

Imagining Futures: Literature, Ecology, and the Ethics of Sustainability

Edited by

Rituparna Chakraborty
Shubham Bhattacharjee



Swami Vivekananda University

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Preface

In the twenty-first century, the intersection between literature and sustainability has emerged as one of the most dynamic and necessary fields of inquiry. The global consensus articulated through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 set forth an ambitious vision of equitable, inclusive, and ecologically responsible development. Yet, beyond the realm of policy and data, this vision also calls for cultural and imaginative engagement—an ethical and narrative framework capable of inspiring collective transformation. The present volume explores this convergence between literature and sustainable development, foregrounding the role of literary imagination in articulating, critiquing, and humanizing the principles that underpin the SDGs.

Sustainable development, in its broadest sense, embodies the aspiration to reconcile economic progress with social equity and environmental stewardship. Literature, as a repository of human experience and moral reflection, offers a vital space where these aspirations are imagined, interrogated, and redefined. Through stories, poems, plays, and narratives, humanity rehearses its relationship with the planet, with other species, and with itself. The literary text becomes not merely an aesthetic artifact but a moral and ecological discourse—a means through which societies understand the consequences of their actions and envision alternative futures. This volume situates itself at the confluence of ecological consciousness and literary representation, affirming that sustainability is as much a cultural question as it is a scientific or political one.

The SDGs, encompassing seventeen interlinked objectives, address the multifaceted crises of poverty, inequality, climate change, and injustice that define the contemporary world. Literature offers unique insight into these challenges, translating abstract developmental frameworks into lived realities and affective understanding. For instance, the goals of eradicating poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2) find

poignant resonance in narratives that depict deprivation, marginalization, and the human cost of systemic inequity. Similarly, the objectives of achieving gender equality, ensuring quality education, and promoting peace and justice (SDGs 4, 5, and 16) acquire profound interpretative depth when examined through the imaginative lens of storytelling. This volume, therefore, recognizes literature not as peripheral to the discourse of sustainable development but as its ethical and epistemological core—a domain where the universal aspirations of the SDGs encounter the diversity of human experience.

At the heart of this intersection lies the recognition that narrative is transformative. The stories societies tell about themselves determine the moral and ecological parameters of their actions. Ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and posthumanist thought have together foregrounded this insight, emphasizing how language and imagination shape ecological consciousness. From the Romantic reverence for nature to the Anthropocene's crisis narratives, literary traditions have persistently mediated the relationship between humans and the environment. The emergence of "climate fiction," for example, signals a growing cultural urgency to confront environmental collapse through narrative imagination. Such texts not only reflect ecological anxiety but also cultivate empathy, resilience, and hope—qualities essential for achieving the SDGs' vision of a sustainable world.

Yet sustainability is not merely an environmental issue. It is also deeply entwined with questions of justice, power, and inequality. Literature serves as a mirror and a critique of these structures, exposing the historical continuities between colonialism, capitalism, and ecological degradation. Postcolonial and decolonial approaches reveal how the exploitation of land and people has been central to modernity's developmental paradigms. The pursuit of "progress" has often been built upon the dispossession of indigenous communities, the silencing of local knowledges, and the extraction of natural resources for imperial profit. By revisiting these histories, literary studies contribute to

a redefinition of sustainability that is not technocratic but ethical—one grounded in reparative justice and cultural inclusion.

This ethical turn also highlights the importance of indigenous epistemologies. Across continents, indigenous literatures and oral traditions have preserved worldviews that emphasize reciprocity, balance, and interdependence—values strikingly consonant with the principles of sustainability. The resurgence of indigenous storytelling in the global literary sphere challenges anthropocentric and extractivist assumptions, advocating instead for a planetary ethics that acknowledges the agency of non-human beings. Such perspectives enrich our understanding of SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), expanding them beyond biodiversity metrics to encompass the spiritual and cultural dimensions of ecological coexistence. The literary representation of indigenous cosmologies thus becomes a crucial site where decolonization and sustainability intersect.

The gendered dimensions of sustainable development are equally significant. Feminist ecological thought—particularly ecofeminism—has long emphasized the parallels between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women. Both are products of patriarchal and capitalist systems that privilege control, productivity, and domination over care, relationality, and sustenance. Literature has been a powerful medium for articulating these connections, from the mythic figure of Gaia to contemporary narratives of women resisting environmental injustice. Through the works of writers such as Margaret Atwood, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy, the ecological crisis is reframed as a crisis of empathy and ethics. The pursuit of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) thus finds a natural ally in literary expression, which reimagines empowerment not merely as representation but as transformation—of consciousness, community, and environment.

Equally vital is the role of education and cultural literacy in advancing sustainability. SDG 4 (Quality Education) emphasizes inclusive and lifelong learning as the foundation of equitable societies. Literature contributes to this goal by fostering critical thought, moral imagination, and intercultural

understanding. Through reading, individuals encounter perspectives beyond their own, cultivating the empathy and reflexivity necessary for global citizenship. Pedagogies that integrate literature into sustainability education encourage students to see environmental and social issues not as abstract problems but as narratives with human faces and emotional resonance. The integration of literary studies into the discourse of sustainable development thus bridges the gap between policy and humanity, between data and meaning.

Another key aspect concerns the representation of inequality and development in literary forms. Narratives of urbanization, displacement, and globalization illuminate the tensions between growth and justice that lie at the heart of sustainable development. The urban novels of the Global South, for instance, depict the contradictions of modernization—technological progress alongside environmental decay, wealth alongside deprivation. Literature reveals the human cost of “development” when pursued without ecological and ethical awareness. It compels readers to question the moral foundations of prosperity and to imagine alternative economies of care, cooperation, and regeneration. Through such critique, literature contributes to reimagining SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) not as a statistical measure but as a lived ethical imperative.

The field of environmental humanities has been instrumental in bridging the scientific and humanistic dimensions of sustainability. It recognizes that environmental change is not only a biophysical process but also a cultural phenomenon shaped by perception, narrative, and value. Within this framework, literature functions as both archive and catalyst—a record of how societies have conceptualized nature and a tool for re-envisioning their relationship with it. From pastoral poetry to climate fiction, from myth to memoir, the literary imagination traces humanity’s shifting place in the planetary ecosystem. The Anthropocene, as both geological and philosophical category, demands precisely this synthesis of science and story, fact and feeling. Literature, by making the abstract tangible and the distant intimate, becomes a bridge between ecological knowledge and ethical action.

Sustainability also entails a confrontation with time and memory. The SDGs envision a long-term horizon of global transformation, yet literature reminds us that the past remains an inescapable part of this future. Historical fiction, trauma narratives, and postcolonial histories all attest to the continuity between past injustices and present vulnerabilities. To build sustainable societies, one must reckon with inherited inequities—slavery, colonization, environmental destruction—that continue to shape contemporary realities. Literature, through its capacity to reimagine the past, enables such reckoning. It reveals that sustainability is not merely about conserving resources but about healing histories, repairing relationships, and cultivating remembrance as a form of justice.

The notion of peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16) resonates profoundly within the literary imagination. Literature has always been a medium for voicing dissent, envisioning justice, and articulating the ethical foundations of community. From the tragedies of war to the utopias of reconciliation, literary texts provide both critique and hope. They teach that peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of dialogue, empathy, and mutual recognition. In contexts of violence and displacement, storytelling becomes an act of survival and resistance—a means of reclaiming voice and agency. The study of literature thus contributes to a broader culture of peacebuilding and civic imagination, affirming the humanities' role in nurturing the moral capacities essential for sustainable societies.

As global crises intensify—from climate breakdown to mass migration—literature's role as a mediator of empathy grows ever more crucial. The imaginative act of inhabiting another's experience dissolves the distances that separate the privileged from the vulnerable. Climate change, poverty, and inequality often appear remote to those not directly affected; yet, through narrative, these realities acquire emotional immediacy. The novel, the poem, and the play become instruments of moral perception, rendering the invisible visible. This capacity for empathy is not sentimental but transformative: it reorients ethical attention toward the shared fragility of human and

non-human life. Such emotional intelligence is indispensable for realizing the SDGs' vision of partnership and solidarity.

The cultural dimension of sustainability also involves rethinking aesthetics. The traditional division between art and utility is increasingly unsustainable in itself. Artistic production, including literature, must engage with the material realities of the world—its waste, its energy, its inequalities. Contemporary eco-art, performance, and narrative experiments exemplify how aesthetics can become ecological praxis. Minimalism, fragmentation, and open-endedness in literary form mirror the ethics of restraint and adaptation. The aesthetics of sustainability, therefore, is one of humility and interconnection: a recognition that beauty and survival are not opposing values but intertwined conditions of existence.

At the same time, sustainability demands attention to digital and media ecologies. The transformation of literary production and circulation in the digital age raises new questions about access, preservation, and environmental impact. Digital technologies offer platforms for global collaboration and activism, amplifying marginalized voices and fostering transnational communities of care. Yet they also consume vast energy and resources, perpetuating forms of inequality. Literature in the digital age thus stands at a crossroads between empowerment and exploitation. The critical study of this tension expands the scope of sustainability discourse to include cultural technologies and media ethics, aligning with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

The interdisciplinary reach of this volume reflects the nature of sustainability itself—a problem that cannot be confined within disciplinary boundaries. Literary scholars now engage with ecologists, economists, sociologists, and data scientists to explore how narrative can inform public understanding and policy. Such collaboration reaffirms the humanities' relevance in addressing global challenges. The sustainability discourse, once dominated by technocratic language, now increasingly recognizes the importance of stories, symbols, and values. Literature provides precisely these elements,

translating planetary crises into forms that engage conscience as well as intellect. The dialogue between art and science thus becomes a cornerstone of sustainable thought.

In addition to environmental and social dimensions, sustainability entails a profound revaluation of human identity. The posthumanist and new materialist turn in literary theory has questioned the anthropocentric assumptions that underlie both literature and development. By decentering the human, these frameworks invite readers to consider the agency of animals, plants, objects, and systems. Literature's capacity to personify and empathize with the non-human becomes a radical act of ecological awareness. This reconfiguration of subjectivity aligns with the SDGs' call for inclusive and holistic worldviews, where sustainability encompasses not only human welfare but the flourishing of the entire biosphere.

The present volume seeks to capture this plurality of perspectives—historical and contemporary, local and global—that together define the dialogue between literature and sustainable development. Its essays traverse genres, geographies, and methodologies, revealing that sustainability is not a fixed concept but a living discourse in continual evolution. Whether through postcolonial critiques of development, ecofeminist readings of narrative, or examinations of indigenous storytelling, each contribution underscores the central insight that sustainability is fundamentally a cultural question. It depends not only on policy reform but on the transformation of values, imaginations, and stories.

Ultimately, this volume affirms that the path to sustainability lies through the imaginative capacities of humanity. The ability to envision alternative futures, to empathize across difference, and to articulate new ethics of coexistence is what literature uniquely provides. In a world increasingly governed by data and instrumental reason, the humanities remind us that meaning, compassion, and creativity are indispensable to survival. The SDGs articulate the “what” of sustainable development; literature helps us grasp the “why” and the “how.” It transforms global agendas into personal commitments, turning policy into ethos.

The ongoing integration of sustainability into literary studies represents more than an academic trend—it marks a paradigm shift in how humanity understands itself in relation to the planet. By exploring the narratives that shape our environmental and ethical consciousness, this field reclaims literature as a mode of planetary care. The essays collected here contribute to that reclamation, demonstrating that sustainable development is, at its core, an act of imagination: the capacity to see the world otherwise, and to believe that such seeing can make a difference.

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The Great Outdoors: Nature's Role in the World of Sherlock Holmes

Rituparna Chakraborty

Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted role of nature in the Sherlock Holmes canon by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, arguing that the natural world functions as more than mere setting. It serves as a testing ground for Holmes's rational method, a source of crucial forensic evidence, and a powerful Gothic element that highlights the contrast between the natural (the rational, real-world explanation) and the supernatural (the folklore or superstitious fear). Special attention is given to the contrast between the urban, analytical realm of 221B Baker Street and the wild, often sinister landscapes encountered in cases like *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Ultimately, nature aids in both the creation of mystery and its ultimate demystification by the consulting detective.

Introduction:

Sherlock Holmes's expertise, often dubbed the "science of deduction and analysis" by Dr. Watson, is deeply intertwined with a mastery of natural sciences like botany, geology, and chemistry. For Holmes, the natural world—even when encountered in an urban context—is an open book of forensic clues.

The Forensic Field: Nature as Evidence:

- **Geology and Soil:** Holmes's "practical, but limited" knowledge of geology, as listed by Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*, allows him to identify the origin of a dirt splash on trousers or the composition of clay tracked into a room. The distinct soils of various parts of London or the shires become a crucial non-human witness.

- Botany and Toxicology: Holmes's "well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally" demonstrates his deep knowledge of plants and their chemical derivatives. This expertise is repeatedly called upon to identify murder weapons (The Speckled Band's venomous snake, for instance) or to understand the motives and methods of criminals who employ natural toxins.

- Fauna as Clue: The animals that appear in the stories, such as the snake in "The Speckled Band" or the eponymous beast in The Hound of the Baskervilles, are often initially perceived as exotic or supernatural. Holmes's intervention strips them of their mystery, revealing their true natural – and often manipulated – identity as tools of human malice.

The Gothic Landscape: Nature as Atmosphere

In several notable adventures, the mystery moves away from the comfortable, analytical centre of London to remote, wild, or enclosed rural settings. Here, nature transforms into a powerful Gothic element, challenging the supremacy of Holmes's reason and creating an atmosphere of dread.

The Hound of the Baskervilles and the Grimpen Mire: The Dartmoor moor is the quintessential example of a hostile natural setting. Its vast, bleak, and fog-shrouded terrain, dominated by the perilous Grimpen Mire, actively functions to both hide the criminal and amplify the sense of supernatural terror. The natural isolation and eerie silence work on the characters' minds, making them susceptible to the ancient, irrational curse of the hound.

A great, black-backed gull was hovering over the marsh. It uttered a loud, wailing cry... Never have I seen a spot which for sheer melancholy and dreariness could equal the Grimpen Mire." – Dr. Watson (The Hound of the Baskervilles)

Nature vs. Reason: The central thematic tension in such stories is the natural vs. the supernatural. Doyle's technique is to immerse the reader in the Gothic dread of the landscape, only to have Holmes, the champion of Enlightenment rationality, peel back the layers of fear and superstition to expose the human, all-too-natural plot beneath the surface. The final

solution is always grounded in the material world, even if the environment was designed to suggest the contrary.

Urban Isolation: The Artificial Environment

In contrast to the expansive countryside, the urban nature of Victorian London is largely one of artificial isolation and manipulation. The fog, smog, and darkness of the city, though unnatural products of the Industrial Age, form a distinct environment where:

- **Human Nature Flourishes:** London's vastness and anonymity allow criminals to blend in and vanish, making it a jungle of a different kind.
- **Evidence is Concentrated:** Instead of miles of moor, Holmes must analyze the small, concentrated evidence—cigar ash, boot prints, and chemical residues—which represent the nature of human action in a confined, constructed space.
- **Holmes's Retreat:** 221B Baker Street is the ultimate retreat from nature, a haven of order and logic where the detective's mind is the primary tool. His experiments, often involving chemical analysis and dissection, represent a controlled and systematic engagement with the natural world—a stark opposite to the unpredictable wilds of Dartmoor.

Conclusion

Nature in the Sherlock Holmes stories is fundamentally a tool of narrative and a vehicle for themes. It shifts seamlessly from being a mere forensic data source in the city to a terrifying, Gothic antagonist in the country. In all instances, its primary purpose is to set the stage for Holmes's genius. The detective does not merely observe nature; he reads it. By applying scientific principles to the natural world—whether a bloodstain on a wall, a distinct soil on a shoe, or a legend on a desolate moor—Holmes demonstrates the triumph of rational, scientific observation over fear, superstition, and the chaos of the untamed world. The natural world, therefore, is not an enemy of reason, but its most faithful and revealing canvas.

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Narrating Sustainability: Literary Pathways to Achieving the UN SDGs

Shubham Bhattacharjee

Abstract

The intersection of literature and sustainability has emerged as a critical discourse within the twenty-first century's global intellectual agenda. As the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outline a universal framework for equitable and ecologically responsible development, literature assumes a pivotal role in narrating the moral, emotional, and cultural imperatives that underlie sustainable futures. This paper investigates how literary narratives—through ecological imagination, ethical storytelling, and affective engagement—mediate the principles of sustainability across social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. By examining the narrative potential of contemporary eco-literature, postcolonial fiction, and indigenous storytelling, this study argues that literature not only reflects but also enacts the epistemological and ethical transitions demanded by the SDGs. The analysis draws from works by Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, and Alexis Wright, among others, to demonstrate how literary expression shapes global consciousness toward sustainability.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, articulate an ambitious framework of seventeen interlinked objectives addressing poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and peace. While the SDGs are often discussed within policy, economics, and environmental science, the humanities—particularly literature—offer indispensable insight into their ethical and affective dimensions. Literature, by virtue of its narrative power, bridges global policy and lived experience,

transforming abstract sustainability paradigms into human-centred stories of resilience, justice, and hope.

In an era marked by climate crisis, cultural fragmentation, and growing economic disparity, sustainable development must be understood not only as a technical or institutional project but as a cultural narrative—a story societies tell about their relationship to the planet and to one another. As Ursula K. Heise observes in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, narratives “translate the global into the personal and the planetary into the everyday” (Heise 10). This paper explores how literature functions as a mode of sustainability discourse, shaping moral imagination and global citizenship in line with the SDG framework.

Literature and the SDG Framework

The United Nations’ Agenda 2030 establishes sustainability as a multidimensional goal encompassing ecological integrity, social justice, and economic inclusion. Within this holistic framework, literature provides what Martha Nussbaum calls “narrative imagination” — the ability to empathize with others’ experiences and envision moral alternatives (Nussbaum 95). Through narrative, readers engage emotionally with issues such as inequality, gender violence, and climate injustice—issues central to SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality), and 13 (Climate Action).

Literature translates the data-driven language of sustainability into human terms. As scholars in the field of ecocriticism suggest, fiction and poetry often anticipate the moral insights that policies struggle to articulate. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement* (2016), for example, critiques the literary and cultural silence around climate change, arguing that the crisis is as much a crisis of imagination as of politics. Ghosh’s claim underscores a vital point: sustainable transformation requires stories that can reimagine human agency, temporality, and responsibility beyond the anthropocentric worldview.

More over, the SDG frame work empha sizes global partnership (SDG 17), acknowledging the necessity of cross-cultural cooperation. Literature, through translation and comparative reading, functions as a form of global

partnership—a shared narrative space where diverse cultural perspectives on sustainability intersect. The act of reading across linguistic and national boundaries fosters empathy and intercultural understanding, both indispensable to the pursuit of sustainable societies.

Narrative Ethics and Sustainability

The relationship between narrative and ethics lies at the core of sustainability discourse. Literary narratives do not merely describe social or ecological realities; they intervene in them by cultivating moral reflection. Wayne C. Booth's concept of the "ethical turn" in literature emphasizes the reader's responsibility to interpret narrative worlds as moral spaces (Booth 83). Similarly, ecocritics like Lawrence Buell argue that environmental literature invites "ethical participation" by expanding the reader's sense of accountability to nonhuman life (Buell 9).

In this sense, literature aligns with the ethical ethos of the SDGs: inclusivity, justice, and intergenerational responsibility. For instance, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) dramatizes the collapse of ecological stability through the migration of monarch butterflies, using personal crisis to mirror planetary distress. The protagonist's awakening becomes a metaphor for collective ecological consciousness. Kingsolver's narrative strategy transforms environmental data into an ethical awakening, translating the SDG principle of climate action into emotional and experiential understanding.

Likewise, indigenous storytelling traditions—often marginalized within global literary discourse—embody sustainable world views that predate modern environmentalism. Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), grounded in Aboriginal cosmology, portrays land not as a resource but as a sentient entity intertwined with community identity. Such narratives challenge Western developmental paradigms that separate humanity from nature, offering alternative epistemologies that align with SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Global Literary Case Studies

1. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004): Climate, Migration, and Human Resilience

Set in the Sundarbans—a deltaic region emblematic of ecological vulnerability—Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* dramatizes the entanglement of environmental and social justice. The novel's interweaving of tides, tigers, and tides-people reflects the dialectic between survival and belonging. Ghosh portrays the fragile livelihoods of marginalized communities within the broader narrative of climate change and displacement. The novel resonates with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), revealing how literature can give voice to those rendered invisible by developmental modernity.

Ghosh's ecological realism also demonstrates how narrative complexity mirrors ecological interdependence. The intertwined stories of Piya, a marine biologist, and Fokir, a fisherman, embody cross-cultural empathy—an affective realization of SDG 17's emphasis on partnership. The novel's narrative structure itself becomes a metaphor for sustainability: diverse yet interconnected, fragile yet adaptive.

2. Margaret Atwood's *Madd Addam* Trilogy: Techno science and the Ethics of Survival

Margaret Atwood's speculative trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *Madd Addam* (2013)—envision a post-apocalyptic world where corporate greed and genetic engineering have led to ecological collapse. Through dystopian satire, Atwood critiques the commodification of life and the erosion of ethical responsibility. The trilogy echoes SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by interrogating the moral limits of scientific advancement.

Atwood's use of speculative fiction is not escapist but diagnostic: it exposes the unsustainable trajectories of contemporary capitalism and biopolitics. The "God's Gardeners," a spiritual eco-commune within the novels, embody a model of ecological ethics rooted in compassion and restraint—principles integral to sustainable living.

Thus, Atwood's fiction demonstrates literature's capacity to envision alternative futures where technological progress and moral responsibility coexist.

3. Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*: Indigenous Cosmology and Ecological Justice

In *Carpentaria*, Wright reconstructs indigenous relationships to land through mythic and poetic narrative forms. The novel's cyclical temporality resists linear notions of progress, reflecting sustainability as continuity and coexistence rather than exploitation. By situating environmental degradation within colonial histories, Wright connects SDG 13 (Climate Action) with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Wright's storytelling mode—non-linear, collective, and spiritually infused—embodies the epistemic diversity that global sustainability demands. The novel's ecological ethics resonate with indigenous philosophies of "Country," emphasizing mutual respect and reciprocity between human and nonhuman entities. In this sense, *Carpentaria* illustrates how literature functions as an archive of sustainable thought embedded in cultural memory.

Theoretical Reflections: Literature as Sustainability Praxis

The convergence of literary studies and sustainability discourse signals a paradigm shift in how we conceive both art and development. The emerging field of "SDG Literature" situates fiction, poetry, and narrative nonfiction as agents of sustainable transformation. Scholars such as Cheryl Glotfelty and Greg Garrard in ecocriticism have long argued that literature mediates the interface between culture and environment. Extending this insight to the SDG framework reveals that literature's contribution is both cognitive and performative—it reconfigures knowledge systems and inspires ethical agency.

From a postcolonial perspective, literature also interrogates the global inequalities embedded within sustainable development discourse. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the "subaltern" underscores the need to listen to

marginalized voices often excluded from developmental narratives. Literary texts from the Global South—such as Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood*—expose the contradictions between economic growth and ecological justice. In doing so, they advance SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by revealing the human costs of unsustainable globalization.

The pedagogical potential of literature further reinforces its role in sustainability praxis. As Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argues, transformative education begins with critical consciousness. Integrating SDG themes into literary curricula can cultivate this consciousness among students and readers, enabling them to perceive sustainability not as an external policy but as an ethical disposition. Through classroom discussions, community readings, and digital humanities projects, literature becomes a participatory tool for achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education).

Conclusion

Literature, as this paper has demonstrated, is more than an artistic mirror of social reality; it is a narrative technology for imagining sustainable futures. By rendering abstract global goals into emotionally resonant stories, literature humanizes the SDG agenda. Works by Ghosh, Atwood, and Wright, among others, exemplify how narrative imagination can mediate between planetary crises and individual moral agency. The ethical, aesthetic, and epistemological dimensions of sustainability converge in literature’s ability to cultivate empathy, responsibility, and global solidarity.

In a world increasingly dominated by data and algorithms, literature reminds us that sustainability is ultimately a human story—one of interdependence, care, and moral choice. The path toward the UN’s vision of sustainable development will require not only technological innovation and political will but also narrative transformation. Literature, as both archive and prophecy, offers the imaginative infrastructure necessary to sustain life on this planet.

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Rabindranath's *Bonobani*: A Poet's Homage to Nature

Dr. Madhumita Roy

Abstract:

In a letter written to Tejesh Chandra Sen from Vienna in October 23, 1926, Rabindranath expressed a deeper urge to be one with the trees at Santiniketan and admitted, "Whenever my mind cries for freedom, of all that I remember are the trees close to my door" (*Rachanabali* 8: 87, Translation is mine). Such a longing expresses an intense proximity with Nature, which the poet experienced throughout his life. This epistolary witness of the poet's friendship with Nature forms the "Introduction" to his *Bonobani* (1931), a volume of poetry where most of the poems are dedicated to the trees of his *Ashrama* at Santiniketan. In this paper I shall attempt to analyse some of the poems of *Bonobani* to explore Rabindranath's perception of Nature as represented in his poetic practice.

Keywords: *Nature, Unity of Life, Inclusive, Consciousness*

In a letter written to Tejesh Chandra Sen from Vienna in October 23, 1926, Rabindranath expressed a deeper urge to be one with the trees at Santiniketan and admitted, "Whenever my mind cries for freedom, of all that I remember are the trees close to my door" (*Rachanabali* 8: 87, Translation is mine). Such a longing expresses an intense proximity with Nature, which the poet experienced throughout his life. This epistolary witness of the poet's friendship with Nature forms the "Introduction" to his *Bonobani* (1931), a volume of poetry where most of the poems are dedicated to the trees of his *Ashrama* at Santiniketan. In this paper I shall attempt to analyse some of the poems of *Bonobani* to explore Rabindranath's perception of Nature as represented in his poetic practice.

Rabindranath was drawn to Nature since his childhood years. His isolation and confinement in the servant's quarters provided him ample scope to observe Nature. He could relate

his isolated state to that of the trees. He admits that in his solitariness Nature offered him a companionship. In the essay "The Poet's Religion", Tagore says: "I remember, when I was a child, that a row of coconut trees by our garden wall, with their branches beckoning the rising sun on the horizon, gave me a companionship as living as I was myself" (Das 2: 497). It is this "living" Nature that constitutes his poems of *Bonobani* where Nature ceases to be a mere decorative backdrop and assumes subjectivity. The title, with its juxtaposition of "bon" and "bani", bears the poet's proposition that Nature has some message to convey. Nature becomes the poet's alter ego where he also finds a reflection of his creative self. The poet's longing to express himself is equated with Nature whose ardent desire for self-expression can be sensed in the beauty of its branches, leaves and flowers. In the poem "Amrobon", the poet seeks to communicate the immense joy that the tree experiences with the emergence of its new shoots. This joy is equated with the poet's creative pleasure. As the plant has its flowers to enhance its beauty and give expression to its creative being, the poet has his verses. If a plant renews itself with its new shoots and floral outputs, a poet rediscovers himself in his imagination. A poet, in fact, renews his consciousness. In another poem "Sal", Rabindranath illuminates an inner creative principle in Nature that facilitates its flamboyant expressions. Here he admires the tree for its uprightness and concentration with which it meditates to create. While defining the "Sal" as a hermit, completely withdrawn from the world and immersed in deep meditation, the poet attests sanctity to its creative principle. The poet's homage to the tree is more pronounced as he perceives it as a symbol of eternal time. Hence, he says, "All the vast empires drown in the currents of time and disappear like bubbles/ The vanity of man traverses the perilous paths of glory, and its broken chariot soon fills the dust/ In the midst of these you stand; O Sal the Great, you are the guest of the eternal time" (*Rachanabali* 8: 100, Translation is mine). Thus, in contrast to the mechanised clock time that fractures our existence, Nature is sought here as a repository of a continuous time that knows no rupture between past, present and future.

In the "Introduction" to *Bonobani*, the poet deciphers our long forgotten history in the apparently unintelligible language of the plants. He says, "Their language is the primitive language of the world of mortals, its signal reaches the first and foremost layer of life; It stirs the long forgotten history of thousands and thousands of years; Even our mind responds in the language of the tree – it has no definite meaning, yet, in it innumerable ages whisper together" (*Rachanabali* 8: 87, Translation is mine). This can be interpreted as the poet's conscious attempt to restore the significance of nature as the cradle of human civilization. In Nature, he perceives a resonance of the "first life" that precedes all existence. The poet contends that the indomitable energy of this life has acquired varied forms of manifestations. Nature is thus seen as an all inclusive sphere of life that connects the inanimate with man's innate being. Rabindranath maintains that his great delight lies in the realisation of this eternal flow of life in nature that also finds an echo in his own consciousness. The liberty that he conceives in nature fosters such realisation and operates in releasing one from the narrow confines of extreme individualism.

Rabindranath's disillusionment with the modern civilisation, and with it the idea of progress as nurtured by the West was perceived in his post First World War writings. In his lecture "City and Village" delivered in Italy at Turin on June 21, 1926, Tagore shows how the modern civilization thrives on the privatization of wealth, thereby, fostering universal greed, envy, mutual hatred which culminates in the destruction of a cordial living condition for men. While he points out the differences between a country and a city, the poet also adds that the urban civilization gradually takes its own course of development by discarding nature altogether. On the other hand, he considers villages as the true embodiment of nature's idyllic state. He says: "Villages are like women ...They are nearer to nature than towns; and are therefore closer in touch with the fountain of life" (Das 3: 513). The relationship between a village and a city, that has been etched out in this address, reveals the same exploitative tendencies that contaminate the kinship between men and nature. The poet maintains that the civilization that prospers by severing all its ties with nature is

sure to meet its decline. As the root cause of such an outcome he condemns the "substitution of true civilization by what the West calls progress" (Das 3: 514). He further clarifies his own stance: "I am never against progress, but when, for its sake, civilization is ready to sell its soul, then I choose to remain primitive in my material possessions" (Das 3: 514). While these multiple facets of fragmentation in the world perturbed Tagore, he sought Nature as an epitome of wholeness. His conscious adoption of the Upanishadic doctrines facilitated his perception of a hidden consciousness in Nature. In one of his Santiniketan lectures called "*Brahmosamaj Sarthokota*", the poet laments that men consider Nature in fragments. While granting the utilitarian aspects of Nature, we generally ignore the greater consciousness that connects Nature with human soul. In this context, the poet acknowledges the teaching of the *Upanisads* that strive to convey the everlasting presence of a single consciousness in all. He also maintains that mere knowledge of this Absolute is not sufficient. Rather a strong devotion is required not only to feel and acknowledge its presence but also to bow down in reverence before the diverse forms of its manifestation. "*Brikshabondona*" contains a similar gesture on the part of the poet that confirms his tribute to the tree which is ultimately directed towards its inner being. Hence the tree is perceived as "*AdiPran*", the repository of wisdom. In his invocation: "Tree, first life, you heard the sun's/ Summons from the blind womb/ Of earth at life's first stirring" the poet seeks the tree as a living link that connects the chaos to the cosmos. From the darker caverns of earth the tree "voiced the first/ Hymn to light" (*Rachanabali* 8: 89). Thus, it emerges as the expression of the inexpressible, the form of the formless. While expounding the nature of the Brahman as expressed in the *Upanisads*, Radhakrishnan resorts to Śamkara's commentary on the *Brahma-Sutra* that refers to an episode where a teacher keeps silent when asked by his student to explain the nature of *Brahman*. When addressed thrice he replies that his silence has conveyed all. Probably silence is the only possible way to show that all the attempts to define the *Brahman* and thus fix its identity are futile. Therefore the silence is infested with a certain kind of wisdom which the poet also senses in the silence of the tree

in “Brikshabondona”. In its profound quietness he perceives immense power that draws him towards the tree. The poet acknowledges thus: “O silent one, O greatly grave,/ Binding bravery with patience, you showed/ Power’s tranquil form” (*Rachanabali* 8: 90). The poet looks up to the tree as a potent source of vitality, which it continually showers upon mankind. The tree is thus praised for its constant effort to nurture humanity. The poem closes in a self-reflexive manner as the poet extends his humble offerings to nature: “I, poet, spellbound by the green god’s flute,/ Salute you with these offerings” (*Rachanabali* 8: 90)¹. This expository poem to *Bonobani* thus clarifies the poet’s purpose of composing such nature poems.

In *Bonobani* the poet incorporates the poem “Jagadish Chandra” where he weaves his tribute to his scientist friend J. C. Bose for his numerous successful efforts to decipher the nervous mechanisms in plants. The poem reveals that the inexpressible depth of Nature contains the essence of life. In the apparent silence of Nature there is a constant struggle to assert its existence. While appreciating his friend’s endeavour to decode the inexpressible in plants, the poet acknowledges that Bose’s project has successfully diminished the differences between plants and mankind and reinstated the kinship between them. What is implied here is that the scientist’s endeavour has actually granted a logical sanctioning to the poet’s intuitions. Interestingly, Rabindranath consciously refers to the scientist as a hermit who preferred a cloistered space to carefully perceive the inner principles of nature. Thus, more than a tribute to nature, the poem emerges as a tribute to Jagadish Chandra Bose and his perception.

The poet’s faith in a greater consciousness operating in all finds another expression in his poem “Narikel” where he personifies a coconut tree planted in Santiniketan, miles away from its natural habitat of coastal areas. He extends his sympathy towards the tree as he earnestly believes that the tree is suffering owing to its isolated life in exile. In his attempt to convey the tree’s emotional response, one finds his conscious effort to see Nature and mankind together. This is also projected in his poem “Kutirbasi” dedicated to

Tejesh Chandra Sen whose residence was built in such a way as to circumscribe the stout trunk of a tree. It confirmed his living in and with Nature. In this poem, too, the poet finds a continuation of Nature's principles in man. Thus in the personality of Tejesh Chandra he discovers the calmness and serenity of Nature. A popular anecdote about Tejesh Chandra reveals that this devotee of Nature did not attend the services at the temple. When Tagore was informed of his reluctance to attend the temple, he discarded it saying that Tejesh had already found his divine principle in Nature.

The year 1926, when the poet made his second trip to Italy, acted as a revelation to him. On his first visit to Italy, he met Carlo Formichi, a Buddhist scholar in the University of Rome, who also acted as the poet's interpreter. Formichi came to Santiniketan in November 1925 as a Guest Faculty at the poet's invitation. Seeing a possibility of a cultural exchange between India and Italy, Tagore promptly planned his second tour to Italy in 1926. This time he received the hospitality of Mussolini and failed to perceive the subtle strains of the Fascist politics. His comments on the Fascist regime were represented in a somewhat distorted form in the government controlled press. Tagore was misunderstood as a supporter of Fascism. However, the initial charm was soon dispelled as he came in contact with Romain Rolland, and most significantly the Salvadori couple who were the worst victims of Fascism. Thus, fully convinced of the nature of the Fascist regime, Tagore could perceive the bleak forces working underneath their administration. His letter to C. F. Andrews from Vienna written in July 20, 1926, reveals his deeper anguish as he clarifies his position against Fascist politics and openly condemns the movement which "ruthlessly suppresses freedom of expression, enforces observances that are against individual conscience, and walks through a blood-stained path of violence and stealthy crime" (Das 3: 993). This letter obviously invoked Formichi's reply attempting to undo the charges of Tagore followed by enormous repercussions in the Italian press. The debate sealed the predicament of cultural exchange between India and Italy. Interestingly this critical year precedes Tagore's composition of the poems of *Bonobani*. While the poet was being scrutinised, condemned and

victimised outside, his poetic exercise gave him a scope to withdraw. In his ardent acceptance of Nature as a true friend we sense his retreat into an alternative world that offers him a peaceful respite. Hence, the poet's conscious articulation of Nature within the cultural ambit of Santiniketan can be read as his proposed way out from the bleak world towards which human life was fast heading.

Two years later in 1928, *Briksharopan* (The Tree Planting Ceremony) was introduced in Santiniketan. The concluding section of *Bonobani* contains the songs which were composed for this elaborate tree-planting ceremony. In her memoir *Sob Hote Apon*, Rani Chanda commemorates the vigour with which *Briksharopan* was celebrated at the Ashrama. A young sapling was placed in a decorated palanquin and carried in procession to the site where it was to be planted. The song "Morubijoyer Ketanuraosunye he probolpran" was sung to grace the ritual. This lyric bears a testimony to the poet's faith in the triumph of the sapling on its barren site in due course of time. The sapling is blessed and the poet yearns that one day it will express itself in its leaves, flowers and fruits. The tree is not exclusively sought for its resources but the poet sees it as a prospective friend of mankind. In the jubilant movement of its branches, he senses a jovial play of musical notes in the morning which gradually recedes into a profound silence in the evening and at night the tree nestles then ascent music. In another song, "Ay Amader Angane", the poet welcomes the saplings as his guests and addresses them as "Balak Torudol". With a deeper urge to the young plants to enjoy the warmth of this newly founded friendship, he weaves his request to the ashram ites to nurture a similar feeling. His filial affection towards the plants is expressed as he blesses them for their future growth and prosperity in this Promised Land. The lyrics are also complemented by Tagore's appraisal of the five elements that secure a plant's sustenance. Thus the earth, water, fire, air and the azure sky are sought to foster the growth of the sapling. The poet sees the earth as an instrument of enormous strength and immense affection. Therefore the earth is invoked to shelter the sapling in her bosom and mould its character by imparting on it her distinct qualities. One day the plant will inherit her strength to endure while

the affection will find expression in its ability to shelter others. The power of water is then sought to enliven the sapling whose vitality will be further enriched by the energy of light. The air is invoked as the plant's playmate who will impart rhythm to its leaves. Finally the poet seeks the infinite sky as a treasure dome of courage, vigour and life force which will preserve the plant and facilitate its growth. All his wishes for the plant are reinstated in the final lyric with which *Bonobani* closes. Titled as "Mangalik" it carries an optimistic note that declares the ritual as truly auspicious. The poet desires a long, sustained life for the sapling and utters the ultimate note of his bonding with it: "Be our friend, stay as our neighbour" (*Rachanabali* 8: 116)

Bonobani emerges out to be a significant platform which not only reflects Rabindranath's aesthetic appraisal of nature but also replicates his suggestion to see nature and culture as two interspersing entities. As it ponders upon the richness of colours in nature, it also imbibes the colour in its own filigree of images. The poet's personification of nature articulates a wider range. Nature is depicted as wise as a hermit or at times it is portrayed with the innocence and restlessness of an urchin. The feminine beauty and frailty also accompany the poet's representation of nature. Thus the multiplicity of images that lies within the poetic design of *Bonobani* corresponds to the variety of nature thereby making such poetic enterprise a true counterpart of nature.

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Nature as a Living Presence in Tagore's Literature: A Study of Spiritual and Emotional Agency

Shreyoshi Dhar

Rabindranath Tagore, a luminary of Indian literature and a Nobel Laureate, is well known for his profound and evocative portrayal of nature in his body of literature. His characterization of nature transcends the mere description of the natural world; rather, he imbues it with rich, dynamic personality traits and attributes that reflect deeper philosophical and emotional truths. This personification of nature in Tagore's texts serves as a medium to explore human emotions, spiritual introspection, and cultural values.

Furthermore, Tagore's approach to nature is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of India. His works often draw upon classical Indian philosophies that view nature as a sacred and living entity. By integrating these traditions into his writing, Tagore creates a vision of nature that is both culturally resonant and universally accessible, inviting readers to see nature not merely as a physical realm but as a spiritual and emotional landscape. Thus, this paper deals with Rabindranath Tagore's characterization of nature as a dynamic and multifaceted character that is central to his literary vision. By endowing nature with personality traits and symbolic meanings, Tagore explores profound themes of human existence, spirituality, and emotion. Nature in Tagore's texts is a living and breathing presence that reflects and enhances the human experience, offering readers a deeper understanding of both the natural world and their own inner lives.

Tagore's portrayal of nature often highlights its relationship with the divine and the mystical. In his writing, nature is depicted as a manifestation of the divine presence, imbued with spiritual significance. For example, in his *Rabindra Rachanabali*, the natural world is portrayed as a reflection of

the divine will, with trees, rivers, and mountains, thereby symbolizing various aspects of the divine essence. This alignment with the divine reflects Tagore's philosophical belief in the interconnectedness of all existence and the sacredness inherent in the natural world.

Rabindranath Tagore's *Rabindra Rachanabali*, a comprehensive collection of his works, offers a profound exploration of nature, reflecting his deep and multifaceted engagement with the natural world. Tagore's presentation of nature in this extensive anthology is not merely a celebration of its beauty but a nuanced dialogue that intertwines the physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of nature. His works encapsulate a vision where nature is a living, dynamic force that influences human life and consciousness. In *Rabindra Rachanabali*, nature is frequently depicted as a manifestation of the divine. Tagore's poetry and prose often imbue natural elements with spiritual significance, suggesting that nature serves as a conduit for experiencing the divine. In this collection, nature is frequently depicted as a manifestation of the divine.

In his prose works and storytelling, Tagore's portrayal of nature is often woven into the narrative, enhancing the thematic depth of his stories. Nature frequently serves as a backdrop that reflects the emotional and psychological states of characters. In stories set in rural Bengal, the natural environment is depicted with rich detail, creating a vivid setting that influences the plot and character development. Tagore's use of nature in storytelling also reflects his belief in its power to shape human experiences and moral values.

One of the central themes in Tagore's works is the idea of nature as a living, breathing entity that interacts with human consciousness. In his poems and essays, he often personified nature, imbuing it with qualities of awareness and emotion. This anthropomorphic view allowed him to explore complex ideas about the human condition, spirituality, and the cosmos. Nature, for Tagore, was a reflection of divine presence, a medium through which the eternal and the temporal intertwined.

Rabindranath Tagore, a profound philosopher and poet, offered a unique perspective on nature that transcended mere observation, embedding it deeply within the fabric of human existence and consciousness. Tagore's definition of nature was not limited to its physical aspects but intertwined with philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions, reflecting his holistic view of the universe and humanity's place within it.

Tagore's relationship with nature was deeply influenced by his upbringing in rural Bengal. Growing up amidst the lush landscapes of Santiniketan, he developed an intimate connection with the natural world. This personal bond profoundly shaped his artistic and philosophical expressions. To Tagore, nature was not merely a backdrop or an external entity but a vital and dynamic participant in the unfolding drama of life.

In Tagore's poetry and prose, nature is not simply a backdrop or setting but a character with its own agency and voice. This is particularly evident in his seminal work, *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*). Here, nature often takes on roles that mirror the human condition. For instance, the river mentioned in his poems is not just a physical entity but a symbolic force that represents the flow of life, consciousness, and spiritual journey. It serves as a metaphor for the human soul, constantly moving and evolving, reflecting the protagonist's inner state of being. The river's gentle, soothing nature can also symbolize peace and tranquility, while its turbulent aspects may signify internal conflict and turmoil.

In his collection of poems *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), Tagore frequently addresses nature as a symbol of the divine. He sees nature as an expression of a higher reality, where every element—be it the sky, the river, or the earth—carries spiritual significance. Tagore's poetry often suggests that nature's beauty and grandeur are manifestations of the divine, revealing glimpses of the infinite and the eternal. For instance, he writes about the natural world in a way that suggests a deep reverence for its ability to connect the mundane with the sacred.

Tagore also explored the idea of nature as a source of inspiration and enlightenment. He believed that through a profound engagement with nature, individuals could attain spiritual and intellectual clarity. In his writings, he often depicts nature as a teacher that imparts wisdom and truth. This view is evident in his essays and stories, where nature is portrayed as a guide that leads individuals toward self-realization and understanding of their place in the universe.

Moreover, Tagore's concept of nature was deeply tied to his philosophy of humanism and the idea of a universal human experience. He saw nature as a common thread that binds all living beings, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. For Tagore, nature was a bridge between individuals and the larger cosmos, fostering a sense of unity and shared existence. This perspective is reflected in his belief in the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of harmony between humanity and the natural world.

Tagore's approach to nature also encompassed a critique of industrialization and its impact on human life and the environment. He was wary of the alienation that industrial progress often caused, where the essence of nature was overshadowed by mechanization and materialism. In his writings, Tagore expressed concern over how modernity, with its emphasis on technology and economic growth, was leading to a disconnection from the natural world and, consequently, from a deeper understanding of existence. He advocated for a balance between progress and preservation, urging society to recognize the intrinsic value of nature beyond its utilitarian aspects.

In addition to his philosophical and spiritual insights, Tagore's literary works offer a vivid portrayal of nature's beauty and diversity. His descriptions are often imbued with a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world. Whether he is writing about the serene landscapes of rural Bengal or the bustling beauty of a forest, Tagore's language evokes a deep emotional response, encouraging readers to perceive nature with fresh eyes and an open heart.

Tagore also uses nature to explore themes of love, longing, and transcendence. In his short stories and poems, nature often becomes a confidante or a silent witness to human emotions. In *The Crescent Moon (Chandranubha)*, Rabindranath Tagore presents nature with a blend of lyrical beauty, philosophical reflection, and emotional depth. This collection, primarily written for children, reveals Tagore's profound appreciation for the natural world through simple yet evocative language. His depiction of the moon and the night sky captures a sense of longing and introspection, providing a space for characters to reflect on their desires and existential questions. The natural elements in Tagore's texts are not static; they are dynamic forces that interact with human experiences, influencing and being influenced by them.

In this collection, nature is portrayed as a realm of wonder and imagination. Tagore's poems reflect a childlike fascination with natural elements, portraying them as sources of endless fascination and delight. The natural world is depicted with vivid imagery and playful descriptions that invite readers to see it through a lens of wonder. For example, the moon and stars are often personified and depicted as playful companions, engaging in whimsical interactions with children. This personification brings nature to life, making it an active participant in the joy and curiosity of childhood.

Tagore's portrayal of nature also explores its connection to human emotions. In these poems, natural elements often mirror the emotional states of the characters or the poet himself. The serene beauty of a moonlit night, the gentle rustle of leaves, and the delicate flutter of butterflies serve as metaphors for feelings of tranquility, longing, or introspection. Through this lens, nature becomes a mirror reflecting the inner life of individuals, emphasizing how closely human emotions are intertwined with the natural environment.

It is important to note that, nature is depicted as a wise and gentle teacher. Tagore often uses natural settings to impart moral lessons and insights to young readers. For instance, the calm and consistent presence of the moon serves as a symbol of enduring wisdom and constancy, teaching lessons about patience, resilience, and the cyclical nature of life. The

natural world in Tagore's poems is portrayed as a guide that helps individuals understand and appreciate the rhythms of existence, encouraging a harmonious relationship with the environment.

Tagore's depiction of nature moreover celebrates the simple, often overlooked pleasures of life. He highlights the beauty found in ordinary moments, such as the sound of rain, the sight of a butterfly, or the warmth of sunlight. Through his evocative and sensory-rich language, Tagore encourages readers to find joy and contentment in these everyday experiences. This celebration of simplicity reflects a broader philosophical view that finds value and meaning in the natural world's subtle and often unnoticed details. Imagination plays a crucial role in Tagore's presentation of nature. The poems often blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, with natural elements taking on magical qualities. For instance, the moon is not just a celestial body but a friendly, almost magical entity that interacts with the characters. This imaginative portrayal encourages readers, especially children, to view nature as a source of creativity and inspiration, fostering a sense of wonder and exploration.

Tagore's writings also reflect his belief in nature's role in fostering social harmony and unity. In his educational philosophy and social thought, he emphasized the importance of integrating nature into human activities and institutions. For Tagore, nature was a means of bridging divides and promoting a sense of shared existence. His vision of education, especially in his institution Visva-Bharati, emphasized learning from and engaging with nature as a way to cultivate a harmonious and unified society. This perspective is evident in his literary works, where nature often serves as a symbol of interconnectedness and collective well-being.

Tagore's educational philosophy also reflected his views on nature. At Visva-Bharati University, which he founded, he emphasized the integration of nature into the learning process. He believed that education should not be confined within the walls of a classroom but should include direct engagement with the natural environment. This approach aimed to cultivate a holistic understanding of the world,

where students could experience and learn from nature's lessons.

Rabindranath Tagore's definition of nature was thus multifaceted and deeply interwoven with his philosophical, spiritual, and artistic views. He saw nature as a living entity, a reflection of the divine, and a source of wisdom and inspiration. His work encourages a profound appreciation for the natural world and advocates for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Through his poetry, essays, and educational endeavours, Tagore offered a vision of nature that is both transcendent and immanent, highlighting its central role in the human experience and its connection to the divine.

“God is Change”: Faith, Adaptability, and Resilience in Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower

Mr. Nabakrishna Barman & Dr. Tirna Sadhu

Abstract

Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) interrogates the role of faith in navigating uncertainty within a dystopian future shaped by ecological collapse, economic disparity, and social breakdown. Central to the novel is the philosophy of Earthseed, which asserts that “God is Change,” positioning change as the sole enduring truth of existence. This paper explores how Earthseed functions as a spiritual and practical framework that empowers Lauren Olamina and her community to confront chaos with adaptability, resilience, and hope.

By drawing on ecocritical and feminist perspectives, the paper examines how Butler aligns Earthseed with the realities of environmental disaster, systemic inequality, and patriarchal oppression. The tenets of Earthseed resonate with process theology’s vision of divinity as dynamic rather than static, thereby reframing faith as a tool of survival and transformation in times of crisis. For Olamina and her followers, faith in change cultivates agency, enabling them not merely to endure instability but to actively shape a new social order through Acorn, Earthseed’s fledgling community.

In connecting Butler’s speculative vision to contemporary anxieties surrounding climate change, economic inequality, and political volatility, this study argues that *Parable of the Sower* offers more than dystopian warning—it presents a blueprint for resilience grounded in adaptability and communal faith. Ultimately, Butler demonstrates that belief in change, far from being destabilizing, can serve as the foundation for survival, cohesion, and renewal in an unpredictable world.

Keywords: *Earthseed, faith, adaptability, climate crisis, process theology, resilience, ecocriticism.*

Introduction

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) occupies a pivotal place within post-apocalyptic literature, offering a vision of survival and spirituality amidst societal collapse. Set in 2024, the novel depicts a fractured America devastated by climate change, economic decline, and rampant violence. Butler's imagined future, though written in the early 1990s, resonates powerfully with present-day concerns, reflecting a prescient awareness of ecological degradation, racial inequality, and widening social unrest. Through speculative fiction, Butler channels these anxieties into a narrative that foregrounds not only destruction but also the potential for resilience, transformation, and renewal.

At the center of this narrative stands Lauren Olamina, a perceptive and determined teenager who rejects the static frameworks of conventional religion in favor of a new belief system: Earthseed. Built upon the conviction that "God is Change," Earthseed offers a fluid, adaptive spirituality that enables individuals and communities to confront instability with agency rather than resignation. Unlike traditional doctrines that seek permanence, Earthseed embraces change as the essence of existence, reframing faith as a dynamic response to crisis.

This paper explores how Butler positions faith in *Parable of the Sower* as a critical means of coping with uncertainty and navigating survival in a disintegrating world. It situates Earthseed within the broader landscape of post-apocalyptic fiction, analyzing how Butler reimagines spirituality as a resource for both personal empowerment and communal resilience. By emphasizing adaptability, resilience, and hope, Butler's novel suggests that faith need not retreat from chaos; rather, it can serve as a transformative force that equips humanity to endure and rebuild in the face of profound change.

This paper explores how Butler positions faith in *Parable of the Sower* as a critical means of coping with uncertainty

and navigating survival in a disintegrating world. It situates *Earthseed* within the broader landscape of post-apocalyptic fiction, analyzing how Butler reimagines spirituality as a resource for both personal empowerment and communal resilience. By emphasizing adaptability, resilience, and hope, Butler's novel suggests that faith need not retreat from chaos; rather, it can serve as a transformative force that equips humanity to endure and rebuild in the face of profound change.

Literature review

The genre of post-apocalyptic fiction has long served as a powerful vehicle for exploring humanity's responses to existential threats, societal collapse, and environmental catastrophe. In the early 1990s, this genre saw a resurgence, with many works reflecting growing concerns about global issues such as climate change, economic disparity, and the erosion of social structures. Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is a key text within this context, offering a profound exploration of survival, faith, and adaptability in a collapsing world. To understand Butler's unique contribution, it is essential to examine *Parable of the Sower* within the broader framework of post-apocalyptic fiction from the same period and explore how it responds to and diverges from existing narratives.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, post-apocalyptic fiction became increasingly shaped by ecological concerns and a growing awareness of environmental degradation. Novels like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) (though later) highlighted the fragility of human civilization in the face of environmental disaster and societal breakdown. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, however, takes this a step further by explicitly linking environmental collapse with socio-economic failure, depicting a United States where water is scarce, cities burn, and lawlessness reigns. In this context, faith becomes not a retreat from reality, but a pragmatic tool for coping with change. Unlike other post-apocalyptic works that emphasize survival in physical terms, Butler's novel uniquely centers spiritual survival as essential to enduring societal collapse.

Scholars such as Gerry Canavan and Peter G. Stillman have explored how Butler's novel redefines the post-apocalyptic genre by foregrounding the experiences of marginalized characters and communities. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina's Earthseed philosophy serves as a response to the failed systems around her, positioning faith as a dynamic, adaptive force in a world where traditional religious structures offer little solace. In their analysis of post-apocalyptic literature, Canavan and Stillman argue that Butler's focus on faith in the midst of catastrophe shifts the genre away from a nihilistic view of the future and toward one of resilience and hope. This aligns with other works from the era, such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (1993), which also emphasizes adaptability and human agency in the face of crisis, though from a more scientific and technological perspective.

Moreover, critics such as Marc D. Schaumann and Patricia Melzer have noted that *Parable of the Sower* challenges the typical gendered and racial dynamics of post-apocalyptic fiction. In contrast to many male-dominated narratives, Butler centers her story on a young African American woman, whose spiritual vision and leadership drive the plot forward. In doing so, Butler subverts traditional power structures and offers a model of faith that is rooted in communal support, cooperation, and adaptability. As Schaumann notes in his study of Butler's work, *Parable of the Sower* emphasizes the need for collective survival in the face of overwhelming chaos, where faith becomes a vehicle for social change and personal empowerment, not just a means of coping.

The Earthseed religion at the heart of *Parable of the Sower* has also been examined as a revolutionary narrative within the post-apocalyptic genre. By embracing the idea that "God is Change," Lauren rejects the static nature of traditional belief systems and instead promotes a faith that evolves alongside its followers. Scholars like Patricia Hill Collins have argued that this reflects a broader trend in post-apocalyptic fiction from the 1990s, which sought to redefine human relationships with the divine, the environment, and each other in the wake of societal collapse. Collins points out that this shift away from apocalyptic pessimism to a more adaptive, hopeful

response to disaster marks a significant evolution in the genre, reflecting the uncertainties of the time while offering a pathway to resilience.

Methodology

The core of this research is a close reading and textual analysis of *Parable of the Sower*, focusing on the thematic elements of faith, change, and uncertainty. The novel will be analyzed through important passages that highlight the protagonist Lauren Olamina's development of the Earthseed belief system, particularly its central tenet: "God is Change." By examining these passages, the paper will uncover how Butler constructs faith as an adaptive response to both personal and societal crises. The paper will see how Earthseed's philosophy contrasts with traditional religious views in the novel and reflects a broader cultural shift in post-apocalyptic fiction of the 1990s.

Butler's portrayal of faith as a dynamic, evolving process will be compared to traditional, static religious doctrines often found in post-apocalyptic fiction. This thematic exploration will help clarify how Earthseed represents a radical reimagining of faith that emphasizes human adaptability rather than reliance on divine intervention.

To situate *Parable of the Sower* within the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction, the research will compare Butler's work to other novels from the early 1990s that address similar themes, such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (1993) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). This comparison will highlight how Butler diverges from the conventional pessimism in apocalyptic narratives, offering a more hopeful vision of faith and human survival.

The paper addresses the post-apocalyptic cultural landscape of the 1990s, particularly in relation to ecological, social, and political anxieties. How *Parable of the Sower* reflects these concerns and presents faith as a means of negotiating them. The role of marginalized voices, particularly women and people of colour, in post-apocalyptic fiction and how Butler foregrounds these perspectives in her exploration of faith.

The study will draw on literary criticism and theoretical frameworks from scholars who have examined faith, identity, and dystopian futures. Postcolonial, feminist, and ecocritical lenses will be applied to understand how Butler uses faith as a tool for navigating oppression, ecological disaster, and societal breakdown. In particular, the research will engage with works by scholars like Gerry Canavan, Patricia Melzer, and Patricia Hill Collins to build a robust framework for interpreting Butler's reimagining of faith.

Finally, this research will conduct a comparative analysis between Earthseed's central tenets and traditional religious philosophies. By comparing Earthseed's embrace of change with religious traditions that emphasize stability, this study will reveal how Butler redefines the role of faith in a world marked by uncertainty. It will explore questions such as:

How does Earthseed's fluid concept of divinity ("God is Change") challenge static, traditional notions of God and how do these differing worldviews influence characters' ability to cope with the uncertainties of a post-apocalyptic world?

Discussion and findings

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is set in a dystopian future America in the 2020s, where societal collapse has led to chaos, lawlessness, and environmental destruction. The story is narrated by Lauren Olamina, a young African American woman who lives in a walled community outside Los Angeles. The world outside is ravaged by climate change, economic inequality, and widespread violence, with cities dominated by crime, drug addiction, and poverty. As resources become scarce, the government is ineffective, leaving individuals and small communities to fend for themselves in a brutal, anarchic world.

Lauren suffers from "hyperempathy," a condition that causes her to feel others' pain as if it were her own. This physical and emotional vulnerability shapes her view of the world and fuels her desire for change. As her community slowly falls apart, Lauren begins to develop her own philosophy, which she calls "Earthseed." At the heart of Earthseed is the belief that "God is Change," meaning that change is the only

constant in life, and human beings must learn to adapt to it rather than resist it.

When her walled community is eventually destroyed by outsiders, Lauren embarks on a dangerous journey north with a few survivors. Along the way, she gathers a group of followers, and together they confront the challenges of a world that has descended into chaos. As they struggle to survive, Lauren teaches them the tenets of Earthseed, a belief system that offers hope in the midst of despair by emphasizing the importance of adapting to change.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren envisions Earthseed as a new way of living that transcends the divisions of the old world. She believes that humanity's destiny lies among the stars, and that Earthseed will guide people toward a future where they can rebuild society in harmony with change. Her journey is both physical and spiritual, as she grapples with the meaning of faith, leadership, and the transformative power of belief in times of uncertainty and turmoil.

Throughout the novel, Butler uses Lauren's evolving faith in Earthseed as a way to explore how individuals and communities can find meaning and strength in the face of overwhelming adversity. Lauren's belief in "God is Change" reflects the idea that faith can help people cope with life's uncertainties by providing a framework for understanding and accepting change, rather than fearing it. By the end of the novel, Lauren has laid the foundation for Earthseed and has begun to build a community centered on the principles of adaptability, resilience, and hope for the future.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler interweaves themes of faith, change, and survival. Lauren's development of Earthseed centers on the belief that embracing change, rather than resisting it, is the key to thriving in an uncertain world. Faith, in this context, becomes not a static doctrine, but a dynamic process—an acknowledgment that nothing is permanent except change itself.

Lauren's mantra, "All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change. God is Change," encapsulates this philosophy, highlighting

how change is both a powerful force and a source of agency. By accepting the inevitability of change, individuals can find strength, resilience, and purpose in adapting to new realities.

In the chaos of her world, faith is no longer simply about adhering to traditional religious beliefs, but about constructing a new belief system that offers hope in a world of uncertainty. *Earthseed* is a tool for navigating the chaos, providing Lauren and her followers with a way to cope with the instability of their environment.

One of the most radical aspects of *Parable of the Sower* is its centering of marginalized voices, particularly those of women and people of color, in the context of post-apocalyptic fiction. Traditionally, post-apocalyptic narratives have often been dominated by white, male protagonists whose journeys focus on survival, power struggles, and the reestablishment of order. Butler subverts this by making Lauren, a young Black woman, the protagonist, leader, and visionary of the story.

Lauren's position as a Black woman in a dystopian world is significant, as her experiences reflect the double marginalization of gender and race. She navigates a world that is not only ravaged by environmental collapse but also shaped by deeply ingrained racial and gender inequalities. Her ability to lead and survive in this context is a testament to the strength of marginalized communities in resisting and overcoming systemic oppression. Butler's choice of protagonist highlights the specific challenges faced by women and people of color in navigating a world where traditional power structures have collapsed, but where the remnants of inequality still exist.

Moreover, Lauren's leadership is collaborative and community-oriented, contrasting with the individualistic and often patriarchal leadership styles seen in other post-apocalyptic narratives. She is a visionary, but she also fosters a collective approach to survival, gathering people from different backgrounds to form a community based on the principles of *Earthseed*. This reflects Butler's broader critique of hierarchical structures of power, suggesting that true survival and progress come through cooperation and inclusivity, particularly among marginalized groups.

Butler uses Lauren's development of Earthseed to foreground the ways in which marginalized voices can offer new perspectives on faith and survival in a post-apocalyptic world. Lauren's belief system emerges from her lived experience as a Black woman in a world that has failed her and her community. She rejects the traditional Christian faith of her father, which, while comforting in some ways, offers little practical guidance for navigating the collapse of society. Instead, she creates a new belief system that is grounded in adaptability and change, one that speaks directly to the realities of her world.

Lauren's faith is deeply tied to her identity as a woman of color. Her hyperempathy condition, which causes her to physically feel the pain of others, metaphorically links her to the suffering of marginalized people, particularly in a world of extreme inequality. This condition drives her to create Earthseed, a belief system that prioritizes collective well-being and adaptability in the face of constant upheaval. It is a response to both her personal pain and the broader suffering of the world around her, making it a deeply empathetic and inclusive faith.

Butler's portrayal of Lauren's faith as a product of her marginalization offers a powerful critique of traditional religious structures that often exclude or marginalize women and people of color. Earthseed, as a belief system, is rooted in the idea of change, adaptability, and collective survival, reflecting the resilience of marginalized communities in the face of systemic oppression and environmental collapse.

The core principle of Earthseed is the belief that "God is Change," which positions change as the only constant in the universe. Lauren Olamina, the creator of Earthseed, observes that in a world where societal, environmental, and political structures are collapsing, clinging to the notion of an omnipotent, unchanging God offers little guidance or comfort. Instead, she redefines divinity as the force of change itself—unpredictable, uncontrollable, and ever-present.

This fluid concept of divinity contrasts sharply with the traditional Christian beliefs that Lauren was raised with,

particularly those held by her father, a Baptist preacher. In traditional religious worldviews, God is often perceived as omnipotent, immutable, and separate from the forces of the world. These beliefs tend to offer comfort in the form of stability and the hope that divine intervention will ultimately restore order. However, in the post-apocalyptic setting of *Parable of the Sower*, where the environment is destroyed, governments are ineffective, and violence is rampant, such beliefs can seem disconnected from reality. The promise of an unchanging God, while offering comfort in times of stability, fails to provide practical strategies for survival in a world where nothing remains the same.

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In contrast to *Earthseed*, traditional notions of God are tied to a fixed worldview, where faith in a higher power offers stability and moral certainty. In the face of societal collapse, however, many characters in *Parable of the Sower* struggle to reconcile their static beliefs with the harsh realities of the world around them. For example, Lauren's stepmother, Cory, continues to hold onto the hope that normalcy will return, relying on her belief in divine protection and the government's ability to restore order. But these beliefs leave her vulnerable, as she is unable to adapt to the new and dangerous reality that threatens her family's survival. Her reliance on the old order ultimately proves to be a fatal weakness in a world where adaptation is crucial.

Lauren, on the other hand, recognizes that survival depends on one's ability to understand and embrace change, rather than resist it. By conceptualizing God as change itself, Lauren is able to confront the uncertainties of her world with a sense of agency. Earthseed encourages proactive adaptation rather than passive submission, as expressed in one of its verses: "Shape God. Shape Earthseed. Shape yourself." This fluidity allows Lauren and her followers to cope with the ever-shifting realities of the post-apocalyptic world, offering them the psychological flexibility needed to survive.

Traditional religious beliefs often place individuals at the mercy of an all-powerful, external deity. In Earthseed, however, individuals are not passive recipients of divine will; they are active participants in shaping their own futures. By accepting that change is inevitable and that they have the power to influence that change, Lauren and her followers are empowered to take control of their own destinies. This fluid concept of God as change challenges the idea that divinity is distant and immutable, suggesting instead that divinity is intertwined with human action and the natural cycles of the world.

Conclusion

The differing worldviews in *Parable of the Sower*—the static beliefs of traditional religions versus the adaptable, fluid faith of Earthseed—profoundly influence characters' ability to cope with the uncertainties of their dystopian environment.

Characters who cling to traditional, rigid notions of God often find themselves struggling to navigate the collapse of societal structures. These characters tend to view change as something negative, something to be feared and resisted. Their belief systems do not provide the tools necessary to adapt to the new world, leaving them vulnerable and unprepared for the challenges they face. For instance, many of Lauren's neighbors in her walled community continue to believe that their fences and guns will protect them, even as the outside world becomes increasingly dangerous. Their inability to accept the inevitability of change makes them ill-equipped to deal with the collapse of their community.

In contrast, Lauren's Earthseed followers, who embrace the idea of "God is Change," are better able to adjust their expectations and behaviors in response to shifting circumstances. They understand that survival in their new reality requires constant adaptation, flexibility, and action. Earthseed teaches that by understanding and shaping change, individuals can exert some degree of control over their futures, even in an unstable world. This worldview allows them to remain resilient in the face of uncertainty, finding hope in the possibility of a better future rather than being paralyzed by fear of the unknown.

Earthseed's fluid theology gives its followers a sense of purpose and direction, even in the face of overwhelming chaos. Lauren's vision of a future where humanity spreads to other planets—an idea she calls "The Destiny"—provides long-term hope and a framework for collective action. Unlike traditional religious eschatology, which often involves divine judgment or salvation in the afterlife, Earthseed's Destiny is rooted in tangible, achievable goals that require immediate action in the present.

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The Precarity of Hope in Fatimah Asghar's "I Don't Know What Will Kill Us First: The Race War or What We've Done to the Earth"

Soumyarup Bhattacharjee

Abstract

Fatimah Asghar's poem titled "I Don't Know What Will Kill Us First: The Race War or What We've Done to the Earth" (2019) offers a sombre reflection on negotiating with hope at a time of grave environmental precarity as well as cultural insecurity in an increasingly volatile society fraught with racial tension and violence. Asghar, a contemporary American poet of Muslim Indo-Pakistani origin, highlights how the individual subject has to encounter multiple facets of vulnerability at the same time through the poem. This brief critical analysis of "I Don't Know..." examines how the poem, garbed in language alluding to nature's beauty and bounty, hints at the possibility of a dark, uncertain, and uninhabitable future. This essay also explores how the poem brings the focus back on the individual--his/her lives, memories, and experiences--to move away from the impersonality and objectivity in the familiar rhetoric around climate change and instead foreground an intimate and personal perception of the looming threat.

Keywords: *Environment, Climate, Earth, Race, Anxiety, Culture*

In recent years, literature has increasingly attempted to draw attention to the precarious existence on Earth in the face of unprecedented and unrestrained climate change potentially endangering and radically altering life and, more specifically, human lives, on the planet. Along with scientific discourses, political debates, and all kinds of intellectual punditry trying and hoping to make sense of the times we live in and the uncertainty that has engulfed our planetary existence, literature too has sought to give voice to the resultant anxieties

about the future of human life on Earth. Fatimah Asghar's poem "I Don't Know What Will Kill Us First: The Race War or What We've Done to the Earth"¹ (2019) serves as a sombre meditation on the contemporary cultural anxieties pervading our psyche both at the individual as well as the cultural level. The ominous title of the poem, carrying unmissable connotations of cultural and planetary decline, sounds like a personal premonition that, nonetheless, echoes fears deeply entrenched in the society.

Fatimah Asghar is an American poet of South Asian origin whose writing often reflects her experience of growing up and living in America as a Muslim immigrant and woman of colour, testifying at once to the cosmopolitanism and the cultural tensions beneath the surface. Her poems frequently offer a glimpse into a world seen through the eyes of a person who belongs to the ethnic and religious minority--someone who can be simultaneously an insider and an outsider, assimilated and yet distant. "I Don't Know...", in particular, is rooted, on the one hand, in the increasingly volatile cultural and political landscape in early twenty-first century America and, on the other hand, the impending climate crisis in the age of the Anthropocene. This terse essay wishes to offer a concise reflection on how the poem juxtaposes complex and conflicting emotions in the face of looming crises on multiple fronts.

As Asghar herself stated, "I Don't Know..." emerged out of a moment of respite from the persistent feelings of ennui and anxiety that accompany her:

I think about the ways that our world feels unsustainable—some of the most pressing ways being the race war that always feels like it's boiling right under the surface, and climate change/disaster. This poem is about a day that I got lost in a conversation with a friend, and it felt like things slowed down around me, and I was able to put those fears aside and just appreciate what was around me. And how hopeful that is, getting lost in the words and presence of someone you love, having them put a pause on the impending doom that seems right around the corner at all times. (Asghar).

As we read the poem in light of the poet's admission of its origin, the duality in the poem becomes all the more prominent. On the one hand, the poem is unmistakably an expression of angst at a moment of social and environmental crisis and, on the other hand, it is resplendent with hope for the possibility of a better future. Featuring an unnamed speaker addressing an unspecified second person, the poem brings back the focus to personal experiences, past memories, and incidents from everyday life--drawing the conversation back to the intimate and the deeply personal. Sam Illingworth, in his essay on poetry's ability to address the climate crisis, argues that "Poetry has a profound ability to help reframe global issues, taking obscure concepts and couching them in language that is both intimate and familiar" (Illingworth). Asghar's "I Don't Know..." aspires to perform a similar function--it positions the individual at the centre of the frame and translates both the social and the global into language of remembrance, loss, and hope felt with a passionate intensity.

In the poem, the butterflies and the returning bumblebees evoke the imagery of nature's bounty--warm and sunny like an idle spring afternoon. However, this image is soon interrupted by an ominous reminder that the greenness of the park we still have today should not be taken for granted, nor the grass and the leaves. Asghar's use of language is careful and measure, almost minimalist to the point where meaning is loosely floated in the air and never stressed. For example, the simple addition of the word "today" to the line "the park is green" alters the connotation of the line; "today" marks the only point of knowing and, by logical extension, tomorrows are steeped into the realm of the unknown, the uncertain, and the unfamiliar. The threat that is posed by climate change--the possibility of the bumblebees, the butterflies, and the green grass disappearing into something else unarticulated yet--is slow, steady, and calamitous. By situating it against the "race war," in the same decade that witnessed numerous incidents of racial strife including the horrific killing of an African-American suspect while his arrest that would ultimately trigger the "Black Lives Matter" protests, Asghar draws

¹Henceforth referred to as "I Don't Know..."

attention to the inherent precarity that defines existence today, especially for people belonging to minority and marginalised communities in the contemporary United States fraught with racial and religious fault lines.

The poem ends with an effort to establish a connection between knowledge and hope in its attempt to offer an answer to the uncertainty and precarity defining human existence at the present moment. The deliberate ambiguity of the closing lines offer two interpretative possibilities. The first offers unadulterated hope--affirming the possibility of survival even against overwhelming odds. The second invites the reader to fill the void of the unknown with something that can be imagined. Like the fate of the butterfly in the jar that can only be speculated but not known, one can fill up the blank canvass of the future with hope. Therefore, despite the ominous and decidedly pessimistic title of the poem, it nonetheless chooses to offer a note of hope. Thus the speaker's recollection of past memories are not merely elegiac but a reminder to the fine moments that might still be possible to reclaim in the future.

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**Anxiety, Alienation, and the Collapse of
Anthropocentric Consciousness: Nature's Epiphanic
Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Self in
Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay's Aranyak**

Agnideepo Datta

Introduction

The concept of impenetrability in high ecological spaces, particularly dense forest regions, presents a profound challenge to the human being steeped in an anthropocentric worldview, especially those who inhabit urban environments. Forests, with their dense vegetation, labyrinthine ecosystems, and unpredictable rhythms, resist the mechanistic logic of urban existence, which thrives on control, order, and predictability. Philosopher Timothy Morton's concept of "dark ecology" suggests that the complexity and vastness of such ecological spaces confront the human with an "uncanny" sense of their own smallness and vulnerability (Morton 55). Unlike the regulated, sanitized urban environments where human dominance is assumed, the forest represents an autonomous entity that neither needs nor accommodates human presence. The anthropocentric mindset, particularly when shaped by urban life, often struggles to adapt to such spaces, not merely due to physical discomfort but because these environments defy the binary distinction between human and non-human. Forests, in their wildness, challenge the very notion that humans are the central agents of the world.

Into the impenetrable

The difficulty of entering and sustaining oneself in such ecological zones is not simply a matter of physical endurance but one of ontological disorientation. Urban anthropocentrism, as Val Plumwood argues, perpetuates a "hyperseparation" between human and nature, fostering

a worldview in which the non-human world is seen as a backdrop for human activity rather than a living system with its own agency (Plumwood 120). In forest regions, this separation collapses. The human body, unshielded by the technologies and infrastructures of urban life, becomes vulnerable to the whims of an environment it cannot fully control or comprehend. The unpredictability of weather, the presence of unknown species, and the lack of clear boundaries between civilization and wilderness contribute to a sense of impenetrability. For the urban individual, accustomed to navigating a world that has been shaped to their needs, the forest becomes an ecological other—imposing, indifferent, and resistant to human imposition.

In *Aranyak*, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay explores the protagonist Satyacharan's struggle to reconcile his urban anthropocentric mindset with the overwhelming impenetrability of the forest. When Satyacharan first arrives in the forest for his job as an estate manager, he is immediately confronted with a world that does not conform to the orderly, predictable logic of urban life. The forest is vast, teeming with life, and indifferent to his presence, an experience that mirrors the ontological disorientation Timothy Morton describes in his concept of "dark ecology." Satyacharan's initial attempts to impose order on the forest fail, revealing the limits of human control in a non-human space. He writes, "The jungle, this terrible jungle, did not care for my presence... I had never felt so insignificant" (Bandopadhyay 34). This realization triggers a deep existential anxiety in Satyacharan, who is used to the structured, anthropocentric environment of the city where human activity dictates the rhythm of life. In contrast, the forest's impenetrability reminds him of his own fragility and the limits of human dominance, leading to a sense of anxiety as Satyacharan becomes increasingly aware that the forest operates beyond human control or understanding.

Satyacharan's relationship with the forest evolves as he spends more time in its depths, leading to moments of epiphany that transform his understanding of nature. Initially, he views the forest through the lens of exploitation, much like the colonial and urban mindset that Val Plumwood critiques in her

analysis of “hyperseparation” between humans and nature. However, as Satyacharan becomes immersed in the rhythms of the forest, he begins to see the forest not as a resource to be tamed or managed, but as a living entity with its own agency and will. This shift in perspective is evident when he observes, “This forest was no mere collection of trees... It was alive, a breathing, pulsating being that enveloped me completely” (Bandopadhyay 79). Satyacharan’s epiphany, much like Thoreau’s realization in *Walden*, comes from deep communion with nature, where the forest ceases to be an alien, impenetrable space and instead becomes a source of spiritual and intellectual growth. Yet, this transformation also deepens his sense of loss or anxiety, as he realizes that he can never fully return to the urban mindset of control and dominance. The forest has irrevocably altered his worldview, making it difficult for him to reintegrate into the urban, civilized spaces from which he came, thus embodying the tension Morton describes between ecological awareness and the constructed divisions of urban life.

The new epiphany

Quite paradoxically, this very impenetrability gives rise to moments of epiphany. The prolonged engagement with forest ecosystems often results in a reorientation of the human’s understanding of their place within the world. As the anthropocentric mindset begins to erode under the weight of ecological immersion, the human subject experiences a series of “epiphanic moments,” akin to what Henry David Thoreau describes in *Walden* as the realization of “life’s essential facts” through deep communion with nature (Thoreau 73). These moments of ecological epiphany reveal the interconnectedness of all living systems, prompting a shift from seeing the forest as an alien space to recognizing it as a vibrant, self-sustaining community of life. In these moments, the human becomes not a master of nature but a participant in its processes, experiencing a humility and wonder that is often absent in urban, human-dominated spaces. The impenetrability of the forest, then, serves not as a barrier but as a threshold to a deeper, more complex understanding of the self and the natural world.

However, this newfound ecological awareness complicates the return to urban, “civilized” spaces. After such epiphanic experiences, the transition back into the ordered, anthropocentric framework of urban life becomes fraught with tension. The forest, once an impenetrable zone of ecological indifference, now looms large in the human consciousness, creating a sense of alienation from the very spaces where one once felt at home. Morton’s concept of “ecological awareness” further elaborates on this difficulty, arguing that once one becomes attuned to the interconnectedness of life, the artificial divisions of urban space become harder to accept (Morton 77). The individual, having experienced the forest’s impenetrability and the epiphanies it affords, returns to the city not with a sense of triumph but with anxiety—a persistent awareness of the fragility of human dominance over nature and the ecological costs of urban life. This heightened consciousness creates a sense of estrangement from the anthropocentric worldview that defines urban existence, leaving the human subject caught between two worlds: the chaotic, impenetrable forest and the controlled, but environmentally precarious, urban space.

In *Aranyak*, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay skillfully narrates Satyacharan’s deepening immersion into the forest, where his encounters with both the natural world and the indigenous tribal people strip away the layers of his urban, civilized sensibilities. His interactions with the forest elements, especially during the quiet solitude of the night, reveal moments of epiphany that force him to reconsider his anthropocentric view of the world. As Satyacharan observes the mysterious sounds and movements of the nocturnal forest, he writes, “At night, the forest transforms... It is not just a collection of trees but a world teeming with life, beyond my comprehension” (Bandopadhyay 98). In these moments, Satyacharan begins to experience what Thoreau describes as the “realization of life’s essential facts” (Walden 73). The forest no longer appears as a mere backdrop to his human activities; it emerges as a living, breathing entity that commands both awe and fear. This shift in perspective marks a pivotal moment in his journey, as he gradually relinquishes the control and dominance that his urban mindset once demanded. Instead,

he becomes acutely aware of the interconnectedness of life in the forest, where each element, whether it be the towering trees or the small nocturnal creatures, plays an essential role in sustaining the ecosystem.

Satyacharan's interactions with the indigenous tribal people further strip away his urban sensibilities and deepen his connection to the forest. Initially, he views the tribal communities with a sense of detachment, as outsiders to the "civilized" world he comes from. However, as he spends more time among them, he realizes that their relationship with the forest is vastly different from his own. The tribal people, unlike Satyacharan, do not see the forest as a foreign, impenetrable space; rather, they live in harmony with its rhythms and cycles. In one poignant moment, Satyacharan reflects, "They spoke to the trees, to the rivers, to the earth itself, as if these were their kin. In their presence, I felt like an intruder, a man who knew nothing of the world he inhabited" (Bandopadhyay 134). This interaction profoundly changes him, as he begins to see the forest not as something to be conquered or tamed, but as a community of life where human beings are just one part of a much larger whole. His epiphany echoes the insights of Val Plumwood, who argues that a truly ecological consciousness involves "breaking down the boundaries between human and non-human life" (Plumwood 122). For Satyacharan, this realization not only challenges his anthropocentric assumptions but also leads to a growing sense of alienation from his former urban life. The more he immerses himself in the forest and its people, the harder it becomes for him to return to the rigid, hierarchical structures of urban civilization, thus heightening his alienation and anxiety.

The anxiety of return

Satyacharan's inevitable return to the civilized, urban world is fraught with an overwhelming sense of disquiet and displacement, a clear manifestation of an ecological loss that forms a sort of anxiety and further a guilt, that not only did he find himself at loss in the urban space but also that he was instrumental in bringing down the forest ecology and all the human and nonhuman lives associated

with it while performing the task assigned to him. Though his responsibilities as an estate manager compel him to leave the forest, the profound changes in his consciousness make the transition back to urban life deeply unsettling. His encounters with the forest and its indigenous people have stripped away his urban sensibilities, leaving him with what can be described as a primeval tonality to his conscious personality. In *Aranyak*, Satyacharan reflects on his return: "The city no longer felt like home. The forest had awakened in me something ancient, something I couldn't shake off. I felt out of place amidst the stone buildings and bustling crowds" (Bandopadhyay 176). This discomfort highlights the tension between his newfound ecological awareness and the rigid structures of urban existence. The anthropocentric logic that once governed his worldview is now irreversibly challenged, echoing Timothy Ingold's observation that "human existence is fundamentally ecological, and once we become aware of it, the structures of modernity no longer seem secure" (Ingold 87). For Satyacharan, the forest has revealed the artificiality of the boundaries between nature and civilization, making his return to the latter a source of profound alienation.

Conclusion

The novel *Aranyak* thus offers a profound meditation on the transformative power of nature and the inevitable clash between urban civilization and the untamed wilderness. Satyacharan's journey through the forest dismantles his anthropocentric worldview, replacing it with a more holistic and interconnected understanding of life. The forest, with its impenetrability and autonomy, strips him of the control he once associated with his urban identity, forcing him into moments of epiphany that reveal the fragility of human dominance. As Satyacharan reflects, "The jungle had changed me, not just in how I viewed the world but in how I viewed myself. The man who had first entered its depths was no longer the man who would return" (Bandopadhyay 185). This transformation is emblematic of what Timothy Morton refers to as the "ecological thought," which dismantles the human-nature binary, recognizing the interdependence of all life forms (Morton 79). Yet, this newfound awareness comes

with the burden of ecological loss or what we may also term as a sort of guilt that haunts him, as Satyacharan's return to urban civilization becomes a source of alienation and disquiet. His story illustrates that the forest, far from being a passive backdrop, actively reshapes human consciousness, making the return to modern, mechanistic life increasingly untenable. Ultimately, *Aranyak* serves as a narrative of ecological awakening, where nature "writes back" against human imposition, leaving its mark on the human psyche in profound and irreversible ways.

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Beyond the Veil of Sentience: Hive Minds, Ecological Sovereignty, and the Metaphysics of Colonial Domination in *Avatar*

Debarshi Arathdar

Abstract:

This article explores the intricate philosophical and ecological themes of hive minds, eco-sentience, and interspecies coexistence in James Cameron's *Avatar*, with a focus on the ethical dilemmas posed by intergalactic colonization. By drawing parallels between the Na'vi's connection to Eywa and real-world concepts of swarm intelligence and collective consciousness, the essay delves into how the interconnectedness of Pandora's ecosystem serves as a self-regulating neural network. The narrative critiques the disruptive force of human colonizers, represented by the RDA, whose exploitation of Pandora's resources mirrors historical patterns of colonization on Earth. Through the lens of eco-fusion, the blending of native and alien species is examined, revealing the destabilizing effects of hybridization and resource competition on both ecological and social systems. The essay further reflects on the socio-ecological consequences of colonization, focusing on how the destruction of indigenous cultural and spiritual ties to the land parallels real-world indigenous resistance movements. Ultimately, this analysis raises critical philosophical questions regarding the ethical responsibilities of colonizers and the right to ecological sovereignty, urging a reconsideration of humanity's approach to coexistence with other species, both terrestrial and extraterrestrial.

Keywords: *Hive Mind, Eco-Sentience, Colonialism, Swarm Intelligence, Indigenous Resistance, Ecological Sovereignty*

Introduction

The *Avatar* series by James Cameron is a science fiction narrative that explores complex themes of hive mind, eco-sentience, and interspecies coexistence in a futuristic, colonized world. Set on the fictional moon Pandora, the series delves into the conflicts between human colonizers and the native Na'vi, a humanoid species deeply interconnected with their environment. The interwoven themes of collective intelligence, ecological consciousness, and the ethical implications of colonization are central to understanding the series's message. This essay elaborates on these concepts by incorporating scientific theories from biology, ecology, and sociology, drawing parallels between Cameron's fictional universe and real-world scientific phenomena. The concept of the hive mind, or collective consciousness, involves a networked integration of individual thoughts, feelings, and actions into a cohesive entity. This phenomenon, widely observed in nature, often emerges within eusocial species such as bees, ants, and termites, where individuals work together to achieve a common goal that supersedes their personal objectives.

In these social insect societies, the colony operates as a single "superorganism," where individual members act as functional components of a larger whole, akin to cells in a living body. For example, in a honeybee hive, foragers, nurse bees, and the queen all perform specific roles that are crucial to the colony's survival and reproduction. Despite the large number of individuals, the hive's activities are coordinated to maintain homeostasis and ensure collective decision-making through mechanisms such as pheromone signaling, waggle dances, and other forms of non-verbal communication. This highly integrated form of intelligence is what researchers often term "swarm intelligence." Swarm intelligence is the collective behavior that emerges from simple rules followed by individual agents, without the need for central control. Each agent (e.g., a bee or an ant) processes local information and responds based on simple, instinctual rules, such as following pheromone trails or reacting to environmental stimuli. Over time, these individual actions aggregate into

a highly organized system capable of solving complex problems like resource allocation, nest construction, and adaptive responses to changing environments (Borofsky et al., 2020). The hive mind can therefore be understood as a form of distributed cognition, where intelligence is not centralized in any one individual but is instead an emergent property of the collective. This makes the hive mind highly robust and adaptable, as the loss of individual members has a negligible impact on the overall function of the system. In scientific terms, this distributed cognition is similar to the way neurons work in the human brain, where the interaction between countless neurons produces consciousness and thought without any single neuron being “in charge.” A similar principle applies to the complex social organization seen in insect colonies, where individual insects contribute to the emergence of collective intelligence through their interactions and communication patterns (Page, 2013).

Hive Mind in Avatar: The Neural Network of Pandora

In James Cameron’s *Avatar* series, the fictional world of Pandora introduces a sophisticated version of the hive mind through its native species, the Na’vi, and the broader ecological network they are part of. The Na’vi people possess a unique physiological feature that enables them to connect to Pandora’s neural network, known as Eywa. This biological network operates much like a planetary nervous system, linking not only the Na’vi but also other species, such as the direhorses and mountain banshees, allowing them to share sensory experiences and coordinate movements. This interconnected system mirrors real-world examples of swarm intelligence, where individual agents work together to achieve complex outcomes without the need for centralized control.

The neural network of Pandora serves as a form of collective intelligence that integrates all living organisms into a single, sentient entity capable of adaptive behavior and environmental regulation. This is most evident in scenes where Eywa intervenes to restore ecological balance or defend against external threats. For example, during the climax of the first film, Eywa directs the various creatures of Pandora to attack the human invaders, demonstrating a coordinated

response similar to the way a hive might react to an intruder. Such a system resembles the swarm intelligence seen in insect colonies, where the colony collectively responds to changes in the environment, such as a sudden attack by predators (Passino et al., 2007).

Understanding the Na'vi's Collective Intelligence

The Na'vi's connection to Eywa can be understood through the lens of swarm intelligence because it is based on decentralized, self-organizing principles. Unlike human societies, where decision-making is often hierarchical and dependent on individual leaders, the Na'vi exhibit a form of group consciousness where decisions are made through a combination of personal intuition and collective input. This is facilitated by their physiological connection to Eywa, which allows them to "plug into" the neural network and share information directly. Through this connection, the Na'vi can communicate not only with each other but also with other species, effectively becoming part of a larger, planetary-scale organism.

This shared consciousness has significant implications for the Na'vi's social organization and culture. Their reverence for Eywa is not merely religious or symbolic but is rooted in an understanding of their place within a larger system. This system, in turn, provides the Na'vi with a deep sense of belonging and purpose. Their rituals, such as connecting their neural queues to the Tree of Souls or the Tree of Voices, allow them to access the memories and experiences of their ancestors, creating a living archive of the collective knowledge of their people. This form of ancestral memory is another hallmark of hive minds, where collective memory is not stored in any one individual but is distributed across the entire group.

Ecological Implications of Pandora's Hive Mind

Eco-sentience, or ecological consciousness, refers to the ability of a system to maintain homeostasis and adapt to environmental changes through a form of collective intelligence. This concept is often explored through the Gaia Hypothesis, which posits that Earth's biological systems

interact to form a self-regulating entity that maintains conditions suitable for life. In *Avatar*, Eywa is a manifestation of this principle, functioning as a sentient organism that oversees and regulates the biosphere of Pandora (Hooper et al., 2005). Scientific research on eco-sentience suggests that ecosystems can exhibit traits of intelligence, such as resilience, adaptation, and even decision-making. For instance, studies have shown that forest ecosystems respond to environmental stress through complex feedback loops that optimize the allocation of resources (Reynolds, 2002). Similarly, Eywa's control over the biological networks on Pandora, from directing animal migrations to influencing plant growth patterns, parallels the way real-world ecosystems respond to shifts in resource availability and environmental pressures (Rotherham, 2017). The neural network of Pandora also functions as an ecological regulator, maintaining the balance between different species and preventing any one species from becoming dominant.

This is similar to the role that keystone species play in real-world ecosystems, where the presence or absence of a single species can have a disproportionate impact on the entire community. Eywa, however, goes beyond the role of a keystone species by actively managing the interactions between species to promote biodiversity and ecosystem stability. Scientific research has shown that ecosystems with higher levels of biodiversity are more resilient to environmental changes and disruptions. This is because diverse ecosystems contain multiple species that perform similar ecological roles, creating a form of "functional redundancy" that allows the system to maintain its functions even when individual species are lost (Naeem et al., 1994). In the case of Pandora, Eywa acts as a safeguard against such disruptions, ensuring that the ecosystem remains in a state of dynamic equilibrium. This form of ecological intelligence is analogous to the way the human brain maintains homeostasis through the regulation of various physiological processes.

Implications for Human Society and Technology

The concept of the hive mind in *Avatar* also has profound implications for human society, particularly in the context of

technology and digital networks. In recent years, there has been growing interest in the idea of “electronic hive minds,” where social media platforms and digital communication tools enable large groups of people to coordinate actions and share information in real-time. Just as the Na’vi use their neural connections to access Eywa’s collective consciousness, humans use digital technologies to create virtual communities that transcend physical boundaries. However, the human version of the hive mind is fraught with challenges. While digital platforms can amplify the collective intelligence of groups, they can also spread misinformation and lead to herd behavior, where people make decisions based on groupthink rather than independent analysis (Chowdhury & Ramadas, 2022). This is in stark contrast to the Na’vi’s harmonious integration with Eywa, which is based on mutual respect and ecological awareness. In this sense, *Avatar* serves as a cautionary tale, reminding us that the power of the hive mind can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on how it is used.

The concept of intergalactic species coexistence in *Avatar* is deeply intertwined with the broader issue of colonization, exploring the ethical, social, and ecological consequences of human expansion into alien worlds. Throughout the series, James Cameron masterfully uses the narrative to highlight the conflict between human colonizers, represented by the Resources Development Administration (RDA), and the indigenous Na’vi people of Pandora. Driven by economic greed, the human colonizers seek to extract valuable resources from the moon without consideration for the ecological and social ramifications. This conflict mirrors real-world historical and contemporary struggles between industrialized societies and indigenous populations, where the introduction of new species, governance systems, and technologies disrupts established ecological and social networks (Naeem et al., 1994).

Ecological Sensitivity to Alien Species: Understanding “Eco-Fusion”

Research in ecology consistently shows that ecosystems are highly sensitive to the introduction of alien species. Such

introductions often lead to a range of negative consequences, including hybridization, competition for resources, and the eventual displacement of native species. This process, known as “eco-fusion,” results in the blending of native and alien species into new, often unstable ecological configurations that threaten the integrity and functionality of the original ecosystem (Rotherham, 2017). The phenomenon of eco-fusion can be observed in numerous real-world examples, such as the introduction of the European rabbit to Australia, which led to widespread ecological disruption. Rabbits competed with native herbivores for food and contributed to the degradation of vegetation, resulting in a cascade of environmental impacts that threatened the survival of many indigenous species. Similarly, in North America, the introduction of zebra mussels has altered aquatic ecosystems, outcompeting native mussels and disrupting local food webs. In *Avatar*, human colonizers introduce Earth’s flora and fauna to Pandora in an attempt to recreate familiar environments, ignoring the delicate balance maintained by Eywa, Pandora’s sentient ecological overseer. This reckless interference leads to ecological chaos, resistance from the Na’vi, and a breakdown of the planet’s natural equilibrium.

Eco-Fusion and the Disruption of Ecological Networks

Eco-fusion often results in the destabilization of ecological networks, as introduced species can become invasive and outcompete native species for critical resources. This competition can lead to a reduction in biodiversity, altering the structure and function of ecosystems. For example, when a new predator is introduced into an ecosystem where native species have not evolved appropriate defense mechanisms, it can lead to the rapid decline or even extinction of prey species. This in turn disrupts food webs and alters nutrient cycling processes, affecting the entire ecosystem. In *Avatar*, the RDA’s attempt to introduce Earth’s technologies and biological systems disrupts the interdependent relationships between Pandora’s species, much like the ecological invasions seen in Earth’s history.

The concept of eco-fusion also involves the hybridization of native and alien species, creating new hybrid forms that may

lack the resilience of their parent species. This hybridization can lead to a loss of genetic diversity, which is critical for the adaptive capacity of ecosystems. In *Avatar*, the human colonizers attempt to terraform Pandora by planting Earth's vegetation, thereby altering the soil composition and nutrient cycles. This mirrors real-world scenarios where invasive plant species, such as kudzu in the southeastern United States, alter local ecosystems by changing soil chemistry and displacing native flora.

The Problem of Colonization in the Pandora Kingdom

Colonization, both in reality and fiction, typically results in the exploitation and displacement of indigenous populations and ecosystems. The theme of colonization in *Avatar* is not merely a backdrop but a critical element that drives the plot and shapes the moral undertones of the series. In Earth's history, colonization has often been characterized by the introduction of foreign governance systems, resource extraction practices, and cultural domination, leading to profound disruptions in the social and ecological networks that sustain native communities. These disruptions often result in long-term degradation of both the environment and indigenous cultures, as traditional ecological knowledge is lost, and ecosystems are altered beyond recognition (Sinclair & Byrom, 2006). In *Avatar*, the Resources Development Administration (RDA) embodies the archetypal colonizing force, driven solely by the pursuit of profit. The RDA seeks to extract Pandora's mineral resources, particularly the valuable element unobtainium, with little regard for the consequences on the local ecology or the Na'vi society. This parallels real-world cases of colonization, where economic motives often outweigh considerations for environmental and social sustainability. Historical examples include the colonization of the Americas and Africa, where European powers exploited natural resources, displaced indigenous populations, and introduced foreign species and technologies that disrupted local ecosystems.

The disruption caused by the RDA is similar to the ecological impacts observed in ecosystems facing deforestation, pollution, and habitat fragmentation. These human activities

lead to a breakdown of ecological functions, such as water purification, soil stabilization, and carbon sequestration, which are essential for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem health (Matthews et al., 2011). In *Avatar*, the RDA's mining operations strip the land of its resources, creating barren landscapes that are no longer capable of supporting life. This degradation is compounded by the displacement of the Na'vi, who are forced to abandon their ancestral lands and sacred sites, leading to the erosion of their cultural and spiritual ties to the land.

Socio-Ecological Impact of Colonization on Indigenous Communities

The impact of colonization extends beyond the ecological realm, affecting the social and cultural fabric of indigenous communities. The introduction of foreign governance systems often undermines traditional leadership structures and erodes community cohesion. In many cases, colonizers impose new laws and land-use practices that are incompatible with indigenous ways of life, resulting in the marginalization and disenfranchisement of native peoples. In *Avatar*, the RDA's imposition of its corporate agenda on Pandora disregards the Na'vi's deep spiritual connection to Eywa and their holistic understanding of the environment. The forced relocation of the Na'vi from their home, Hometree, symbolizes the broader dislocation and cultural genocide experienced by indigenous peoples around the world. The Na'vi's resistance to the RDA's colonization efforts is rooted in their understanding that the health of Pandora's ecosystem is inseparable from their cultural identity and survival. This perspective aligns with the views of many indigenous cultures on Earth, who see themselves as stewards of the land rather than its owners. Indigenous resistance movements, such as those led by Native Americans, the Māori of New Zealand, and the First Nations of Canada, emphasize the need to protect not only the land but also the traditional ecological knowledge that has been passed down through generations. The Na'vi's fight to protect Pandora is thus a metaphor for the struggles of indigenous peoples to defend their lands, cultures, and identities against the forces of colonization. The ethical

dilemmas presented in *Avatar* are multifaceted, touching on themes of environmental stewardship, respect for indigenous knowledge, and the consequences of unchecked technological advancement. The series suggests that true coexistence can only be achieved through mutual respect and understanding of the interconnectedness of all life forms. Scientific research supports this view, emphasizing that sustainable coexistence requires recognizing the intrinsic value of ecosystems and adopting management practices that prioritize long-term ecological health over short-term gains (Rodogno, 2010).

Conclusion

The *Avatar* series serves as a powerful allegory for the complexities of ecological and social coexistence in a colonized world. By drawing on real-world concepts of hive mind, eco-sentience, and interspecies interactions, the narrative highlights the importance of preserving the delicate balance that sustains life on Earth—and potentially, on other worlds. The neural network of Pandora represents an idealized version of swarm intelligence, where decentralized agents work together to maintain harmony and balance. This stands in stark contrast to human attempts to create electronic hive minds, which often result in chaos and conflict rather than cooperation. By drawing on real-world scientific principles, *Avatar* provides a thought-provoking exploration of the potential—and the dangers—of collective consciousness in both biological and technological systems. As humanity continues to explore and expand into new frontiers, the lessons of Pandora remind us of the ethical responsibility to tread lightly and with reverence for the interconnectedness of all living things. The *Avatar* trilogy serves as a poignant critique of the ethics of intergalactic colonization, raising important questions about the rights of indigenous species and the responsibilities of colonizing powers. The conflict between the RDA and the Na'vi highlights the dangers of imposing foreign systems on established ecological and social networks, illustrating how the pursuit of profit and expansion can lead to the destruction of irreplaceable cultural and natural heritage. By drawing on real-world parallels, *Avatar* urges audiences to reflect on the long-term consequences

of colonization and the need to adopt more sustainable and respectful approaches to interspecies coexistence, both on Earth and in the exploration of new worlds.

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Of Ownership and Rights of the Subaltern: Decoding Crises in Aranyer Adhikar(1977) and Kantara(2022)

Sudipta Dutta

One of the most urgent inquiries that postcolonial studies can confront pertains to the concept of 'ownership.' Innately, human beings exhibit a proclivity for wielding power, often emulating traits reminiscent of colonizers and usurpers. In the contemporary landscape, consumer capitalism, akin to a modern Goliath, poses a formidable threat to appropriating intellectual creations. Simultaneously, the enduring socio-cultural quandary of dominion over one's physical and intellectual existence notably persists in contemporary India as well. It is now almost an urgent task for an author and a researcher in the social sciences to create and locate texts that are invariably challenging the power dynamics fueled by the appropriation and monopolisation of knowledge system and money.

The 2022 Kannada blockbuster, *Kantara* transcends the 'South Indian Cinema' stereotype, delving into profound questions surrounding ownership of the human body, mind and land. Subterranean themes of pantheism, casteism, and subaltern livelihood further accentuate the gravity of these ownership dilemmas. Utilising Mahashweta Devi's 1977 novel *Aranyer Adhikar* (Rights over the Forest) as a foundational reference, this research work endeavours to study both the texts as narratives of crisis, where the word 'crisis' contains historical, legal, social, and political dimensions. From a postcolonial lens, this paper will also attempt to find out how, for the subalterns, crises of basic human rights in the struggle for existence, tie the common threads of the multicultural and multiethnic Indian nationhood between the two different geopolitical entities. This research will also look forward to addressing the questions of ownership from an ecocritical point of view and will examine how capitalism can be a great threat to ecological rights.

Keywords: *Crisis narratives, Ecocriticism in Indian literature and cinema, Subaltern rights, Ecocriticism and colonization of India, Ecology and capitalism.*

Introduction

One of the most pressing issues in postcolonial studies is the concept of ownership, particularly how it relates to power dynamics in contemporary society. Historically, the colonizer's desire to dominate lands and peoples was driven by a deep-seated belief in their right to ownership, which extended not just to land but to bodies, minds, and knowledge systems. This legacy of ownership has evolved, now manifesting in the insidious form of consumer capitalism. This new form of domination poses significant challenges, particularly in the context of intellectual property and cultural appropriation, where the commodification of culture and knowledge perpetuates the exploitation of the subaltern.

In India, these dynamics of ownership and rights continue to play out in complex and often violent ways. The subaltern — those marginalized by class, caste, or ethnicity — find themselves at the forefront of battles over land, resources, and identity. This paper explores these themes through a comparative analysis of two texts: Mahasweta Devi's novel *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977) and the 2022 Kannada film *Kantara*. Both narratives address the multifaceted nature of ecological crises, examining how issues of ownership intersect with questions of human rights, survival, and cultural identity.

Aranyer Adhikar is set in colonial India and portrays the struggles of the indigenous people against the British-imposed forest laws that restricted their traditional rights to the land. On the other hand, *Kantara* brings the issue into the present day, focusing on the conflict between a small community and modern capitalists seeking to exploit their land for profit. These texts are not only narratives of crisis but also explorations of how the subaltern, through their struggle for rights and survival, challenge the dominant power structures.

Literature Review

The exploration of ownership in postcolonial studies has been a central theme for scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. Said's concept of "Orientalism" highlights how Western powers constructed knowledge systems to justify their domination over the East. Spivak's work on the subaltern emphasizes the importance of giving voice to those marginalized by these power structures, while Bhabha's notion of hybridity explores the complex identities that emerge in postcolonial contexts.

In the context of ecological crises, scholars such as Rob Nixon and Vandana Shiva have explored how environmental degradation disproportionately affects the subaltern. Nixon's concept of "slow violence" describes the gradual, often invisible, environmental harm that impacts marginalized communities, while Shiva's work critiques the global capitalist systems that exploit natural resources at the expense of local populations.

Ecocriticism, as a theoretical approach, provides a framework for analyzing the intersection of environmental and social justice issues in literature and film. By examining how narratives depict the relationship between humans and the environment, ecocriticism sheds light on the ways in which ecological degradation is linked to social and economic inequalities. This paper applies these theoretical perspectives to analyze how *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Kantara* address the multifaceted nature of ecological crises, ownership, and subaltern rights.

Ownership and Rights in *Aranyer Adhikar*

Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* is a seminal work that explores the struggle of the indigenous people of India against the colonial government's forest laws. The novel is set in the early 20th century and follows the life of Birsa Munda, a tribal leader who led a rebellion against British rule. The forest laws, imposed by the British, stripped the indigenous people of their traditional rights to the land, criminalizing their way of life and reducing them to mere laborers on the land they once owned.

The concept of ownership in *Aranyer Adhikar* is deeply tied to the identity and survival of the indigenous people. The forest is not just a resource for them; it is a sacred space that sustains their culture, spirituality, and community life. Devi's portrayal of the subaltern's struggle against the colonial state highlights the intersection of ecological and human rights, where the loss of land is synonymous with the loss of identity and autonomy.

Birsa Munda's rebellion is not just a fight for land but a broader struggle against the colonial system that seeks to erase the subaltern's way of life. The novel's depiction of this struggle reflects the broader postcolonial critique of ownership, where the colonizer's claim to land and resources is seen as an act of violence against the indigenous population. The ecological crisis in *Aranyer Adhikar* is therefore multifaceted, encompassing issues of environmental degradation, cultural erasure, and social injustice.

Ecological Crisis and Subaltern Rights in *Kantara*

Kantara is a contemporary Kannada film that addresses similar themes of ownership and rights, albeit in a modern context. The film is set in a small village in Karnataka, where the local community's traditional rights to the land are threatened by modern capitalists seeking to exploit the land for profit. The conflict in *Kantara* is not just about land ownership but about the community's right to maintain their way of life, which is deeply connected to the land.

The film's portrayal of the subaltern is complex, depicting how the community navigates the pressures of modernity while trying to preserve their cultural and spiritual connection to the land. The conflict over land ownership in *Kantara* is portrayed as an ecological crisis, where the exploitation of natural resources by capitalist interests threatens the very survival of the community. The film's depiction of this crisis reflects Vandana Shiva's critique of globalization, where the imposition of Western capitalist systems on local communities leads to environmental degradation and social injustice.

Kantara also delves into themes of pantheism, casteism, and the subaltern livelihood, which accentuate the complexities

of ownership dilemmas in contemporary India. The film's narrative, enriched by its visual storytelling, uses long shots and panoramic views to emphasize the community's deep connection to the land, while close-ups and medium shots capture the emotional and physical toll of the ongoing conflict on the characters.

Cinematic Techniques and Narrative Structure

Both *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Kantara* use narrative and cinematic techniques to emphasize the urgency of the ecological crises they depict. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi employs a straightforward narrative style that allows the story of Birsa Munda and his people to unfold with a sense of inevitability. The linear progression of the story mirrors the inexorable encroachment of colonial power on the lives of the indigenous people, culminating in the rebellion led by Birsa.

Kantara, on the other hand, uses a more dynamic narrative structure, interspersing moments of intense action with quieter, more contemplative scenes. The film's use of cinematography is particularly noteworthy, with the lush, verdant landscape of the village serving as a backdrop to the unfolding drama. The cinematographer's use of natural lighting and long takes captures the beauty of the land, while also conveying the fragility of the community's connection to it. The editing style, which alternates between fast-paced sequences and slower, more reflective moments, mirrors the tension between the old ways and the forces of modernity that threaten to overwhelm them.

The use of sound in *Kantara* also plays a crucial role in conveying the film's themes. The soundtrack, composed by B. Ajaneesh Loknath, blends traditional folk music with more contemporary sounds, reflecting the film's exploration of the tension between tradition and modernity. The diegetic sounds of nature—the rustling of leaves, the chirping of birds, the flow of water—serve as a constant reminder of the land's importance to the community and the threat posed by its exploitation.

Ecocritical Analysis

From an ecocritical perspective, both *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Kantara* explore the impact of capitalism on the environment and the people who depend on it for their survival. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the British forest laws represent an early form of environmental exploitation, where the colonizers' desire for profit leads to the destruction of the forest and the displacement of the indigenous people. The novel critiques this exploitation, highlighting the ways in which the colonizers' actions disrupt the delicate balance between the people and their environment.

Kantara continues this critique, examining how modern capitalism perpetuates similar forms of exploitation. The film's portrayal of the conflict over land ownership reflects the ongoing struggle between traditional ways of life and the forces of globalization. The ecological crisis in *Kantara* is not just about the destruction of the environment, but also about the loss of cultural and spiritual connections to the land.

Both texts highlight the interconnectedness of ecological and social crises, showing how the exploitation of the environment is inextricably linked to the oppression of the subaltern. By focusing on the experiences of the indigenous people in *Aranyer Adhikar* and the rural community in *Kantara*, these narratives underscore the importance of preserving both the environment and the cultural practices that sustain it.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Kantara* reveals the multifaceted nature of ecological crises in India, where issues of ownership, rights, and survival are deeply intertwined. Both texts offer a critique of the forces of colonialism and capitalism that have historically exploited the environment and marginalized communities. Through their narratives, these works highlight the resilience of the subaltern in the face of these challenges, while also calling attention to the ongoing struggles for environmental and social justice.

By examining these texts through the lens of ecocriticism, this paper has sought to demonstrate how the themes of ownership

and rights are central to understanding the ecological crises depicted in *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Kantara*. These works remind us that the fight for environmental preservation is also a fight for the rights and survival of the subaltern, and that true ecological justice cannot be achieved without addressing the underlying social and economic inequalities that drive environmental degradation.

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Nature's Reckoning: Exploring Environmental Crisis in Amitav Ghosh's Novels

Natasha Chatterjee

Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh's narratives precisely offer rich amalgams of nature and environmental concerns, flawlessly combining these elements into his storytelling. His novels, such as 'The Hungry Tide' and 'River of Smoke', are notable for their complex depictions of natural settings and their influence on human lives and societies.

In the novel 'The Hungry Tide', by Amitav Ghosh, the author brilliantly presents the Sundarbans, a deltaic region with its distinctive flora and fauna, stressing on the complex relationship between the environment and the lives of the people who live there. The natural world is not just a backdrop but an active force that structures the narrative and the characters' fates. Likewise, in 'River of Smoke', the author's portrayal of the island's geological characteristics and the encompassing environment enhances the historical context of the trade of opium and the characters' experiences. The author's attentiveness toward minute details, from the illustration of the cave within a limestone spur to the golden sands and thick woods, reinforce the importance of nature in the novel.

Amitav Ghosh in his novel 'The Great Derangement' broadens his focus on environmental issues with a more precise exploration of the change in the climate and ecological crisis. This novel through its intense narrative educates the readers to consider the critical environmental issues of our time and its effects on the society.

Amitav Ghosh's style of putting forth the narrative not only furnishes a pleasurable reading experience but also motivates the readers to deeply think on the interactions between nature, culture, and human activity. The author's potential

to interweave elements pertaining to environment into his narrative makes these novels an impactful medium for raising awareness about ecological issues and the extensive influence of the actions of human beings on the natural world.

Introduction:

The age-old slogan of "Love not Man the less, Nature more" has long served as an impactful reminder of the importance to esteem and preserve the natural world. This point of view reverberates the spirit of eco criticism, an interdisciplinary field that explores the correlation between literature and the environment. "Eco criticism" was coined for the first time by William Rueckert's in his groundbreaking essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco criticism." Which was published in the year 1978. Eco criticism explores writings about the nature, within the extensive context of societal practices, that includes politics, policy-making, as well as filmmaking. So, it should be noted that Eco criticism takes in stride a wide range of topics, including the study of literature's representation of nature and the different manner in which environmental issues are entwined into literary narratives.

The fact remains that both American scholars and British Green Studies chip in to the discourse on literature and nature, although it may happen that their outlook may differ. Whilst American eco criticism frequently draws on the traditions of transcendentalism and environmental activism, British Green Studies often line up with Romantic and post-Romantic literary traditions. Despite of the above-mentioned differences, both these lines of thinking share a common aim: to comprehend and address the deep-rooted association between literature and environmental concerns.

The pursuit to regain a paradise that is lost or reinstate environmental balance is a crucial concern in contemporary discourse that is being faced throughout the world. Environmental consciousness has become a noteworthy concern,) with the efforts of democratically elected governments frequently being scrutinised for the actions taken by them often pose threat to the environmental concerns. Environmental issues of the present times are a product of several factors such as the carbon economy, imperialism, and recent global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforce

the gravity of confronting ecological issues. Amitav Ghosh, an eminent Indian English author, highlights these themes in his novels, stressing on the intricate interconnection between human activity and the natural world.

Human agency has developed into anintimi dating geophysical force, notably changing the ecosystems and proceeding towards a space that can be termed as a planetary tragedy in the current scenario. The field of eco criticism has impacted the varied facets of the humanities, from teaching and learning to scholarly research. An important juncture in the history of ecocriticism was the formation of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in the year 1992 in the United States. This organization has played a pivotal role in prospering the study of literature's association with the environment and encouraging interdisciplinary discourse.

Despite the fact that eco criticism has evolved due to American transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau, it should also be thankful to the British Romantic poets. The Romantics honoured and glorified nature and opposed industrialization, which laid crucial groundwork for future ecological concepts.

Amitav Ghosh's novels especially 'The Hungry Tide' and 'The Great Derangement', highlights deep understanding into the relationship between literature and environmental issues. The novel 'The Hungry Tide' which was published in the year 2004, tells the touching story in which a very high-profile environmental program with the objective of protecting the Bengal tiger has drastic outcome on the refugees from East Bengal who resided on the island of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans. This novel, highlights the complications and unintentional consequences of environmental policies, depicting the often-overlooked human aspects of conservation efforts.

The representation of the Sundarbans in the novel 'The Hungry Tide' poses to be a very cogent example of the manner in which environmental policies can have strong influence on the marginalized communities. This narrative by Amitav Ghosh highlights the challenges faced by those people who are directly affected by conservation proceedings,

giving utmost importance on the need for more inclusive and equitable approaches to environmental stewardship.

In the novel 'The Great Derangement', Amitav Ghosh explores the extensive implications of environmental crisis, including climate change, colonialism, and economic systems. He gives stress on the historical and contemporary impacts of these agencies on both the natural world and human societies. The author's insistence that his forefathers were "ecological refugees long before the term was invented" highlights the enduring nature of displacement and environmental disruption, associating historical patterns to the present time ecological struggles.

The establishment of ASLE and the growth of eco criticism have crucially influenced how literature and environmental issues intersect. Eco criticism provides a framework for the ways in which literary works reflect and mould our perceptions of nature and ecological issues. It also examines how literature can lead to environmental awareness and action.

Eco feminism, an appendage of eco criticism, thrives on the insights of initial environmental literature and spread forth the research to incorporate feminist perspectives. Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' is an example of an impact full literature which have played a significant role in emphasising on the interconnectedness of environmental and gender issues. Eco feminism analyses the manner in which environmental degradation is often associated with gender oppression and supports for more inclusive and apt approaches towards environmental justice.

In his novels, Amitav Ghosh gives focus on the themes of eco feminism by examining the intersections of environmental as well as social issues. The author's narratives depict a profound comprehension of the intricate connections among nature, culture, as well as power. By highlighting both historical and contemporary environmental issues, Ghosh contributes to an extensive discourse about the necessity for both ecological and social justice.

The Romantic tradition's puts emphasis on humanity's isolation from nature and the search for a holistic connection with the environment aligns with the author's exploration of

nature's renewal. The Romantics' puts stress on the necessity to reunite with nature and accept the human place within it aligns with the writer's perspective for a more amiable and sustainable relationship between human beings and the natural world.

If one studies the Diasporic literature, which includes the writings by Amitav Ghosh, the readers can see that how they explore the fact that both geographical and cultural displacement have an impactful effect on people and landscapes. Again, it can be deduced that Diasporic literature puts forth important queries about the manner in which cultural practices intersect with environmental contexts and the way in which narratives of migration and settlement mould our understanding of nature.

Further, if we reflect on this connection between nature and culture 'The Culture of Cities' by Lewis Mumford which was published in the year 1938, extends a foundational outlook on the connection between nature and culture, depicting the various manner in which urbanization and cultural practices impact our association with the environment. This work reinforces the significance of taking into consideration both natural and cultural components in comprehending ecological concerns.

If we focus on the genre of Romantic literature, one can see that it emphasizes on humanity's quest for a profound connection with nature, and it vocalises promptly of our troubled environmental times. The Romantic prominence on reinstating a sense of unity with the natural world is in particular pertinent in the current time space, as we struggle with the aftermath of environmental degradation and seek trails to ecological restoration.

Ghosh in his novels depicts a commitment to examine and address environmental concerns with the help of literary narratives. His novels often challenge his readers to review their connection with nature and to envisage multiple options of sustainable living. Amitav Ghosh in 'The Great Derangement' reflects these views at the concluding part of the novel: "-that they will be able to transcend the isolation in which humanity was entrapped in the times of its derangement; that they will rediscover their kinship with

other beings, and that this vision, at once new and ancient, will find expression in a transformed and renewed art and literature." This perspective showcases an optimistic and life changing outlook to literature's contribution in addressing environmental crises.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Amitav Ghosh's literary contributions offer deep understanding into the complex relationship between nature and human societies, most importantly through the point of view of eco criticism. All of his works dig in intensely into the issues pertaining to environment, giving special stress on the paramount need for more inclusive and equitable perspective to conservation and sustainability. The author by depicting historical contexts as well as contemporary ecological challenges, magnify the reader's understanding of the ways in which literature interconnects with nature and suffuse our comprehension of environmental justice. The author's storytelling not only depicts the influence of environmental policies on marginalized communities but also shows cases the extensive concerns that are encountered by the masses globally, for example climate change and displacement. Through his vibrant narratives and critical engagement with ecological themes, the author reinforces the relationship and connections between humans and the environment. His novels motivate the readers to review their relationship with nature and propose for a more congruous coexistence. By cutting short the space between literature and environmental discourse, the author's writing accords significantly to the continuing discussion about the importance of addressing ecological and social justice affairs with the aim of a sustainable future.

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Covid, Interdisciplinarity, and Towards a Discrimination-free Learning

Dr Tanmoy Bhattacharjee & Sayan Mukherjee

Abstract

If historians seek to enumerate the most catastrophic of civilizational crises the planet has ever faced, the covid-outbreak will surely top the list. It is, as if, the ominous rise of a demon, hungry and prowling for its prey in every nook of the world. It has brought in its wake a turmoil of unmeasured proportion but, at the same time, it has severely impacted the usual ways of teaching-learning. It may be said that covid, despite being a gargantuan crisis, is an important cognitive-affective phase in human development in general and for the student-community in particular. Learning, according to the recent pedagogical findings, is of two broad categories – (a) the visually oriented learning and (b) the haptically determined one. In the face of a common predicament like covid, the hierarchy between these two types has just fizzled away, yielding place to a digital deterritorialization and reterritorialization of experience. The discrimination, of course, doesn't vaporize overnight but, at least, it is loudly acknowledged. This paper examines how the sudden yet an indispensable advent of multiple digital interfaces, indeed, conjures an atmosphere for the use and celebration of interdisciplinarity and how the coalescing of disciplines naturally translates into fabulous creative outputs, especially in the realm of teaching-learning.

Keywords: *covid, interdisciplinarity, discrimination, teaching-learning.*

Introduction

Can despondency be both “beautiful and horrifying”? Yes, that’s what the keenly sensitive Wilfred Owen writes during the winter of 1911-12 in ‘Supposed Confessions of a Secondrate Sensitive Mind in Dejection’:

... face to face, she fixed on me her stare:

Woe, woe, my blood has never moved since then;

Down-dragged like corpse in sucking, slimy fen,

I sank to feel the breath of that Despair. (*Wilfred Owen* 83)

The first quarter of the previous century brought upon humankind the slough of warfare, whereas the present a colossal despondency in the wake of covid, that fetched up, demon-like, and “down-dragged like corpse in sucking, slimy fen”. The whole world came to a standstill. The fresh flurry of life was gone. The air breathed virus. In the garden of Oscar Wilde’s fable, loomed the Giant alone, as the “trespasser” prohibitive flashed. Anxiety mingled with the throbs of life. A full-stop festered and all smiles stopped.

What could the shut walls provide the harried mass? A harried despondency. The exponentially mutating virus was wreaking havoc. Every break of day was an occasion for death. For, humanity, however, the turmoil was not just physical. The catastrophic chain of events soon muddled the psyche, culminating in a torpor that humankind has ever faced in the long march of creativity. “Darkling” notwithstanding, newer adaptive, combative and counterproductive means were on the air. They had to be! Every deluge finds it. A belief, of course, lay somewhere that the clouds would pass. And, as the Doomsday began to feeble, as coveted, the belief gathered momentum. The stony, daunting grimace of the full-stop thawed, as it were. A long hyphen resurrected to favour the world.

Learner and Learning: The Usual Ways

Metaphorically speaking, a hyphen is a harbinger of hope, unlike the stasis that a full-stop is. Something obvious follows a hyphen and, not just this, a hyphenated word means the birth

of a whole new dimension of meaning. In this paper I propose to see the cataclysmic covid-phase as not just murderously degenerative but as a period of valued gestation. By all means, covid is a crisis and crisis means passing from one phase to another under great duress. Given the magnitude of loss, this is true both physically and emotionally. Since the covid-crisis is inextricably bound up with bodily, as well as with emotional changes, the arguments of my paper revolve round a critical domain in which body, emotions, and mind have to adjust to an interim terra-incognita. We can summarily say that it is an important cognitive-affective phase in human development in general and that of the student-community in particular. If we pay close attention to the different behavioural reactions and attitudes of learners during and after covid, if not the period before it, we find this intervening hyphen to be a decisive juncture in a learner's life. The adaptive, counterproductive changes unfurl only if a crisis knocks and much of this change is due to the degree of difficulty through which the learner manoeuvres his or her way. The responses to the crisis vary, indeed. To some learners, the difficulties seem unsurmountable. They mostly remain frigid to this absolutely unsolicited turn of events. But, to a considerable number, the more unwelcoming is the situation, the greater is the urge to respond to it properly. The sudden and the very necessary switch to the digital media as an indispensable tool for learning is, after all, a corollary of profound psychological changes. Especially for the learning community, the changes must have, first, come in their imaginative terrains. To determine the exact nature of this suddenly surfacing creativity—evolving and metamorphosing at the same time— we need look into the facts that trigger the psychological change in a learner's imaginative concept.

In pedagogical parlance, it is almost axiomatic that a learner's praxis of imagination is principally bound up with the self, with subjective feelings, and subjective interfaces with surroundings. Usually for a growing learner, the subjective relationships with surroundings keep varying and they keep varying only in degrees, not in kinds. It is observed that, with time, a learner's allegiance to the world of symbols

considerably wanes; the awareness of the self intensifies, which, in turn, translates into a more poignant and punctilious expression of the body. This is a standard and a unanimously accepted critical attitude of any learner in any place of the world towards his or her creative-didactic accountability. In fact, all learning communities, so far as the science of learning is concerned, pass through this creative-didactic journey and the corresponding critical awareness that makes this journey possible is mainly of two categories. There are learners who cultivate the self for all experiences or vice-versa and the other groups are devoted more to the surroundings than anything else, for creative-didactic outputs. Thus, according to extant pedagogical research, two different but distinct orientations exist among the learners – (a) those mainly concerned with the visual experiences are the visually-minded learners and (b) those with kinesthetic ones are the haptic-minded learners.

Eyes are the sine-qua-non for the visually-minded learning community. A common man may think that the ocular health and the visual exactitude are mutually complementary. However, superior visual awareness has got nothing to do with the normalcy of the eyes. On the contrary, as experiments have shown, the appropriate psychological inclination for observing is of paramount importance. How does learning occur for a visually-minded learner? If we examine this question in keener details, we will find that not being able to see is not always a pejorative or prohibitive factor. The visually-minded learner first takes interest in the general, broad outlines of a phenomenon. For instance, in a botany class, if the teacher is demonstrating a leaf, the learners first imbibe in the general shape of the leaf, then the tip, the margin, the midrib, the petiole, and finally everything incorporated in the conceptualization of the whole leaf. It all starts with a general morphological premise and, with time, tiny but consequential impressions are synthesized into a whole, comprehensive image. This is true not only academically, but also aesthetically.

In fact, since visual accomplishment is conducive to the analysis of every little component of an object, it lets the learner delve deep into the nature of the object. However,

observing merely the details associated with a phenomenon is not always an appreciable quality. Acquainting oneself with the formal shapes and structures of an object is undoubtedly a learner's visual-minded competence. It also speaks volumes of the learner's sound memory and his subjective interest in these nuanced details. However, the right visual calibre lies in locating the changing effects of these characteristics in proportion to the changing external conditions. Convincing examples can be cited from the chapter of light. With the changes in external conditions, the optical behaviours also tend to change. Nonetheless, how does a visually-minded learner approximate the possible learning outcomes, even if oftentimes he or she misses the phenomenal change quite tangibly? It is, in many a way, hypothetical. To meet the learning objective, visually-minded learners invariably transform tactile and kinesthetic experiences into visual experiences. This, then, leads us to believe that various other experiences are constantly contributing to a decisive visual worldview of a learner.

Now, the other category of learners may be said to belong to the haptically minded learners. For a haptically minded learner, the bodily, emotional and intellectual apprehension of any object or phenomenon is incurably subjective. Such a learner puts the self before everything else and tends to correlate touch impressions, kinesthetic stimuluses and muscular stirrings with the outside world. It is not at all imperative to transform the tactile or kinesthetic experiences into the visual ones. In the event of being haptic, a learner totally depends on his or her self, the kinesthetic sensibilities and seeks to appropriate the learning objectives without the oft-employed ocular expertise. The haptic accomplishment is ideally suited to a learner of visual art-studies. The learner, in this case, remains quite satisfied with the piecemeal impressions that he receives through touch, body movement or muscular mobilizations. Normally, he will not weave these partial impressions into something creative. However, if the learner is ever emotively engaged with the object or phenomenon itself, he or she gets into creating something meaningful. The learner's senses here are the senses of values; the sensibilities are highly subjective.

Digital Terrains: Minimizing Discrimination

Thus, the haptic predispositions are far from being introspective, analytic or contingent, whereas the visual ones are essentially synthetic in nature. For an effective didactic-creative output, however, both these sensations are equally important. In other words, all sorts of sense-impressions including the emotional experiences of shape and form combined with the intellectual apprehensions of these features are cumulatively instrumental in facilitating a learner's passage to creativity. Both visual-mindedness and haptic proclivity, if fused in the right measure, give way to the desired academic outputs. Researchers in the field of pedagogy, however, have pinpointed a grave problem in this apparently bipartite system of learning. The mainstream academia asserts that visual perception is the most admissible of all perceptions, the eyes being the key intermediary. The finding that is not publicly stated is that all other sense-impressions are subordinate to those coming from the eye. Visual impressions, therefore, deliberately disregard the vital experiences like the tactile or the kinesthetic ones.

The brush with covid has only accentuated death, destruction and disasters. However, in the face of a common enemy like covid, whose mortal vengeance were long unknown, the whole society—irrespective of being low and high, shanty-huddlers or palace-inhabitants—stood as one single condominium whose doors and windows were fiercely shut against all viral onslaughts. Humankind quickly yet necessarily took to digital modes of interacting, especially learning. The digital terrains substituted the physical ones. The familiar school room was now the small virtual cubicle on the laptop or smartphone. The digital boards replaced the sturdy classroom boards, the softcopy lessons the empirical textbooks. So many other media were graciously invited to make this virtual experience a user-friendly one. Times, rules, regulations and other prerequisites were altered or modified to help learners come to terms with this diametrically altered scenario. The redeeming aspect, however, was that the human teacher remained the same. Both to the learners and the teachers it was not unknown that the visual and the

haptic concepts are fundamentally different in their basic experiential content. It was also not unknown that no unitary experience will ever endure—either visual or haptic. The digital exposure, however, brought a new whiff of experience among the learners. All other sense-impressions were of secondary importance in comparison to the visual perception. A learner's growing digital involvement, however, came as a good promise. The triggers for the formulation of the visual perception were now clear to a learner. What remained otherwise unexplored, unacknowledged or unmet in the parochiality of everyday was now more emphatically pronounced before the learning community. The making of teaching-learning curriculums, the ways of disseminating them, the practical hindrances in their digital imparting and the simultaneous urge for overcoming the associated ennui of a cloistered space— all these factors minimized the discriminatory attitude towards the seemingly insubstantial sense-impressions. It was either their forced deprivation or their heavily flaunted use that enkindled a special probing-zeal in the learners. That it was a discrimination was, at least, acknowledged.

A Passage to Interdisciplinarity

This valued acknowledgement is no small issue. In fact, the espousal of the non-discriminatory attitude is the first step towards accepting not just the yet-unacknowledged sense-impressions but the blurring of boundaries between disciplines. Just as no single sense-impression guides a learner to didactic-creative outputs, no single disciplinary premise really sustains. The forces championing interdisciplinarity had always already been in the academia, much prior to covid. However, its necessity was more fiercely felt in all sectors of life, even beyond chartered academia, only in the spurt of digital interactions during and after covid. There are criticisms that interdisciplinarity is, after all, a transgression of particular disciplinary boundaries, albeit in a very specific, historically and socially contextualized space. There are even accusations that epistemic frontiers fostered through interdisciplinarity are a challenge to disciplinary conventionality and thus, interdisciplinarity is a political

contention. Like any other discipline, interdisciplinarity runs the risk of being institutionalized or totalizing in nature but there is no denying that, for a learner, this escalated potentiality is a way of interpreting a phenomenon from as many angles as possible— identity, science, life, culture, anthropology, technology and even today's medical humanities.

As many as three decades before this covid pandemic, Jean-Francois Lyotard saw the potentiality of complex "material machinery" and anticipated the need for the "correct use of the machinery":

The idea of an interdisciplinary approach is specific to the age of deligitimation and its hurried empiricism. The relation to knowledge is not articulated in terms of the spirit or the emancipation of humanity, but in terms of the users of a complex conceptual and material machinery and those who benefit from its performance capabilities. They have at their disposal no metalanguage or metanarrative in which to formulate the final goal and correct use of that machinery. But they do have brainstorming to improve its performance. The emphasis placed on teamwork is related to the predominance of the performativity criterion in knowledge. (*The Inhuman* 52)

Lyotard's is thus a question of figuring out how the new-found dialogue with technology changes and interrogates the epistemological foundations of mainly human-centric disciplinary practice and cultural analysis. Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, as the digital paradigm takes over, a learner at least feels that interdisciplinarity is the call of the hour, for it promises to rise above cultural sectarianism, cartographic provincialism and holistic discrimination. The idea of common humanity, as the new digital awareness vitally shows, is discriminatory, of course. Had there not been this digitally mediated man-machine cultural tete-a-tete, the discrimination would have perpetuated ad infinitum. In that case, humankind would have got a despotic liberty for exploitation. Bill Readings in his seminal *The University in Ruins* (1996) has rightly dissuaded humankind to deem them as exclusive "object of cognition":

Our responsibility to others is thus inhuman in the sense that the presumption of a shared or common humanity is an irresponsible desire to know what it is that we encounter in the other, what it is that binds us. To believe that we know in advance what it means to be human, that humanity can be an object of cognition, is the first step to terror, since it renders it possible to know what is non-human, to know what it is to which we have no responsibility, what we can freely exploit. Put simply, the obligation to others cannot be made an object of knowledge under the rubric of a common humanity. (190)

Conclusion

John Keats upholds in "The Eve of St. Agnes": "... 'Hark! 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land, / Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:" (*Fifteen Poets* 373). Covid is not just "an elfin-storm", nor a "boon" by any means, but it serves, for sure, as a potential lens through which the humanity, more particularly the learning community, have seen the world. The time had been precarious, no doubt but then, no one denies the raw, pithy and priceless experience that the humanity has derived through it and all experience, we do agree, is an arch wherethrough gleams many untravelled worlds. Many worlds have really entered making a learner believe at least in the necessity of rising above discrimination. The digital turn has invited the learners to reconsider the clichéd ties between the visual preconceptions of learning and the immediate surroundings. Moreover, it has paved the way for a new creative space and experience by acknowledging the fundamental *raison d'être* for interdisciplinarity, especially in the didactic-creative parlance. A learner, at least, knows that by way of learning to appreciate interdisciplinarity, she or he is turning towards the realization of what the present day deems as "posthuman". Regarding the de-centred concept of what is traditionally known as human, Arthur Kroker, hence, rightly observes: "The technological posthuman is that historical moment when the power of technology turns back on itself, effectively undermining traditional concepts such as subjectivity, privacy, and bounded consciousness in order to render all things truly uncertain and unknowable" (*Exits to the Posthuman Future* 15).

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ⁱOxford *English Reference Dictionary* traces the origin of this epithet to Greek *haptikos*, which connotes bodily touch (640).

About The Contributors

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2. Dr. Shubham Bhattacharjee is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore. He has received his Ph.D. from Rabindra Bharati University. During his research period, he engaged classes at Rabindra Bharati University from July 2019, initially as a Junior Research Fellow and subsequently as a Senior Research Fellow. Previously, he had also pursued his B.A. (Hons.), M.A. and M.Phil. from the same institution. He also possesses a second M.A. Degree in English Language Teaching from Netaji Subhas Open University, alongside a Post Graduate Diploma in Translation and Transcultural Studies. He has also completed MBA in Human Resource Management

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3. Dr. Madhumita Roy completed her Ph.D. on “Rabindranath Tagore’s Engagement with Science” from the Department of English, Visva-Bharati in 2022. During the initial years of her research, she worked as a research assistant in the Kalanukramik Rabindra Rachanavali Project under Visva-Bharati. She also provided research assistance to Prof. Uma Dasgupta. She worked as a guest faculty in Visva-Bharati, and later on joined Adamas University, Kolkata as a full time Assistant Professor of English. Currently she is an Associate Professor of English, Swami Vivekananda University, near Kolkata.

4. Dr. Shreyoshi Dhar is currently serving as Assistant Professor, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University. She has completed her Ph.D. from Rabindra Bharati University. Previously, she had also completed her B.A. (Hons.), M.A. and M.Phil. from the same institution. She is also in possession of a second M.A. Degree in English Language Teaching from Netaji Subhas Open University, alongside a Post Graduate Diploma in Translation and Transcultural Studies from School of Languages and Culture, Rabindra Bharati University. She has also completed MBA in Human Resource Management from Indira Gandhi National Open University. She has cleared the UGC-NET examination on multiple instances. Prior to joining this institution as an Assistant Professor, she

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5. Dr. Tirna Sadhu is currently serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Swami Vivekananda University, Kolkata. She specializes in Science Fiction and Posthuman studies. She completed her Ph.D. in English Literature at Visva-Bharati Santiniketan and has supervised scholars over the past four years, with three successful Ph.D. dissertations submitted under her guidance. She earned her M.A. in English from Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. She graduated with Hons. in English from Hooghly Mohsin College, affiliated to the University of Burdwan. Dr. Sadhu has presented at conferences, workshops, and symposia and has published widely in reputed journals and edited volumes nationally and internationally, as well as edited an anthology and translated poetry. In addition to research and teaching, Dr. Sadhu has actively organized seminars and workshops.

6. Dr. Soumyarup Bhattacharjee is an Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies (formerly the Department of English) at Swami Vivekananda University, India. He was previously a research scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in IIT Bombay. His current research focuses on transcultural approaches to contemporary Gothic literature in South and Southeast Asia. He is currently a member of the Gothic in Asia Association and a former member of the Modern Language Association.

7. Agnideepo Datta is an Assistant Professor of English at Swami Vivekananda University, West Bengal. He holds a postgraduate degree from the University of Calcutta and an M.Phil. from Vidyasagar University. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at Bankura University. With teaching experience in institutions across India and abroad, he also coordinates examinations and interdisciplinary academic initiatives with dedication and efficiency.

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