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Representations of Ecocides in Settler Colonial Arts and Literatures

A Postcolonial study of *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay: An Ecocidal Fiction of Colonial India's Indigenous Lands

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OUTLINE

TEXT

Introduction

1 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aranyak* (1939) is one of the earliest eco-conscious fictions of India. It was originally written in Bengali and later translated in English by Rimli Bhattacharya in 2017 as *Aranyak: Of the Forest*. Environmental consciousness was scarcely seen in novels during Bandyopadhyay's time. *Aranyak* was written during the time of the British colonial period, yet it demonstrates an awareness of ecological issues prior to the rise of environmentalism as a widespread social and political force. For environmental welfare to take effect or even to be generated in the first place, a climate of transformed environmental values and perception is required. To that end, the power of stories, images, and artistic performances, as well as the resources of aesthetics, ethics,

and cultural aspects are crucial. As the ecological crisis increases, emotional responses soar with it.

2 *Aranyak* is an Indian novel that represents one response Indigenous people had towards colonial India's deforestation process. It is also an Indian wilderness narrative, influenced by western texts such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854),[1] while being seeped with local Indian specific concerns. The novel depicts a mosaic of human lives composed of Indigenous peoples, nomads, vagabonds, poets, and moneylenders who are all interconnected with the wilderness. It powerfully demonstrates how the forest's destruction threatened the survival of these diverse groups. I argue that this narrative of ecocide predominantly portrays the Global North's deep environmentalism, although an undercurrent of Global South's utility-based environmentalism can be discerned. This article explores the ecocide of Indigenous lands through alternative perspectives on environmentalism that critique traditional wilderness narratives and analyze the interconnectedness of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene.

Ecocide and Deforestation of the Indigenous Lands in *Aranyak*

3 In *Aranyak*, the narrator Satyacharan comes to the Indigenous jungle area because he needs a job to survive and his only available option is to take up a job as a tax collector in a jungle[2] owned by his friend's father, a large forest estate set on Santal and Gond peoples' land in British Colonial India. He hates the desolate wilderness at first, calling it an uncivilized land inhabited by "barbarian"[3] people, while gradually getting addicted to the beauty of the jungles as he ends up overseeing its destruction. *Aranyak* can be read as a tale of confession and remorse. The novel indeed begins with the narrator's confession of the crimes he committed against the forest.

4 The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) does not define the term "Indigenous."[4] However, *Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Human Rights System*, Fact Sheet No. 9 Rev. 2, defines Indigeneity with terms such as self-identification, historical continuity with pre-invasion/pre-colonial

societies, distinct cultures and social organizations, as well as vulnerability.[5] Neither the British government of colonial days nor the present-day Indian government have officially recognized any specific section of their population as "Indigenous." For administrative purposes, the Indian government utilizes the term "Scheduled Tribe" to designate certain communities for constitutional privileges, protection, and benefits, acknowledging their historical disadvantage and social upheavals. Article 342 of the Indian Constitution empowers the President to specify that a community is a Scheduled Tribe, while Parliament retains the authority to include or exclude communities from this list.[6] In common understanding, Scheduled Tribes are often equated with Indigenous groups in India. A formal definition of "tribe" or "Indigenous" remains elusive. Furthermore, as caste identity frequently overlaps with tribal identity, making clear distinctions between them can be challenging. "Indigenous people" and "tribe" are often used interchangeably in this article, highlighting the fluidity of these two social categories.

5 *Aranyak* foregrounds the complex socio-cultural landscape of rural colonial India through its representation of diverse marginalized communities, including established Indigenous groups and lower caste populations. Specifically, the narrative incorporates the Santal[7] and Gond,[8] recognized as Adivasi communities for their distinct cultural traditions and historical relationships to the land. Furthermore, the novel also mentions lower caste groups, such as the Gangota (specializing in farming and animal husbandry[9]), Ahir,[10] Dosadh,[11] and Kalaor,[12] whose social position is often characterized by economic precarity and historical oppression. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the frequent fluidity between Indigenous identity and caste affiliation in the Indian context. The inclusion of these diverse groups allows the novel to explore themes of land rights, social hierarchy, and the persistent legacies of historical marginalization.

6 *Aranyak* delves deeply into the intricate relationship between Indigenous communities and their land. The novel portrays the forest as more than just a geographical space as it is deeply intertwined with Indigenous cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and social structures. The novel highlights how deforestation disrupts their

intricate balance with the environment, forcing them to adapt to unfamiliar and often exploitative economic models such as farming and working as migrant laborers. Deforestation depletes traditional resources, compelling Indigenous communities to migrate to survive through low-wage agricultural labor in upper caste communities' corn, mustard, and wheat fields.

7 In *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (2004), Alfred Crosby explains how European settlers introduced and/or curated animals and plants in the colonies for their own profit. Colonizers also brought fatal diseases with them. European settlers and their plants, animals, and diseases destroyed the original flora and fauna of their colonies. [13] Although this theory can be applied to describe the ecocides as well as human hecatombs which occurred in North and South America as well as Oceania, in dense tropical and subtropical lands of India, changing the entire ecosystem was not an easy task for British colonial masters, which led them to adopt a different strategy. Colonial presence drastically changed the land usage system of India. Instead of changing the entire ecosystem, the British colonial system changed the economy, land, and forest usage, as well as food production by coercing and/or seducing their subjects to drive them into farming cash crops such as indigo, opium, and jute. By the middle of the 17th century, Britain emerged as the world leader of deforestation. After destroying their own forests in the UK, British colonizers focused on their colonies' forests for the supply of timber, coal, and other resources for business, on top of making railways and ships. [14] The most obvious outcome of colonialism was its global control over resources. Although the colonial presence is not the explicit focus of the novel under study, multiple references to the British Raj are scattered throughout *Aranyak*. The major example is the revenue system of the forest land as well as the narrator's education and feeling of moral superiority stemming from his British colonial education. Indeed, he belongs to the colonial elite class created by the British through the imposition of the English education system. [15]

8 In *Aranyak*, acre after acre of forest are cut off to tame, control, and transform woodland into settler areas and agricultural lands by order of a *zamindar* [16] (land holder), who, in exchange, receives regular

taxes from settlers. British colonial rulers are not seen as the profit-making party here but ultimately, the taxes and revenue of the land filter towards them as they officially own this land. The narrator oversees the deforestation of the forestlands which partially belong to the Indigenous population. The Indigenous community is recognizable by its political autonomy, isolation, and self-reliant economy. Yet, hardly any Indian Indigenous group falls in this category, as isolation is a myth. The forest land is the richest store of resources thereby, which explains why colonial agents were attracted to this land to exploit more and more resources for business.

9 Alfred Crosby's idea of ecological imperialism could also be applied as a framework through which to read the actions of the narrator Satyacharan and his friend Jugalprasad. Jugalprasad is an eccentric man who has one purpose in his life – beautifying the jungles and mountains.[17] Both men bring flower saplings from cities and outside to make the forest look beautiful in their own terms. As Jugalprasad said:

> I had seen a wonderful English creeper in a saheb's garden in Purnea: it had lovely red flowers. This seed is of that creeper… the forests here don't have these species of flowers and creepers. I'm planting them now; in another two years they will come up and start flowering. How nice it will look.[18]

10 "Saheb," in this context, refers to a British person. Both men's attempt at beautifying the forest can be perceived as a great aesthetic move when seen through the colonial gaze, but this enterprise heavily contributes to eliminating local species. Beautifying the jungle according to colonially inspired aesthetic tastes disregarding the local ecosystem, destroys and replaces it with different species, exemplifying imperial ecocide. The narrator also orders seeds and plants from a British Indian company named "Sutton Seed Company" to later spread them in the jungle:

> That year, I had English wildflowers ordered from the Sutton Seeds Company in Calcutta and the wild jui creeper brought from the Duars range and had them planted in great numbers in the forest around Sarawati kundi […] I picked out the colourful and attractive ones. Amongst these, the white beam, red campion and the stichwort

> showed exceptional progress; the foxgloves and the wood anemones did not do too badly either; but despite our best efforts, the dog-roses and the honeysuckle could not be saved.[19]

11 This passage also illustrates a kind of ecological invasion on local ecology. The creepers and plants, that the male characters introduce in the wild, very soon invade the locality. When cataloguing plants and animals living in the wilderness, the narrator uses either Bengali names instead of local Indigenous words to adhere to the culturally dominant language or invents a name for them altogether. He does not use the local names of most species, erasing the plants' original names in the process.

Conflicting Views on Environmentalism

12 Environmentalism is fundamentally different whether applied in the Global North or in the Global South, as these two approaches do not address the issues of nature, environment, and preservation in the same way. In *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (1997), Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez Alier argue that the Global North grew conscious about the wilderness of nature in post-industrial era and tried to preserve it for the ultimate luxury of the upper-middle-class consumers.[20] Environmentalism in the Global North is interested in the preservation of nature and the wild. The Wilderness Movement, focusing on the preservation of pristine untouched nature, began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily in the United States. Inspired by the Romantic and Transcendentalist work of William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold amidst others, this movement was a reaction to growing concerns over rapid industrialization and urbanization that were threatening vast tracts of natural land.

13 Environmental movements in the Global South, particularly in a country like India, emerged as a direct response to the negative ecological consequences resulting from development initiatives after India became independent from the British Raj in 1947. Large-scale industrialization, deforestation, and the displacement of people often led to visible ecological damage, pollution, soil erosion, and the

destruction of forests. These tangible consequences of development directly affected the livelihoods and well-being of local communities, prompting them to mobilize and demand environmental justice. [21] In 1973, the Chipko movement in the Himalayan forests, for example, emerged as a response to the destruction of forests for timber extraction. Local women embraced trees to prevent their felling, highlighting the interconnectedness between the environmental protection of their land and the survival of their communities. Similarly, in 1985, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (i.e. Save the Narmada River Movement) arose following the construction of a large dam that threatened to displace hundreds of thousands of people and cause significant environmental damage. Environmental movements in India – and the Global South more broadly – are often rooted in the lived experiences of people who are directly affected by environmental degradation. Their struggles are not merely about preserving nature for its aesthetic, ecological, or intrinsic value, but about ensuring the survival and well-being of their communities.

14 Bandyopadhyay's novel is set in pre-independent India. Yet, I argue that early consciousness regarding ecocidal consequences is perceptible in the novel. The forest land is used by the Indigenous people and lower caste (mostly Gangota caste and various tribes) for grazing cattle and cultivating lac insects. [22] These agricultural practices were the primary sources of survival for most people then, to which hunting and gathering could be added. For the sake of their own survival, the tribal and lower caste people were motivated to preserve the forest. [23] The motive behind their environmental protection is not planetary consciousness or deep ecology, but their own survival. This kind of environmentalism is called "empty belly environmentalism" by Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier. According to them, the environmentalism of Third World countries is driven by the marginalized people whose livelihood depends on forests and other natural resources. Indeed, if large-scale environmental degradation happens, their livelihood will get affected and they will be the first group impacted. As they mention:

> The environmentalisms of the poor, we argue, originate in social conflicts over access to and control over natural resources: conflicts between peasants and industry over forest produce, for example, or between rural and urban populations over water and energy. Many

> social conflicts often have an ecological content, with the poor trying to retain under their control the natural resources threatened by state takeover or by the advance of the generalized market system.[24]

15 As he belongs to a privileged background, the narrator of the novel *Aranyak* very often shares thoughts which evoke the "deep ecological" theories and western concepts of environmentalism. What motivates him to save the forest is the forest's intrinsic value and its aesthetics. Subsequently, after the forest is lost, the narrator does not recount the fate of these people who lived and were dependent on the forest's resources for survival. By comparison, Indigenous and caste communities suffer much more severely than the narrator as he only regrets the loss of beauty.

16 Conceiving and experiencing "nature" from a different angle due to his class prejudices, the narrator describes nature as a beautiful fairyland, unaffected by survival issues. Satyacharan follows the common rhetoric of retreat from the civilized world and city life, falling in love with nature's beauty:

> I began to feel that I would not be able to return to the hurly-burly of Calcutta forsaking the vast tracts of forestland, the fresh fragrance of the sun-scorched earth and the freedom and the liberation they represent [...] her beauty unveiled: evenings came wearing a crown of bloody clouds; the searing afternoon in the guise of a mad Bhairavi; or draped in moonlight and wearing the cool and pure fragrance of wild flowers, in the depths of night came the beautiful muse of music, wearing around her neck a garland of stars; and, on moonless nights appeared the immense form of Kali, wielding the flaming blade that was Orion, the radiance extending into space.[25]

17 In this passage, the narrator employs Romantic ideals by emphasizing the sublime aspects and his renewed connection with nature. The awe-inspiring descriptions of celestial phenomena (i.e. "crown of bloody clouds," "flaming blade that was Orion") evoke the sublime, a concept central to Romanticism that emphasizes the overwhelming power and beauty of nature, often experienced as a transcendent and even spiritual encounter. Satyacharan finds solace and inspiration in

the natural world, suggesting a deeper connection to the universe and a rejection of the artificiality of urban life.

18 The use of different literary devices, such as pathos, personification, and mythical imagery, further contributes to the Romantic aesthetic. By imbuing natural elements with human characteristics (i.e. "evenings came wearing a crown," "the searing afternoon in the guise of a mad Bhairavi"), the passage animates the natural world, suggesting a deeper, more profound relationship between humans and their environment. The invocation of Hindu deities like Bhairavi [26] and Kali [27] adds a layer of mysticism and connects the experience of nature to the spiritual realm – a key aspect of Romantic thought too.

19 Where the narrator is seen romanticizing nature, the actual inhabitants of the land find it cruel due to continuous severe drought, scarcity of food, cholera, and other epidemic diseases, attacks from wild animals, such as tigers, wild boars, wild buffaloes, etc. The locals constantly struggle:

> No simple language would be equal to portraying the face of this fearful natural calamity [...] all the water in the jungle ran dry – ponds, ditches, canals or any fair-sized body of water. There was no water to be had even if you dug a well; if some little water did manage to seep through the sand into the well, it took over an hour for water enough to fill a small bucket to collect inside the well. [28]

20 Benefiting from his privileged administrative role, the narrator readily adapts to life in the wild. By contrast, the local populace, particularly the most impoverished, face continuous struggles arising from a combination of factors, including the exploitation of their land and resources by moneylenders and the upper caste, as well as the challenges posed by adverse natural conditions.

21 The relation Indigenous people have with the forest land fashions their distinct eco-consciousness. Agriculture in settled land is not their preferred means of livelihood as it is forbidden in their culture. Their means off livelihood is hunting-gathering but hunting is never used as a means of entertainment. They take pride in hunting with spears but hunting with guns is seen as derogatory and offensive.

When the narrator asks an Indigenous person about their farming habits, the clan member replies:

> "That sort of thing is forbidden to our race," Dobru Panna replied with some pride. "The greatest honour lies in hunting, and of that, there was a time when hunting with spears was considered the most prestigious. Hunting with bows and arrows does not appease the gods, it is not something a brave does."[29]

22 No major organized environmentalist movement resulted in conservation of the wilderness in India. India was a British colony during the novel's timeline. The administrator and the owners were bound to generate more taxes and revenue from the land. It was obvious that the colonial masters would not want to save the jungle for aesthetic purposes or ecological biodiversity when the forestland could generate so much income. Contrary to local cultural customs, the forestland was turned into agricultural farmlands to produce cash crops that generated revenue.

Anthropocenic and Capitalocenic Impacts on the Forest

23 The anthropocentric worldview, prioritizing human needs above all else, has driven our planet to the brink of ecological collapse. Our survival now hinges on shifting towards a post-anthropocentric perspective that recognizes the interconnectedness of all lives. Ecological concerns are not new phenomena. From the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh* dating back to the Sumerian Civilization to the 20th-century novel *Aranyak*, a recurring pattern can be highlighted: civilizations built on foundations of violence, unchecked consumption, pollution, deforestation, and disregard for the natural world, ultimately sow the seeds of their own destruction.

24 When the Deep Environmentalist movement emerged as a reaction to anthropocentrism, it called for a radical reevaluation of the relationship between human beings, non-human beings, and the environment. The term "Deep Ecology" was coined by Arne Naess in his 1973 article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary."[30] Deep Ecology staunchly rejects the idea of

human centeredness and calls for the preservation and protection of every species. This ideology claims to preserve the richness and diversity of life in all forms, regardless of human needs. Deep Ecology also has limits, though, as it can sometimes downplay the interconnectedness of environmental issues with social and economic inequalities, potentially neglecting the environmental burdens disproportionately borne by marginalized communities.

25 To critique the concept of anthropocentrism, Donna Haraway in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2022) develops the concept of the Capitalocene, even though this term was first coined by Andreas Malm in 2009 in a seminar at Lund University, [31] Sweden. The current environmental crisis is not a result of inherent human flaws, but rather a consequence of the capitalist system's relentless pursuit of profit. For her, the concept of the Capitalocene emphasizes capitalism as the primary driver of ecological destruction, and highlights how this system, through its exploitation of both humans and nature, has led to widespread environmental degradation. The concepts of the "Anthropocene" and the "Capitalocene" highlight the human impact on climate change, fostering a sense of despair and determinism. Donna Haraway proposes the idea of the "Chthulucene" instead, a framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and their environments. The Indigenous cultures depicted in *Aranyak*, especially the clan of Old King Dobru Panna, can be seen as inherently Chthuluceneic due to their deep-rooted understanding of interconnectedness. They often recognize symbiotic relationships within ecosystems, placing humans as part of a larger web of life, not above it.

26 In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton argues that the traditional concept of nature as something separate from humanity hinders effective environmental action. [32] He proposes a new framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings within a complex mesh. Morton also contends that the idea of pristine wilderness is a myth, and that acknowledging our integral role within the natural world is crucial. From the very beginning of the novel, Satyacharan's sense of environmental preservation is motivated by a fetishized attachment for one particular landscape. His idealized vision therefore prevents the forest's

environmental well-being. [33] As an outsider, he is the only character to find nature mysterious, dark, exotic, and beautiful. The natives of the forestland, the Indigenous people, and the lower caste people are not amazed by the forest as they coexist with nature without fetishizing it. In the text, people from tribal backgrounds do not wonder at the sight of pristine nature as it is part of their everyday life. However, they do wonder at the thought of city life. Cars especially fascinate them: "I went to Bhagalpur once – quite a city, that. I've seen the wind-run cars there: such strange things they are… No horses, nothing, and they move along the road by themselves." [34] This quote from *Aranyak* challenges the assumption that sublime nature universally evokes awe. It suggests that perceptions are shaped by unique experiences and environments. This challenges the romanticized notion of Indigenous peoples as inherently connected to nature, highlighting instead the diversity of human experiences and values within different cultural contexts.

A Critique of Wilderness Narratives

27 The wilderness is often referred to as "virgin land." It is often imagined as uninhibited by humans and secluded. This concept constructs nature as uncontaminated by civilization, adding a sacramental value to it, and promising a renewed relation between humans and nature. In his landmark article **"**The Trouble With Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1996), William Cronon contests the sublimity of the wilderness and argues that the sublimity of wilderness is a recent invention. [35] The idea of a pristine wilderness was created to serve the needs of a western urban privileged and consumerist society who have the leisure and resources to take a break from their work and escape to the countryside to enjoy its beauty. It also shows the commodification of nature as leisure. The wilderness is not a natural state then, but a man-made construct resulting from an urban/rural dichotomy. In *Aranyak*, urban privileged people come to the wild for leisure. They are not seen experiencing the wilderness though, as they keep their same urban habits of polluting the spaces they live in. They leave tin cans of condensed milk and jam as well as garbage behind them. They

also come to the forest to hunt for their own entertainment, angering the narrator in the process. [36]

28 William Cronon argues that the characterization of the American wilderness as "desolate" in many historical accounts and narratives are inaccurate as these accounts ignore the significant presence of Indigenous peoples, themselves imagined as "Red Indians" by western settlers. Very often, the narrator of *Aranyak* also refers to the forest land as a desolate and lonely space, [37] when, in reality, the land is filled with Indigenous people. By calling the land "*Terra Nullius*," he negates their presence in the jungle. However, it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples were practicing forms of land stewardship for thousands of years before the formalized Wilderness Movement began.

29 Diverse types of forestlands are recognized in Indian literature and cultures, recognizing forests' varying degrees of density, their proximity to human habitation, and association with cultural significance. [38] These degrees are *āraṇya*, *vana*, and *upavana*. *Āraṇya* is the deepest form of forests, where human presence is minimal and only sages dwell there for acquiring spiritual wisdom. *Vana* denotes a less dense forest type, often described as a grove of trees. This term is often associated with exile (*vanavāsa*) or as a place of retreat from societal obligations. *Upavana* is the transitional zone between the wild and the domesticated *gramyā* (village). [39]

30 The title of Bandyopadhyay's novel therefore derives from ancient India's main collection of Hindu religious texts named *Vedas* composed between 1500 and 500 BCE. *Vedas* comprise four parts (*Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda*) and each part is itself divided into four sections (*Samhita*, *Brahmana*, *Aranyaka, and Upanishad*). The section of *Vedas* that were created in *aranya* (dense forests) are called "*aranyaka*" which means "of the forest." According to Arthur Berriedale Keith, "*Aranyak*" was thus named because the discussions contained in these works were to be studied in the forest by ascetics and sages living in forests, or were intended to be studied in the "*vanaprastha*" phase of life [40] when people retire from domestic life to the forest to gain spiritual wisdom. The novel *Aranyak* draws its name from the "*Aranyakas*," ancient Indian texts often studied in the seclusion of forests. This title reflects the

author's profound reverence for the forest (*aranya*), which is viewed as sacred. In the prologue, the narrator starts his story in these terms: "I have heard that to confess a crime in one's own words lightens somewhat the burden of the crime. Therefore, this story." [41] The novel *Aranyak* thus explores how the ecological destruction of the forest is deeply entangled with the guilt associated with harming the sacred space, as the protagonist repeatedly confesses his remorse at having participated in the destruction of the forest from the very first chapter of the novel.

Conclusion

31 To conclude, this article on Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*, highlighting a form of ecocide on Indigenous lands, challenges conventional wilderness narratives and illuminates the crucial link between the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. By examining the novel through the lens of alternative environmental perspectives, this article brings up a more nuanced understanding of the complex forces driving environmental destruction in the specific context of colonial India. *Aranyak*, written in the 1930s, offers a poignant portrayal of the devastating impact of deforestation on the lives of Indigenous communities, nomadic groups, and other marginalized populations deeply connected to the natural world. Moving beyond idealized and often romanticized visions of untouched wilderness, this analysis focuses on how *Aranyak* portrays the lived experiences of those directly affected by environmental degradation. The novel reveals the interconnectedness between human lives and the forest ecosystem, demonstrating how the destruction of the forest disrupts not only ecological balance but also social structures, cultural practices, and economic livelihoods. This article argues that *Aranyak* provides a valuable historical perspective on the intertwined histories of colonialism, capitalism, and environmental destruction. By analyzing the novel through the frameworks of both Global North's deep environmentalism and the more utilitarian environmental perspectives often associated with the Global South, this article studies the multiplicity of values and motivations that shape human interactions with nature. *Aranyak* demonstrates how the colonial drive for resource extraction, fueled by capitalist expansion, led to the exploitation of Indigenous lands

and the disruption of traditional ways of life. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the need for a more critical and inclusive approach to environmentalism, one that recognizes the historical and ongoing injustices embedded within ecological crises, and centers the voices and perspectives of those most affected.

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8 Ibid., pp. 165 and 242.

9 Ibid., pp. 23 and 120.

10 Ibid., pp. 79 and 92.

11 Ibid., p. 41.

12 Ibid., p. 50.

13 Alfred Worcester Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. xviii.

14 Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Oxford and Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 117-121.

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16 The Zamindari system was the administrative-social formation through which the superior landholders extracted agricultural revenues for the Mughal and English East India Company states in 18th century Bengal. See John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 8.

17 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 108.

18 Ibid., p. 108.

19 Ibid., p. 108: *Jui* is a Bengali name given to a white flower of the Jasmine species. The bionomical name of *Jui* is "*Jasminum auriculatum*" in Latin. *Kundi* refers to a small lake or a water body.

20 Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*. London and New York, Earthscan Publication, 1997, p. 18.

21 Ibid., p. 20.

22 *Kerriidae* is a family of scale insect, commonly known as "lac insect." These insects secrete a waxy resin that is harvested and converted to be used in various dyes, wood finishing varnishes, and polishes.

23 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 212.

24 Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism*, p. xxi.

25 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 20-21.

26 David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, p. 163. Bhairavi is a Hindu warrior Goddess who has a reddish complexion. She often wears a garland of severed heads, holds a rosary and a book in

two of her four hands, and makes the signs of fearlessness while conferring boons with her other two hands. Her breasts are smeared with blood.

27 David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 116. The goddess Kali is almost always described as having a terrible, frightening appearance. She is always black or dark. Her body is usually naked, and displays long, disheveled hair. She is usually shown on the battlefield where she is a furious combatant who gets drunk on the hot blood of her victims, or in a cremation ground where she sits on a corpse surrounded by jackals and goblins.

28 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 32.

29 Ibid., p. 152.

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31 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 184.

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33 Ibid., p. 1.

34 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 24.

35 William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, vol. 1, No. 1, 1996, pp. 7-28.

36 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 184-185.

37 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 63, 65, and 114.

38 Meera Baindur, *Nature in Indian Philosophy and Cultural Traditions*, New Delhi, Springer, 2015, p. 110.

39 Ibid., p. 111

40 Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 1925, pp. 489-490.

41 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 4.

ABSTRACTS

English

The article intends to present a postcolonial ecocritical study of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939). This novel is one of the earliest fictions to portray the deforestation occurring on the Indigenous lands of the Santal in India during the British colonial period. This article also tries to study the conception, representation, and understanding of nature in different strata of the colonial Indian society. *Aranyak* is concerned with nature being violated by exploitative practices, as well as processes of ecocides and deforestation in Indigenous forest lands. The perception of nature and the ideological views on how to preserve forests are drastically different among the characters who show differing views on environmentalism. In western culture, religion, and philosophy, humans are usually considered the center of the universe, but in the Indigenous Indian context, humans, in this shared world, are not at the center of the universe but part of the planetary consciousness. The different approaches to environmentalism developed by various characters in the ecofiction will be studied in detail. The article will also focus on the concepts and representations of wilderness, deforestation, colonial influence, and capitalism. The current climate crisis proves the non-functionality of anthropocentrism. Therefore, there is a need for an alternative, all-encompassing worldview of nature where humans are not a be-all and end-all but a part of a greater planetary consciousness.

Français

L'article présente une étude écocritique postcoloniale du roman *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939) de Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. Ce roman est l'une des premières fictions à décrire la déforestation organisée sur les terres indigènes des Santal en Inde pendant la période coloniale britannique. Cet article tente également d'étudier la conception, la représentation et la compréhension de la nature dans différentes couches de la société indienne coloniale. Aranyak s'intéresse à la nature violée par des pratiques d'exploitation, ainsi qu'aux processus d'écocide et de déforestation dans les terres forestières indigènes. La perception de la nature et les points de vue idéologiques sur la manière de préserver les forêts sont radicalement différents selon les personnages qui affichent des points de vue divergents sur l'environnementalisme. Dans la culture, la religion et la philosophie occidentales, les humains sont généralement considérés comme le centre de l'univers, mais dans le contexte indigène indien, les humains, dans ce monde partagé, ne sont pas au centre de l'univers, mais font partie de la conscience planétaire. Les différentes approches de l'environnementalisme développées par différents personnages de l'écofiction seront étudiées en détail. L'article se concentrera également sur les concepts et les représentations de la nature sauvage, de la déforestation, de l'influence

coloniale et du capitalisme. La crise climatique actuelle prouve la non-fonctionnalité de l'anthropocentrisme. Il est donc nécessaire d'adopter une vision alternative et globale de la nature, dans laquelle les humains ne sont pas un tout et une fin en soi, mais une partie d'une plus grande conscience planétaire.

Español

El artículo presenta un estudio ecocrítico postcolonial de la novela *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939) de Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. Esta novela es una de las primeras ficciones que describen la deforestación organizada en las tierras indígenas de los Santal en la India durante el período colonial británico. El artículo intenta también estudiar la concepción, representación y comprensión de la naturaleza en diversas capas de la sociedad colonial india. Aranyak se interesa por la naturaleza violada por prácticas de explotación, así como por los procedimientos de ecocidio y de deforestación en los bosques indígenas. La percepción de la naturaleza y los puntos de vista ideológicos sobre la manera de preservar los bosques son radicalmente diferentes según los personajes que adoptan puntos de vista divergentes acerca de la ecología. En la cultura, la religión y la filosofía occidentales, los humanos son generalmente considerados como el centro del universo, pero en el contexto indígena indio, los humanos, en este mundo compartido, no están en el centro del universo, sino que son parte de la consciencia planetaria. Los diferentes acercamientos del medio ambientalismo desarrollados por diversos personajes de la ecoficción son estudiados en detalle. El artículo se concentra también en los conceptos y las representaciones de la naturaleza salvaje, de la deforestación, de la influencia colonial y del capitalismo. La crisis climática actual prueba la no-funcionalidad del antropocentrismo. Por consiguiente, es necesario adoptar una visión alternativa y global de la naturaleza, en la que los humanos no son una totalidad y un fin de por sí, sino una parte de una mayor consciencia planetaria.

INDEX

Mots-clés

environnementalisme indien, environnementalisme occidental, grands espaces, écocide, déforestation, terres indigènes

Keywords

Indian environmentalism, western environmentalism, wilderness, ecocide, deforestation, Indigenous lands

Palabras claves

medioambientalismo indio, medioambientalismo occidental, grandes espacios, ecocidio, deforestación, tierras indígenas

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