along with Jugalprasad , who was an ardent lover of forest Satyacharan found it more important to decorate the forest by planting many rare species of herbs and saplings which is found in the development of the story .

Ggradually Satyacharan became fond of the wonderful natural beauty of Lobtulia and Fulkia-Baihar. Although he was touched by the struggling lives of dispossessed peasants, penurious Brahmins, migrant landless laborers and adivasis(aboriginal people) who were supposed to get jungle land decided by the estate owner but the uprooting of age old gigantic trees and removal of plants and herbs of rare species for making shelter of the landless resulted in a deep feeling of guilt and sadness that tortured his soft nature and loving mind throughout his stay.

Satyacharan is the most important character of *Aranyak* but not the central one. In fact he is an outsider who has no connection with the forest or the forest people seemingly . Indeed, Jungle plays the central role in the novel. It shapes the mentality, activities and even the way of thinking of the characters. Different characters behave differently under the unknown spell of jungle. The forest with its myth and mystery has deciding effects upon the characters directly or indirectly.

Though initially Satyacharan was not a match for the jungle life but as time passed by the mysterious enticement of Lobtulia automatically made him a deep lover of it. Few many female characters seem to attract Satyacharan but not as much as the natural fascination of Lobtulia and Fulkia-baihar. The beauty of Lobtulia-baihar made him forget his main objective of coming in to the jungle. He understood that there are something enchanting and unknown effects in the jungle that forces his mind to stop the act of destruction; rather he grows affection for the mind blowing forest. As he remarks:

While coming to destroy this waste land I have fallen in love with this impeccable wild heroine.”
(Translated by Md. Sedekul Islam, *Aranyak*: page 67)

But, in the course of time Satyacharan had to stoop in spite of his complete reluctance to give away the virgin forest lands for settlement and cultivation. The protagonist reminds us that telling the story of his deep love and acute loss of the forest can exonerate him somewhat from his profound guilt. Like the Ancient Mariner, of S.T. Coleridge's poem, the narrator has to tell his story to exorcise his guilt. As we flash back we find that the writer begins the story in *Aranyak* with a heavy mind:

“But these memories do not give me pleasure; they are filled with sorrow. By my hands was destroyed an unfettered playground of nature: I know too that for this act the forest Gods will never forgive me. I have heard that to confess a crime in one's own words lightens some-what the burden of the crime.” (Translated by Sedekul Islam, *Aranyak*: page 8)

Later on we see, Satyacharan comes in close contact with a number of human beings in *Aranyak* the dancer lad Dhaturia, the holly sati mother Kunta, the generous money lender Dhautal Sahu , the poor, religious Brahmin Raju Panrey , mystic man and nature lover Jugalprasad, the princess of the forest Bhanumati and also the powerful and dishonest Zaminder Nandalal Ojha, Chote Singh and dangerous Rashbehari Singh. But none could affect him as much as the hypnotizing surroundings of Lobtulia forest ever did.

Satyacharan's attraction for Bhanumati, is symbolic inclination for the prehistoric glory of the forest of which Bhanumati is reminiscence. Both the glory of the forest and Bhanumati are diminished; which is a symbolic coherence of the story of the novel. Bhanumati is the symbol of unintelligible side of the jungle that attracts without any prior cause. In fact coming into close contact with the nature Satyacharan's senses become sharper and there is a fundamental metamorphosis in his frame of mind. The hustle and bustle of city life is in a sharp contrast to the quiet repose of heaven like forest in *Aranyak*. As in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* the cruel courtly characters coming in to contact with nature goes through a purgation in the same manner nature cleanses the soul of Satyacharan making him compromising and peace-loving. Nature divulges most valuable truth to him so he can read the fraud mentality of Rasbihari Singh or Nandola Ojha and can appreciate the naive and simplistic condition of the destitute. Getting in touch with nature gives Satya a chance to understand human behavior quite clearly. Thus he becomes liberal, loving and as generous as nature.

To be eco-conscious we must feel some sort of love for the nature as a reservoir of feral grandeur. It happens to Satyacharan as he thinks everything has got changed since the war of Palasy or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ but some wild nature like Mohalikharup retains it inviolable loveliness. Bibhutibhusan also raises important questions more than once about the meaning and necessity of violating the inherent beauty of nature. The writer is in confusion regarding the material development that negates the importance of wilds. As he contemplates autobiographically:

What does man want – progress or peace? What is the use of advancement if there is no peace in it? I have known many people who progressed in life but lost peace.” (Translated by Sedekul Islam, *Aranyak*: p-143)

The ever thoughtful character, Raju Panrey who was rather idle thus could not progress in cultivation and was leading a very poor life however spiritually he was very robust and his strong devotion to nature like Satyacharan also can be traced. This pitiable man was deeply devotional and possesses important philosophy of life that also centers round the fondness to forest Goddess. He is out and out a spiritual and unworldly person. Satyacharan likes the way of Raju Panrey's thinking:

The duration of life is very short sir. While clearing the jungle so many thoughts of life crosses my mind, I think sitting idly. As you see the wild jungle, it is a very auspicious place ; from time immemorial the flower clusters are blooming , birds are chirping, with the descent of wind the deities come down to put their footstep here. Where avarice and calculation of profit and loss are rife, the wind becomes poisonous! They don't live there. So whenever you are with spade and shovel the deities snatches it away. They speak in such a silent manner in the ear that the thought of wealth and gaining withers away,” (Translated by Sedekul Islam, *Aranyak*: p-46)

To feel the silent wonder of forest, can be more pleasant than a throbbing city life. We see while going through the novel that the forest became so much precious to Satyacharan that he forgets the hazards of thick jungle and takes rides across the jungle even at nights. There was a sense of oneness between the wild jungle and infatuated mind of the protagonist. Gradually Satyacharan becomes a devotee of nature Satya understands the bounty of nature. Like a Bhakto(devotee) Satyacharan utters:

What nature gives away to its Bhakto is priceless. And one cannot achieve it without serving nature for a long time." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p- 56*)

The thought of Satyacharan is reminiscent of Coleridge's Dejection ode:

"O lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live: "

(S.T. Coleridge, Dejection: An Ode: para IV)

Initially the writer is against dismantling the forest due to his aesthetic passion. The writer repeatedly changes the date of allotting the lands to the hand of even poor tenants. He is totally unwilling to allow other to destroy the beautiful land and the rocky beauty of Nara- baihar which place he named 'Beauty Spot'. His growing love for the Mother Nature is deeply apparent :

I was here to destroy the wild nature but has fallen in to love for it." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p- 67*)

Again in the same occasion he very consciously declares his apprehension over the demolition of forest land. The jungle area around his territory is not a waste land to him but its demolition is a wastage he understands significantly:

"If I give thousand bighas of land most of the parts of the jungle will be wasted – how nice is the grove, how many sprouts would cruelly be cut!" (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p- 67*)

Meanwhile in the tenure of Satya many parts of Lobtulia were being given to the settlers. The new settlers began to clear it off by cutting and burning many precious trees and breaking high plains. The burning of the beautiful jungle for cultivation purpose comes to Satya as deep anguish. Satyacharan blames the activity in general, the aimless action by the people to do such meaningless wastage of valuable nature. Again a feeling of deep regret is found in him:

I hear from afar, the guttering sound of the forest burning- so many beautiful trees and twigs are destroyed - I think while sitting down. I have some unknown feeling so I never feel like going there. Immensely valuable wealth of the country, which could bring everlasting peace and diversion to the people are gone- only for a handful of grains we had to sacrifice it. (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p- 71*)

Not only the fast losing of the forest of Lobtulia that makes Satya uneasy ; his despair is multiplied seeing the secret machinations of wealthy people to take possession of poor people's land which they own with great hardship. The lust for owning land as wealth is criticized:

But soon new tenants locked in vicious fights. I understood they are not peace loving." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak , page 71*)

Apart from sensibilities for green plains and forest land Satya shows his disdain for killing birds. As the forest is full with many types of birds he could easily kill birds and relish but quite oppositely he remains a vegetarian. Bibhutibhusan voices his concern for safeguard of birds some hundred years back; though it is a fairly latest enterprise to save birds for maintaining the balance of eco-system. Satyacharan who is the voice of the author importantly shows his early carefulness for birds fairly like modern environmentalists:

Though there was no lack of Silli and Peacock, but my mind does not allow killing birds so in spite for having an air gun I was used to vegetables." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-76*)

In another instance when he was climbing up the North Nara-Bihar forest with the company of jugalprasad here also Satya shows his choice for not harming birds and its freedom. At this point he forbids a sentinel not to kill a bird.

A gigantic peacock was sitting just over our head. A sentinel came up with a rifle, when he was about to kill the bird, I forbade." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-125*)

The novel also reminds us of *Walden* by Thoreau and his choice for the freedom of jungle birds. Presence of birds near the Walden Pond made Thoreau's time more worthwhile. As he says:

For I found myself suddenly neighbor to the birds; not by having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them. (*Walden, Where I lived, and what I lived For, Henry David Thoreau, Chapter 2, p-1813*)

In Aranyak the author also makes other characters think in an eco-sensitive way. It is found in the female character Manchi's thought while talking to Satya she shows her interest for trees .She tells Satya, by the way, that she heard that there is no tree left in Kolkata city. And interestingly enough it is a common phenomenon of South Asian cities which lack a balanced environment necessary for healthy living. It is important to note that there is growing concern over this at present.

The writer's criticism over the urban people who are blind to inner mind to see the natural beauty is reminded when the picnic party comes to the jungle led by a retired official from Kolkata. While being

acquainted with the picnic party Satya realizes well that they don't have the real eye to see the beauty of the mountains, the color of the setting sun, enjoy the chirping of the birds. The writer further indicates the myopic view of the urban girls who seem to be pissed off finding rice to be coarse in the area ; in fact staying long in the city area one loses one's actual view of the jungle life. They also show their total indifference to environment because Satya knows very well that their sole enjoyment will be to kill some rabbits or deer.

While the forest of Fulkia seems to be a safe den for the buffaloes as the buffalo God is there genial protector; on the other hand Satyacharan remembers a very shocking incident of animal torturing in Kolkata which is a very common scenario in this part of the world. So in a silent entreaty the writer invokes the aid of the buffalo deity Tarbaro to save the animals from predicament. This shows positive thoughts of Satyacharan for animals. During few years of stay of Satya in Lobtulia and Fulkia-baihar most part of the forest was already gone and the few other acres of land needs to be distributed in an immediate measure. if the land is not leased in time Satyacharan would not be able to collect Khajna(revenue) from the authority . Thus it would be impossible for him to pay his higher authority properly. So in spite of serious unwillingness he has to gradually allocate some other parts of Lobtulia-Baihar. In the last section of the novel it is seen that most part of the forest of Baihar that was assigned to Satyacharan has been distributed to the vagrant Gangata Brahmin or other poor clans.

Another man in the novel that could be equaled with Satya is Jugalprasad. Jugalprasad is a good companion of Satya because he is also drawn to nature finding an unmatched curiosity in it. There is an urgency in both of them, the writer and Jugalprasad to save the environment. Satya along with mystic Jugalprasad enthusiastically proceeds to protect the wonderful forest. Though the limitless forest line was decreasing everyday, the admiration and attraction for nature is not diminished in Satyacharan; rather he along with Jugalprasad take the voluntary effort to beautify the rest of the forest which is still intact. Satyacharan very pleasingly appreciates Jugalprasad's voluntary effort to decorate Saraswati Kundi with rare plants, as he says in the final sections of the novel:

"[...] the quiet exquisitely lovely land has become more beautiful with the self-hand plantation of flowers and plantlets by Jugalprasad." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-119*)

Both of Satya and Jugalprasad search for new plants in the Mahalikharup Mountain. Not only is the cause of beauty that fires their mind with love for wide spread jungle rather they are devotional to the purity, beauty and wild affection of Fulkia-Baihar. They are not just beholder rather they are devotee who finds it their holy duty to save the mother forest.

Identifying new plants in the forest becomes a joy for the both. And when the land was given away to the new settlers for cultivation both the nature lovers not only showed their dismay but also they were utterly shocked. Jugalprasad's shock is felt equally by Satya :

"The north line of Nara Baihar is still thick forest. But in the Lobtulia Baihar no forest mark is left anymore. Three-fourths of the beauty of Nara Baihar is gone, only in the northern territory two thousand bigha is not allotted to the subjects. I found Jugalprasad utterly shocked at this." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-124*)

Jugalprasad's anguish over the act of destruction is more acute seeing the attitude of the Gangata tribe. He accuses of them as if they were murderer to the land because the Gangata clan unnecessarily disturbs the forest land in their short maverick stay here and there; to Jugalprasad it is totally a meaningless act. But Satyacharan helplessly reminds Jugalprasad that he is bound to give the lands away because his landowner has to pay tax to the government for having such a big forest land.

However, the shocked Jugalprasad requested Satya fervently not to give away the land of "Swaraswati kundi" because he did not want his forest goddess of beauty that resides there to die.

"Please don't lease the Swaraswati Kundi sir I collected plants with much pain to plant there." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-124*)

In the passage of time it became impossible for Satyacharan to save the unharmed part of Lobtulia, it seemed he no longer could afford to hold back 'Swaraswati kundi' one of the favorite recluses of Jugalprasad. Satyacharan was attracted to Jugalprasad not only for his love of nature it was something else that attracted Satyacharan. Jugalprasad was very unselfish; the worldly achievement did not press his mind he was not greedy like other people around Satya. He never in any occasion showed yearning for owning lands, and never ever cared for having cows or buffalos. However, Jugalprasad was preoccupied with the thought of losing Saraswati Kundi. Satya shows his full sympathy over this:

"I feel pain- Jugalprasad's most loved 'Saraswati Kundi'- how long I would be able to save it? Where the Hangsalata and jasmine grove would pass away? Instead tassel peeping over cereal grass and maze field would take its place." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p- 128*)

In the later few months of stay of Satya tenants began to take place in the lower areas of Mahalikharup Mountain stretching to Lobtulia and to the northern corridor of Nara-baihar. As the forest area began to be crowded Satyacharan and Jugalprasad was feeling much distressed. Rapid usurpation of land by landless people

was making the beauteous forest a swarming slum. This is how the vast precious wild was being wasted. The destruction of Lubtulia-baihar is the destruction of South Asian terrain in miniature.

As the forest of Lubtulia was fading away fast so did the charm of Satyacharan began to wane. The writer made up his mind to leave Baihar. For temporary pleasure and to remove the burden of guilt of losing Fulkia and Lubtulia-baihar Satya planned to pay a visit to Bhanumati, the poor princess for the last time. On the way through thick and deep jungle to his last visit to Bhanumati the writer gives us ample proof how much dissatisfied he became to see the lost glory of Lubtulia and how much passionate he was with the wild forest area and its charm . In the mountainous Dhanjhori area, where Bhanumati lived, full with Palash, Mohua and Shalchara trees and hardly any men, the protagonist finds a tranquil heaven like repose . He also shows his scorn for those who do harm to nature:

I am rescued from utter monotony seeing so long the swarming squalid cots and slums and the grey stereotyped cultivated land of Lubtulia. This type of wild nature is rare in this part of the world." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-137*)

And he wishes to live in that wild unravished greenery of Dhanjhori area perpetually that would not merely give him sustenance but also mental solace; because the forest of Lubtulia possessed something special : this ensures, supports, soothes and gives wider opportunity of peace in mind:

I would lease some Bidi Pata (tobaco leaf) producing woodland making a hut in this secluded, serene wild area and would live forever beside some flowery green valley and spring." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-138*)

The time of departure became impending as the forest was loosing its originality, beauty, and grandeur fast. Interestingly the way of viewing the nature got changed to Satya at this period; he finds ethical necessity in the forest life now. He calls the unravished jungle land shrine. Satyacharan holds himself culprit for the destruction of innocent wilderness because it happened before his eye and under his governance. Even his deep love for Bhanumati could not stop him from leaving Lubtulia-baihar which spelled bound him with profound majesty. Eventually, His strong love for nature prevails. We don't only need nature for beauty or for solace but for the sake of moral importance. His concluding thoughts are more clearly ecological:

There will be a time when people won't find any wilderness – only cultivable land, jute mills, chimney of garments factories would come in to view. Then people would come to this calm wilderness, as the people come to shrine. Hope this forest remains intact for those future days." (*Translated by Sedekul Islam, Aranyak: p-140*)

The writer of course focuses on superstitions, mystery, and savagery of the forest and its people but he poses a generous heart to love everything. There is a division in the area between the upper class landlords and the downtrodden Gangata Brahmin and the Santals but the writer does not treat them differently. In one case his giving away land to Noksed, free of cost indicates how much sympathy he had for the poor. His close and unimposing relations with people like Raju Panrey, Matuknath Panrey, Manchi,, young low caste girl and Jugalprasad proves how easy he is with the poor . His unselfish support to Ganori Teoari the poor itinerate teacher shows the munificence of his mind that has got changed coming in to close contact with nature. In the later period when Kunta , the young widow is oppressed in a cruel way by Rasbihari Singh, Satyacharan to save her from loan, gives away ten bighas of land to her without any cost. Satyacharan's treatment to ailing and excommunicated Giri Dharilal is a proof of the writer's sympathy for the outcast people.

In Baihar the writer could feel his own pulse with the motion of seasons, with the blooming of flowers, with the chirping of birds that brought life to the silent and cryptic nature. Numerous trees, scented wild flowers, colorful birds, feral animals, changing of the seasons with all its beauty of Fulkia and other parts of the forest are captured by the writer as a piece of heaven on earth. The appetizing depiction of Fulkia-Baihar , the charming natural beauty of Saraswati Kundi, the unparalleled magnificence of Mohalikharup mountain area make *Aranyak* a piece of paradise on earth.

II. CONCLUSION

The language of *Aranyak* is very facile; the description is so minute and lively that we see the forest before us. The reading runs in such a natural and rhythmic way that *Aranyak* gives the taste of reading a lyric; it satisfies our artistic hunger by appeasing senses of sound, sight, smell, taste and touch . A clear mark of ecological consciousness pervades through the novel. Satya as a speaker of the author shows inner urge for saving the primeval condition of the forest and deep sympathy for the beautiful, innocent, wild land. This unique effort makes the author a pioneer of Eco-writer in Bengali literature. Sometimes the writer feels like an environmentalist who puts emphasis on environmental balance. So Bibhutibhusan can be considered one of the pioneers of eco-consciousness in Bengali language. As the novel progresses the writer shows how truly he is committed to nature. His attraction to nature is mixed with his unflinching eco-consciousness. Very notably like the modern eco writers, Bibhutibhusan could understand the importance of nature preservation and his soft mind was against the lofty modern practices that began to usurp the pristine nature. Like Thoreau's *Walden* the writer

shows predilection to an eco-social life style what then was beginning to die. The book *Aranyak* thus become a milestone for not only nature lover but encourages those who are in favor of protection of nature from being usurped.

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