

Environmental Consciousness and 'Aranyak' By Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay

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Abstract

Environmental issues emerged in the Late twentieth century as a major focus of international concern and activity. It impacts Literature heavily and which leads to construct a literary theory named eco-criticism. Eco-criticism has some distinct features to judge a literature and classify it as an eco-text. In this discourse we will try to find the answer that can Aranyak by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay be called as an eco-text?

Keywords: Aranyak, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, Environment.

Introduction

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, the environment-thinker novelist, no doubt holds the nature with its totality, depth and alive entity in Bengali novel. Only for forest-nature, so much deep-loving attachment is rare in Bengali literature, as well as world literature also. It is undeniable that, 'Aranyak', the novel written by him, is pioneer in the arena of complete environment-based novel in Bengali literature.

Aim of the Study

The main objective of the discourse is to find out whether the novel 'Aranyak' is an eco-text or not. The unique originality is the main factor that made the novel memorable. The treatment of unexpected originality made this novel totally new in comparison to its predecessors and contemporary novels. Now the question is, what are the basic elements of its novelty and originality.

Main Text of the Study

It's fact that, a novel builds up with human beings. A novelist depicts and weaves his story-line with human day-to-day life, hope and desire, joy and sorrow. Apart from historical novels, the Bengali novels of total nineteenth and first two decades of twentieth century dealt mostly with common picture of common Bengali people's most ordinary life. Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, while depicting most ordinary and merely common people, has obtained such a fineness and sophistication, that it is not true to say that, Bibhutibhushan could surpass it. But it is also a strong truth that, after reading 'Aranyak', a reader's soul becomes filled with a touch of new ecstasy of a calm and melancholy feeling. This is a different and incomparable flavor in Bengali novel, which was not tasted before 'Aranyak'. The key component of that incomparability is: the nature, feeling of nature and nature consciousness. In this novel the nature appears with so much importance, that gives birth to different types of confused criticism about the class determination of the novel. Various opinions have come out; whether it was a diary, a travelogue, a theoretical literature or else. But 'Aranyak' is actually an absolute novel of different style, which was unseen and untasted before. An eminent researcher, wrote: "Before Bibhutibhushan, the Bengali novel was mostly based on history, society and romance. Bibhutibhushan wrote a nature-based novel. His novel belongs to a different level, which was influenced by forest-consciousness, nature-love of Rousseau, Mary, barreleye and English romantic poets. So 'Aranyak' can't be placed in any traditional shelf of Bengali novels. Although the novel has a clear story, more than one hero and heroine, a fixed philosophy and a special style of language also, so it can be justified called as a novel of forest or an environment-based novel."¹

For deeply understanding a particular novel, it is very much necessary to cultivate its creator's mind. Reading a novel without understanding the creator's philosophical ideas and aesthetic outlook, is an incomplete reading.



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So, it is not required to mention that, to know about the environmental thinking, which reveals in Bibhutibhushan's novel, an extensive study on his life and living is necessary.

This novelist was born on 12th September, 1894 in his maternal uncle's house in Muratipur village. His childhood was spent in Barrackpur village near Bangaon in undivided Bengal, which was his paternal home. Since childhood an eco-friendly attitude grew in him. Gopikanth Roychowdhury, an eminent critic on Bibhutibhushan's literature, in his book, "Bibhutibhushan: the mind and art" has also emphasized upon his nature-loving attitude from childhood, while tried to search the beginning of his mental growing up. Bibhutibhushan, from very beginning, was not ready to accept the human life, as confined merely within common human living. It can be said easily that, this nature-closeness and nature-loving were germinated and became a tree later on as nature-consciousness. In his youth, his intensive travel through Bengal on account of his job, made his consciousness richer and deep-rooted. Because of his job, he came in close contact with forest, and brought an unique change to his thinking. He firmly realized that, the forest-nature-environment trio is an undivisible total entity. This realization effected his own living at first and was depicted in his literary works later on.

His service life was very much colourful and multi dimensional. He was deputed in different types of job in the estate of Khelat Chandra Ghosh of Pathuriaghata from 1923 to 1941. He served here for some time as personal secretary of Siddheswar Ghosh, son of Khelat Chandra, some time as private tutor of Bibhutibhushan Bose, the nephew of Khelat Chandra, some time as a teacher of Khelat Chandra Calcutta Institution at Dharmatolla street, Kolkata, and some time as the assistant manager of their forest estate at Bhagalpur.

He joined the forest estate in Bhagalpur in 1924 and returned to Khelat Chandra school in 1929. This mid-time five-year phase of living in Bhagalpur was most memorable chapter of his literature life. He spent day-after-day, a lonely forest living life there. The pococurent, grave beauty of forest nature charmed him at first and made overwhelmed later on. Another critic, Sunil kumar Chattopadhyay wrote in this context; "in alone afternoon, in moonlit night he remembered his distant past. At those moments, it seemed to him that the lovely smile of children of thousands of years past is blooming now as flowers in forest and fields. And a call of joy comes from that carnival. And he thought that, this message is to be delivered to others through literature."² With this great beauty-lover mind he looked upon nature, tried to feel the forest-consciousness. This type of thinking was most unlike to common people. Most of common people are habituated to consider the forest life an exile. But this lone forest-living opened a Broadway to the untasted world of joy, getting a new horizon of a newer thought, his creativity was boosted up. In this phase of life sometimes he grew deeply nostalgic and painful for beloved friends and relatives, but the healing power of forest slowly elevated him up from nostalgia and pain to a great creativity. The undisturbed forest-living provided him with a plenty of leisure to be prepared to write down 'patherpanchali' and 'aparajito'. Besides, a zeal to write down a complete novel, whose subject matter will be nature and environment exclusively, reacted slowly but intensely in him. Between 1924 and 1927, a lofty number of pages of his daily diary proves a sincere preparation to write down such a novel. A confession comes from his diary; "I shall write something about this forest life...a vigorous heroic upcoming picture of neglected life. This forest, loneliness, horse riding, distraction...darkness...living in the forest in a khubri. Sometimes, as today, the jungle path way found towards the bathan to vitetolla, that type of jungle path goes from this bathan to another one...distracting, roaming in the forest on a horse. The poverty of common people here, innocence. This virile, active life, the scene of dense forest in dusk, deep Casuarina wood...all these."³

Or "a novel of forest. There will remain description of loneliness, will contain different trees-wood...straight high layer of stone. Metallic stone. A colourful spring comes down from forest. The crimson sunlight on the peak of the hill. Forest of Shiuli trees...wildlife...some people saw Tarbaro ...who saves the graze of wild buffalo by standing on the verge of a ditch at darkness of midnight."⁴

Or, "in the novel of forest rich and poor, wealthy landlord, the tillers are poor and wretched. I shall clear this discrimination. They are homeless...they starve,

NanduramGosainetc...my strength.”⁵

Thesediary pages prove how Bibhutibhushan prepared himself slowly for an unique novel. This was the background of making of ‘Aranyak’. Besides we must be aware of another dimension of his environment- consciousness, and that was his staunch belief on teaching of Upanishad. In Indian tradition, the relation between nature and human is unbreakable, undeniable and based on soul. Bibhutibhushan himself named his novel as “Aranyak”. In the acknowledgement part of this novel, Sachindranath Bandyopadhyay, a profound critic, informed us; “it is notable that, the word Aranyak is both noun and adjective at the same time. The first meaning of Aranyak is the name of the annexure of Brahmana in Vedanta literature, and the second meaning is wild or related to forest. We think, it will be wise to take it in first sense to understand the novel. And if we accept this, we can realize rightly and easily the essence of Upanishad within it.”⁶

However, that, Satyacharan, the central character of the novel, is representing the author throughout the novel, can easily be understood, as because we see his feeling for forest is drawn almost thoroughly from the diary of Bibhutibhushan. The name: Satyacharan, means one who keeps touch with truth. This is significant also.

Taradas Bandyopadhyay, the son of Bibhutibhushan, wrote; “When in Vagalpur he kept diary on daily basis. It was not a diary in proper sense, rather it can be called a journal, from which a selected part was published later, named ‘Smritir Rekha’(A memory line). In this diary and its pre-final-copy we can find the sprout of Aranyak. Many characters of Smritir Rekha and Aranyaki are alike and have no difference.”⁷Aranyak was written from 1937 to 1939 and was serially published in the magazine Prabasi from Bengali month of Kartick 1344 to Falgun 1345, and published in 1939 as a novel. In the little preface of the book, Bibhutibhushan wrote; “There is no existence of dense forest near human locality. It can be found at far remote, where the breeze of Godavari is scented by ripe blackberry smell. Aranyak is a description of that land of imagination. It is not a travelogue, nor a diary, but a novel. Dictionary says, a novel is a fictitious story as a whole. We are not bound to obey those who write a dictionary. The fact is, the background of Aranyak is not fictitious as a whole. On other bank of Kushi river, this type of forest was stretched upto horizon in old days and now also. The forests and hills of south Vagalpur and Gaya districts are almost renowned.”⁸

Keeping in mind about his childhood days, his love for nature, environment- consciousness, and background of this novel, now it is time for explaining it in detail. All the novel was described in first person, by Satyacharan, the hero. It seems as a down memory lane journey. Satyacharan is an educated city dweller young man, who has come to this forest unwillingly. Due to his difficult economic condition, for an income only, he joined the chair of Assistant Manager for distribution of a vast forestland of Labtulia mouza, among eager tillers for cultivation and dwelling. When a man is bound to do a job, he doesn't like or love that. Satyacharan felt no attraction towards nature, on contrary, he strongly desired the city life. So, this vastly stretched forestland grew no charm in his mind at first. Naturally, in the first chapter, we find a picture of painful forest life of Satyacharan, which he was spending reluctantly, only for money. But in third part of second chapter, Satyacharan tells us, as the days are passing, he is feeling an attraction to the forest. He is quite aware of the difference of the nature of Bengal and that of Labtulia. As for example; “Those violet flowers of jungle sent a tune of Agamani (a tune of upcoming biggest festival of Bengal) to me. Not the flower of lemon, not the Ghentu flower, not the buds of mango, not Kamini flower, not red Palash or Shimul: it was an unknown unnamed beauty-less wild flower of a thorny bush. But this most ordinary wild flower appeared to me as a token of a full flowery garden, a flowery forest of spring. I was standing attentively for a long while there. I am a son of Bengal. The scene of honouring the spring by several thorny wild flowers' boquet, is new indeed to me. But what a beautiful scenery of the woods is on the top of hills!A meditated,pococurante,unarrayed,...yet how great!”⁹But this mental change does not come on a sudden day. Prior to enter this forestland, Satyacharan did not know that the forest has a hidden marvellous mystery of eternal beauty. The fearful wild beauty of hard wavy hill and entangled dense forest in one hand, and a trance-awakeningmysterious appearance of the forest on other hand, changed him, from a nature hater to

nature lover. Moreover, he wanted to be associated with this ancient forest, its river, hills and mountains, forest living aborigines, wild animals, birds and inhabitants of the nature of Labtulia as a whole. In European environment-centric literary thought, this wilderness (such a nature which is not polluted yet by modern civilization) has a great importance. When he comes in touch of such an untouched, uncultivated, virgin nature, he is deeply influenced by it, which he himself does not know. As he feels oneness with this nature in totality, he wants this forest to remain unperished and safe. This forest is a natural dwell for many colourful birds, wild deer, wild buffalo and many more unidentified and unnamed creatures. Satyacharan comes to this realization that, "Such a vast unbound, indomitable beautiful forestry is a valuable property of a country. If it was in another country, it would be reserved as National Forest by act."¹⁰ While describing the SaraswatiKundi, he mentions different types of birds, such as; Shyama, Shalikh, Hartit, Bantia, Chadai, Chatare, Ghughu, Harial, Bajbouri, Bok, Chil etc. He can recognize such a variety of birds; this proves he has been fallen in love with this forest. These birds' dwell in this forest which is about to extinct due to tree cutting in huge numbers. Satyacharan is well aware of losing shelter of these birds. Bibhutibhushan, actually himself, said in speech of Satyacharan: "as the birds of Narha-Baihar and Labtulia forest area lost their nests, a part of them took shelter in the forest of SaraswatiKundi, some birds here and another one part in Mohanpura Reserve Forest; they are humming restlessly."¹¹ Satyacharan is aware enough that, this forest must be well preserved, not only for wildlife, but also for the people too. The first cause is obviously to maintain ecological balance and the second is that; coming here, one city dweller can get rid of fatigue of workload, and can avail a chance of refreshing himself with the healing touch of forest, so it is also clear that, the writer is conscious enough about the sacramental value of a forest. But, it's a pity that, the responsibility attached with his duty and livelihood, becomes opposite to his loving attitude towards nature. Satyacharan has come here with a responsibility for changing this vast forest into human locality and tilling land. The more he will succeed in land distribution among tillers, the more revenue will be attracted, and simultaneously his skill as Assistant Manager will be proved. His prestige, position and income obviously will increase. But the contradiction between livelihood and love to nature, makes him helpless and confused. As a nature-lover and environment-oriented person, this contradiction enlightens a new more shade in his character.

The author also informed us, how one's greed for plot allotment can be exposed with limitless nakedness. In the words of Satyacharan; "Man is too much greedy, for a little amount of maize and a cup of grain of China grass. They are ready to annihilate this dream about."¹² Infact the history of human civilization is no doubt the history of avidity. Man makes his way of victory-chariot by destruction of nature. For dwelling and cultivation, the forestland has been annihilated without minimum consideration. Wild life has been obliterated for human avidity. The ecology of whole world is intensely detrimented. We find in Aranyak, a vivid picture of human greed, unhealthy life leading at dirty and filthy slum area after inhabitation started cutting the forest. After all these, even in this atmosphere of inauspicious time of all around faithlessness, the character like Raju Panre and Jugalprasad inject green hope to our mind. It is expected that, as Satyacharan is educated by learning system of the city, so his environment consciousness will have a totality comprised with philosophy and science-based thinking. But as Upanishad influenced the environment consciousness of ancient India, so it is better to say, the nature related life style of ancient India needed no bookish knowledge to preserve forest. Love to nature is inherent to Indians and it is attached to Indian life style. Raju Panre is a perfect example of this traditional thinking. Even after a piece of land is allotted to him, he is not eager to till it, because he is reluctant to enhance cultivable land by destroying forest. In his consideration, this flowery, fruity, colorful, beautiful, fragrant forestry is the abode of God, so if anyone is about to destroy it, then God himself will desist him. He realized well the ugly form of the greed of man, and so can tell easily; "Where greed for money and money lending business go on, atmosphere becomes bitter there."¹³ The need of a man to survive, is a little. It can be acquired easily without destruction of nature. But his demand is so much all-grabbing that, property of whole world is not enough to quench his thirst. The sense of friendly co-existence with the nature, which Raju holds in his life style, is no doubt a lesson of philosophical

thought influenced by Upanishad.

The character of Jugalprasad in this novel, is incomparable in another consideration. Like Raju, he also has seen the 'tooth and nail' of human greed. His findings are so deep. When conversing with Satyacharan, he informs; as long as the land will be allotted in cheap rate, the revenue will be nominal, the crowd of people will stay there. Thereafter, they will again prepare themselves for searching a new allotment in less revenue elsewhere. As the ruthless annihilation of forestry became a lucrative business to landlords themselves, so the greedy tenants became the partner of this unhealthy mischief. The very existence of the forest, is burning with the joint fire of greed of these two classes. This is his attitude to worldliness. But his beauty-loving nature, which is actual beauty of his character, attracts endless respect of readers. Satyacharan says; "The man has no personal ownership of land here, yet he is spending own money and time on this vast forest only to beautify it. What a strange man he is!"¹⁴ Jugalprasad has a firm belief, so his endeavor has not stopped by any obstruction. He used to plant only flower plants, which grow up without caring and which will convert this forest into Eden Garden by beauty, colour and fragrance. What did he want to achieve in exchange of spending own money and toil, especially in this need-driven days? the beauty, the beauty of full bloom indigenous and foreign creepers. There is an anxiety about this forest of being destroyed later on, but he didn't lose faith, and promised to Satyacharan with a new hope, that he will plant on Mahalikhharup hill, as because a forest on a hill has less chance to be destroyed. In the passage of time Satyacharan also became his companion. After having informed about Satyacharan's departure from there forever, he is not despaired at all, on contrary he says; "You will not be with me, I shall do this job myself alone."¹⁵ If there is a face of now-a-day's slogan, 'plant tree, save life', the face of Jugalprasad must be advertised.

An important point of forest preservation is to preserve its wildlife. The environment-thinkers worldwide, have told this repeatedly in recent past and now also. The author pointed out this context in the novel, when he mentioned about helplessness of birds losing their nests in SaraswatiKundi. In a context of wild buffalos of the reserve forest of DholbajyaDwarbhanga Maharaj, he told a story of Tanrbaro, a deity of wild buffalos, who saves them from extinction. The aboriginals of forest, believe that, while Tanrbaro saves buffalos, none can harm to them. In an ancient country, like India, where a work is hard to accomplish by extensive environment propaganda, can easily be done by fear of God. The Santal king Dobru Panna said to Satyacharan; "Tanrbaro is a caring deity, except him the hunters will extinct buffalos for horn and skin."¹⁶ By mentioning this story of Tanrbaro and coming of an evil power in disguise of a dog, Bibhutibhushan depicted a real story of different beliefs of aboriginals. Although these are superstitions no doubt, but it is a practical picture of those who live in lonely wild environment. As an impartial observer, Bibhutibhushan presented a faithful depiction to the readers.

In the environmental thinking of modern time much importance is being bestowed upon fulfillment of interests of aboriginals. When neither in India nor in international level, even a little spark about environment-consciousness is noticed, at that time, while writing Aranyak, Bibhutibhushan did not forget this point. This proves, he was much advanced to his contemporary times. When we make a classification of the characters of Aranyak, we find three types of people who come and go out occasionally or permanently reside in the forest. In the first type, there are Dhaotal Sahoo, Raju Panre, Ganori Tewari, GonuMahato, Jugalprasad, Vanumatietc who stay there for long, and so become inseparable entity of forest. Except them, as if, the glory of forest becomes pulverized. The people belonging to second type, are those who came from elsewhere but became habitat by living in the forest, such as; Kunti, Manchi, MotuknathPanre, Nandalal Ojha, Rasbihari Sing Rajput etc. The last, in third type is those, who are permanently settled nowhere, seasonal land laborurer, who roam all over the country round the year, i.e., migratory laborurer. There seems to be, no clear and lasting reciprocal connection among these three types of people, but Bibhutibhushan had painted a total colourful picture of forest life along with all of them. Except them all, the novel would not achieve epical pervasion. He depicted life leading and thoughts of many a single man who are separate with each other, and there after by a skillful amalgamation, he narrated a clear picture of an indivisible

total soul of forest for introducing to city civilization.

Amidst so much characters, Dobru Panna and his lineage, is central character of forest indeed. The sub- plot of Dobru Panna draws face to face comparison to the modern proud civilization with ancient time-born culture of aboriginals. A critic, Saroj Bandyopadhyay wrote; "Dobru Panna is the soul of the forest, as well as the novel Aranyak. Vanumati is the beauty of forestland. Dobru panna is the symbol of dignity. Without any hesitation, the writer depicts the beauty of dignity and dignity of beauty both. The writer does not forget that, in spite of being routed by defeat, he is a king and hero of a past war. Dobru Panna joined war against company (the East India Company) in his youth. His ancestors fought against Mughal Army. He belongs to the heredity of Surya. Once upon a time, this hill-forest and whole world was under the rule of his ancestors. The writer offered royal honour to Dobru Panna."¹⁷ Not only the author himself, but the city civilization also stand face to face with the non-Aryan deprived Santal aboriginals, who are the main origin of Indian civilization. The way of civilization started from forest- living, but those very forest dwellers are down-trodden, deprived and wretched now. Pointing this sheer crisis of modern civilization, Bibhutibhushan actually begged pardon for the injustice and greed of so-called civilization done upon them. The proud civilized society, kept parted these forest dwellers from rest of India, till now. The civilized India not tried to amalgamate them to a greater society, have done nothing to abridge. The forest is being used as a source of wealth only. The actual owners of forest for dwelling there, are being deprived ruthlessly. Before Aranyak, the injustice to aboriginals was not described so artistically and clearly in Bengali, Indian novels as well. Moreover, no novelist raised the point of preservation and human rights of forest dweller aboriginals before.

But all these went in vain. This beautiful vast forestry is annihilated by Satyacharan himself, because to perform this very job, he was appointed. We find in the introductory part of the novel; "this unrestrained forest of sweet dalliance was destroyed by myself. I know, the Deity of forest will not forgive me. I heard that, confession of sin done by oneself, lighten the weight of one's fault."¹⁸ The novel, Aranyak, is in totality, as if a confession of guilty-consciousness of Satyacharan for annihilation of a forest.

Conclusion

As per our aim if the researcher look into the basic points of eco-criticism or ethics of environment are depended upon the conditions noted below. They are;

1. Repentance for lost nature and environment.
2. Building every possible awareness for afforestation and preservation.
3. Keeping safe overall interest of all wild animals including man.
4. To ensure the sacramental value of peace of soul derived from forest.

In prior discussion, it has been shown that, the novel, Aranyak has fulfilled all these conditions rightly. It is true that, literature never depends upon fulfillment of any type of prefixed condition imposed on it. But if we theoretically honour these standards of appreciation of a literature, in that case also, it can be surely said that, the novel Aranyak is a masterpiece of nature consciousness.

A well-propagated complaint about Bibhutibhushan is that, he is not time-conscious, not connected with contemporary human life. The only cause of this charge is, he allowed greater space for nature than human, in his writings. Commonly a novel deal with human life and character, whereas we see in his novels, the beauty of mysterious nature and its presence is more dominant than human influence and individuality. At the specific point of time when Bibhutibhushan was writing his novels, his colleague writers were busy to describe the human activity and crisis of human soul, arising from modern civilization. That is why, in that time it seemed; he was an escapist. But a deep scanning on his literature reveals that, he was not an escapist at all. On contrary, he was a man of sharp consciousness having a greater perspective of human life. He could recognize the eternal crisis of human society than contemporary problems.

If we look into the perspective of human life of India, we can find, in 1927 a forest law was passed, which said; "This act stipulates that no forest land or any portion of thereof may be used non-forest purpose. It provides for the constitution of an advisory committee to advise the Government on cutting

the trees.”¹⁹ At the very point of time when this act passed, Bibhutibhushan was living in the forest of Vagalpur, from where he gathered experience to write Aranyak, so it can be easily said that, his environment conscious novel was not at all a fictitious one, but he was well aligned with the perspective of nature preservation in India. He not only rightly pointed out the environmental problem in advance to his contemporary time, but also tried to make mankind aware by his literature, to be serious about the crisis, which have drawn whole world, in front of a total demise.

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