

# Nature-Human, Foster in Reciprocation: A Look into *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay

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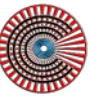
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## Abstract

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*As our mode of living has changed so has our erudite disposition. Common human regards have shifted its stare from self-gratifying hypothesis to the restoration of natural bliss, that had left us long since. Social, cultural, historical and literary issues are now not much worrying the intellectuals, rather, they feel it urgent to ruminate over the protection of ecosphere and the habitat, highlighting the shameful abuse on nature and natural habitats, the extinction of natural resources, and the consequent end of the human species on the planet in the last few decades. But in spite of the continual efforts of these inventive enterprises, it has become evident that true concern for nature can't be possible to attain through forceful regards that is to be promoted through journals, web talks, lecture series, campaigns or to a far extent by forceful laws and punishments. Instead what the human beings needs all the more is a deep understanding of Nature, a natural and intrinsic interchange of love, an involvement with nature's self to be a part of nature's communicative ecosystem. And hence ecosophy is initiated which the ecocritics hope will enable human beings to build a close bonding with nature by present their own individual and distinctive perception and understanding about nature and by develop a deep innate wisdom about our relational environment. This paper is about to explore the ecological philosophy in Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Pather Panchali*, a novel which reflects how nature and human beings tie in with a single inseparable bond of love and each of us respond in our own unique way to nature's beacon relying our own listening or perception of Nature.*

**Keywords:** nature, human, ecosophy, correspondence



### **Introduction:**

The world of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay is invariably green as nature rests in the heart of most of his works. Apart from indulging in the function of the narrative, Bibhutibhushan always keeps hefty space for human nature correspondence in the deepest level in his novels. *Pather panchali– Song of the Road* was published originally in Bengali in 1929 but its worldwide adoration initiated its translation into several other languages including English. Nature in the novel, unlike serving as a mere backdrop, has congruently been enfolded within the novel and in the course of its exploration we can sense the presence of an inter connective wave that surges through human, nature and the society (which are generally taken as three different domains) promoting all them to live in peaceful concurrence with each other.

### **Exploring Nature-Human Correspondence:**

Bibhutibhushan's nature is unique in the sense that it is not set in a strikingly alluring natural landscape, common in almost all green narratives. Rather his chronicle floats us to the world of the pristine beauty of the unvarnished rural Bengal - imaginary Nischindipur, the land of eternal peace where our impression of the rural life got radically transformed. The darkness, poverty, superstitions, were no more there to command over the genial spirit of the villagers but the humble folks peacefully lived their unadorned tenor of life in "the cool sequester'd vale of life". (Raghunathan, 109)

The concept of ecosophy has originated not only to bolster eco criticism as a movement to reinforce human concern for ecosphere, a common vogue in the present cosmopolitan crisis , but to make every organism feel the presence of an inseparable bond that has been ingrained behind our eyes among all the natural elements since our birth in this biosphere. This inbred bond is a bond of interdependence that triggers the impression that the life and living of one element on this planet is incomplete and inconsequential without other's presence.

Etymologically the word 'ecosophy' originates from the two Greek words—'oikos' or 'household' and 'sophia' or 'wisdom'. As with 'ecology', the meaning of 'eco-' (oikos) refers to something larger than a mere household in domestic life, in ecosophical perspective also 'oikos' is taken as the Earth as a whole, as we inhabit it. "Thus ecosophy is a philosophical worldview or a system inspired by our living conditions in the ecosphere." (Suwantana 44). The concept and interpretation of ecosophy formally took its shape at the hands of two illustrious scholars Arne



Naess and Felix Guattari. These two thinkers though, had splitted overtures, often coincide in their chief common concern about ecological.

Naess's turn into ecosophy leads the paradigm to be anchored in a kind of conceptual philosophical framework.

By an ecosophy, I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of sofia (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements, and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc. but also value priorities. (Naess 8)

In 1973 Naess in his book "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement." introduced the concept of "Deep ecology" when he intended to break traditional dualism between human and nature that focused on preservation of nature just for its utility. Naess's 'Deep Ecology' enhances the necessity of "self realization" for the adequate understanding of human beings in relation to nature. The term is comprehensive as by "self" he doesn't want to mean an individual self. Instead he wishes for a universal self – a self which will be all possessing and will encompass a relational capability to identify with every single organism of nature. This very "self" can be procured only after diminishing of the self centred ego and after reaching a realization that all organisms in this biosphere are intertwined in an integral bond that initiates interconnection among all the natural beings. Each contributes in other's ecological share thus creating a harmony. Thus Self-realization is a process of expansion to a greater self, to say more precisely in Naess's word "The total field image" which "dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact things-in-milieu concept-except when taking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication." (Naess 95)

To achieve self-realization, Naess believed that one has to pass through few stages like

"T0-self-realisation

T1-ego-realisation

T2-self-realisation (with lower case s)



T3-Self-realisation (with capital S).” (Naess 84-85)

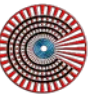
Self realization is reaching to T3 phase and it is feasible only by joyful inclination toward nature, no moral preaching or enforcement will be of no value in its process.

Self realization plays a vital role in the differentiation of ‘Shallow’ and ‘Deep’ ecology. In ‘Shallow ecology’ self realization is not mandatory as it is only concerned with common environmental issues— mostly on the surface level— like pollution, global warming, extinction of natural habitats whereas in ‘Deep’ ecology, self-realization is extremely essential as it promotes a symbiotic relationship of interdependence between nature and beings in the process of their becoming. Thus Deep ecology entails a commitment to respecting the inherent worth of diversity in the nature regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs.

Naess writes in “Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements” that Deep ecology is achieved through the “rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total-field image.” This rejection is feasible by recognising “organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relationships” in which “an intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things.”(Naess)

But it may seem hypothetical that human beings will be able enough always to provide an assurance to all about comfortable coexistence as each has their different needs and approaches. But what we can do, according to Naess, is to identify with their selves and this identification, Naess says, “elicits intense empathy” which is a pre-requisite for reciprocal co-existence. (Naess 227)

*Pather Panchali* beholds the ecological philosophy in a way which is prone to be excluded by the readers in surface reading of the text. Instead of a utopian natural landscape, Bibhutibhusan’s novel probes into rural Bengal where familiar views are delineated with unfamiliar gazes. The unvarnished sound of title of the novel appears to be beguiling for the readers when they are yet to discover its deep connotations that the songs or ardour of human life depends upon the call of the path or nature which takes the immured mankind away from the boundary of four walls in quest for what is unseen and unknown. Path, a totem of nature, here seems to have served as a life force driving the characters from confines to terrain where they can enjoy ultimate truce in the lap of Nature. The characters in *Pather Panchali* live in an intrinsic interdependence with nature and its elements. There were no social enforcements or as such moral schooling but still an intense urge



was there to lead them to be united with nature spontaneously. Harihar, the head of the family, spends his life quite contentedly in his thatched house never complaining about his meagre earning with his dreams unfulfilled. He never grumbles for the indigence or distress that he suffers but lives peacefully weaving his dream to be a feted writer one day. Indir Thakrun, Harihar's senior aunt lives in the family almost as an outcast. Despite the ignominy and humiliation of her life, the old lady strives to attain a little peace in her life and no one can provide her that except nature. Though Sarbojaya's continuous grudges often led her to desert the house, the old lady couldn't stay back long and return back to the old veranda of her broken hut from where she could see "the leaves of the coconut tree quivering in the moonlight and dozed off happily" with the children by her side. (Bandopadhyay 36). Sarbojaya, mistress of the family appears to be harsh and spiteful in her attitude and bearing. But no one in the family handled poverty as vigorously as she did in her husband's absence. When family faced a big set back in want of money, she steered it alone by means of nature. Vegetables, mushrooms, plums that are found in plenty in rural Bengal came to her aid to satiate the hunger of her starving children. But to whom nature appealed most intensely are the siblings— Durga and Apu. Nature didn't help them, provide them but chose to live within them. Their wild little feet could not stay home long and they thrived by running through the red roads, climbing to the mango trees, and diving in the village pond. To Durga, nature was foster - mother. As a daughter craves her mother intuitively, Duraga, as Bandopadhyay writes,

... had known them all her life so naturally and intimately that they had become a part of her ...she longed to be able to gather them all in her arms and hold them close forever (Bandopadhyay 228) .

Nature which serves as mother's lap to Durga, a kind of protection from the hurdles of life, to Apu Nature acts as inspirer by sparking up the artist within him and accelerating his wish to encompass the world into his tiny heart. Looking at the big banyan tree from the window, Apu's itinerant soul ventures to soar high in the sky taking off the shackles of mundane life looking forward the horizon. Even his habit of introspection which feeds his artist self later in the life, grows as he spends more time with Nature alone. His detachment from crowd boosts up fantasy which takes him along the world of imagination where he identifies with his favourite kings, heroes and warriors.



The more the characters fervidly cling to the nature, nature's urge to respond to their feelings become proliferated. The joys of Apu and Durga are best expressed in the shower of the rains, in the autumnal dew or in the strong scent of the *chatim* flowers. On the other hand serene Nature reacts violently when was not doing well. Durga was tossing in fever and the torrential rain kept on hitting Nischindipur with heavy thunderbolt. It seems that nature roars its fury in dissent against the maltreatment of the little girl who is left unattended and neglected as a girl child. Durga remains in the heart of nature while her family was too hurry to obliterate her memory and decided to shift to city.

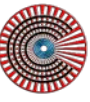
Apu and Durga didn't have the access of any formal education. Though Apu was sent to village Pathsala, Durga was left out at home, as female education was still a matter of luxury in a rural family. Yet these young siblings eventually proved themselves as highly intuitive, sensitive and receptive to the core and this was made possible for their reliance on natural education which taught them to feel for each and every entity around them. Durga's big eyes were filled with tears when her old aunt left the house sulkily never to return again. The little girl became depressed at the thought of marriage as she knew that marriage will bring segregation from nature and its protective embracement.

...Yet now she was beginning to learn that love could hurt. Something seemed to be telling her that she was going to lose them, and she longed to be able to gather them all in her arms and hold them close forever. How could she live without them?" (Bandopadhyay 228)

Apu's little heart swelled in pain when he listened to the episode from Mahabharata where the wheels of Karna's chariot got stuck in the soil and he was defeating the battle. Thus these two kids could identify with each and every organisms and thereby overcoming the illusory boundaries, there creates an inter-related whole where the intrinsic value of each specific entity is honoured.

While Naess calls for an expansion of the self via self - identification or "Self-realisation", Felix Guattari, celebrates autopoietic processes that initiates dissolution of the self via disjunction ("becoming-other")." (Tinnell 36). 'Guattari's concern,' writes Genosko, 'is not self-realization through widening of a pre-given self, but processes of singularization that resist the frames of reference imposed by an identity' (Genosko, 2009: 87)

Guattari's conceptual framework of ecosophy is depended on the practical creativity rather than theoretical approach. Unlike the earlier ecocritics who regarded that eco criticism is an



idealistic utopian philosophy that is committed to preserve nature's purity and harmony in balance, Guattari's take on is more radical and practical. For Guattari we live on this planet depending on techno scientific mutations and union with nature is not possible with the detachment from technologies or complexities of modern life. Thus it is essential to rethink the philosophy in our contemporary moment in the midst of convergence of nature and culture, globalisation and rapid techno scientific evolution etc. Guattari postulates the necessity of reconfiguration of subjectivity and remaking of academic or social practices altogether. In addition to green buildings, hybrid car, it is necessary to rebuild selfhood and develop some practices which will be conducive to the consumption of ecological concern.

we need to rethink traditional notions of selfhood and, at the same time, invent practices designed to facilitate an ontology consummate to contemporary ecological concerns, as well as the emergent relational modes proliferating with the expansion of global capitalism and digital media." (Tinnell 38)

As environmental ecology is complementary to social cultural and mental ecologies Guattari believes that crisis in one of them which will evidently affect others. For Guattari, 'The ecological crisis can be traced to a more general crisis of the social, political and existential', which 'involve[s] changes in production, ways of living and axes of value' (Guattari, 1995: 119/134). (Tinnell 38)

Thus according to Guattari, Ecosophy is an approach to a better living, to cultivate our own subjectivities by acknowledging them as interdependently ingrained within social and material ecologies. Our subjectivity is a product, or an expression of the interconnected socio political, economic, domestic, and technological environments we exist within.

Bibhutibhusan in *Pather Panchali* apart from making room for human-nature correspondence directs us to the changes in nature coming with the paces of time that made a lasting impact on society and its people. The readers feel the presence of an interconnected wave that flows smoothly through nature, society and people's mentality. The village Nischindipur, which was the icon of pristine rural beauty, eventually became the site of the injustice in pre-independent India. The lands which were meant to produce foods were forced for indigo production by the Indigo sahibs and that eventually marred the land damaging its fertility. This oppression reached its height when British sahibs unleashed brutal tortures upon the innocuous farmers who denied producing



indigo on their land which they loved more than their life. Thus ecological crisis is becoming interlinked with social crisis and more precisely human crisis affecting one another equitably.

Industrial Revolution and the techno scientific mutation which was embarking in colonial Bengal, hit Nischindipur unmistakably. Railway comes to the village threshold filling lives with bliss, ardour and felicity. Scraping the threat of ecological disruption of balance, it brings forth wide range of curiosity, zest and fervour in Apu and Durga. They secretly ran away one day to see Railway that was still far away from their village without letting her mother known. Apu and Durga dreamt of meeting railway - its whistles, engine, tract. It was more than a carriage to them, as it involved their fantasy, love and passion to explore the exotic world beyond the limit of their eyes. On the other hand railway imported a ray of hope in the Harihar family. The impoverished family wished for a better future in Benaras leaving this village and its strapped life which besieged them before and that was made possible only for railway. Though Apu utterly missed nature and the invisible presence of his sister amidst the nature, he had to take off in search of uncharted horizon that the siblings dreamt of.

...his memory took him back to a stormy monsoon night , to a dark room in an old house and the ceaseless noise of the train , when the daughter of a poor village family spoke to him from her bed of sickness and said, 'Opu, when I get better will you take me to see a train? (Bandopadhyay 358)

### **Conclusion:**

The novel clarifies the fact that we very often skid. Apart from the dependence on material stuffs that Nature provides us for living, each and every organisms return to Nature as the connotation of living i.e. peace, love, empathy, imagination, fervour, sensitivity is only formed when Nature and human unite into one.

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**Trisita Ganguly** (MA in English) presently serves as a State Aided College Teacher and her area of interest covers Popular Culture, Feminism and Ecocriticism.