

**A HISTORICAL APPROACH TOWARDS THE ECOLOGY OF FOREST AND
THE FOREST DWELLERS OF PALAMAU PURNEA AND MANIMAHESH:
THE THREE BENGALI NOVELS (1880 TO 1969)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY FOR THE
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PHD ABSTRACT

Choosing a particular item from the past and recreating it as a variant is in part, an act of historical significance. The past is viewed from the present, wherever the present may be located, and that which is selected from the past goes into constructing a tradition or constructing a history. A tradition is never handed down intact from generation to generation, however appealing this idea may seem. Innovation is what gives it vitality. The items selected from the past are often so chosen as to legitimise the values and codes of the present. In selecting and recasting cultural items we highlight some and marginalise others. The act of selection becomes a dialogue with the past. The point in time at which the selection is being made gives a different value to the selection as a cultural symbol, as an idiom, as an icon. This has happened throughout our cultural history, although our awareness of this process is perhaps more apparent now. Where the narrative is culturally central to our own present today, we have also to see it as a part of the intervention of the colonial period and recognise the disjuncture this may produce. The concept of culture in relation to the early past, implies an intersecting of disciplines of which history, it seems to me is foundational. This involves the original text and its historical contexts, as also frequently the Orientalist reading of it and equally frequently, the internalising of this reading by commentators of the last century or two. And more recently, the questioning of this reading. Inevitably there is a contextualising of the Orientalist re-presentation and European perspectives brought to bear on the reading. A single item can therefore have multiple identities which change at historical moments. Understanding a cultural item historically requires some comprehension of the world-view which it represented. Each version has some relation with those which preceded it: a relation ranging from endorsement to contestation of earlier versions. The main motive of this

research paper is to narrate chosen literary texts which puts light on the environment, its preservation and decay, and link it with history. As literature is an imaginary examination of a particular society and environment, history preserves those because with passing time texts become archives which helps in preserving writings and help in further readings and researches.

The genre of my work centres round eco-criticism and so by taking into account eco-critical 'Bengali novels' it has been easier for me to address this research from a historical perspective, which is a very new approach towards literary history writing. I have divided my research into the following chapters. In the first chapter, *The Forest Dwellers: Ecocriticism And Literary Texts As History*, deals with, what Ecocriticism is and how history forms the foundation for evaluating any kind of interdisciplinary text, as, history itself can bridge the gap between different genres of writing. Literary texts here, does not only deal with romantic nature writing but also deals with the struggles of the people who are the most important part of nature. In the second chapter, *A Historical Approach Towards Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay's Eco-Critical Travelogue "Palamau", in Jharkhand (1880-1883)*, deals with, an analysis of this wonderful Travelogue which is more of a Novel and less of a Travelogue by citing the scenario of then Jharkhand to show how the ecological balance was maintained in the dense forest of Palamau by the forest dwellers, despite challenging conditions and threats imposed by the British government. I have mentioned about all the measures taken by the Indian government to preserve the forests and its dwellers. In the third chapter, *Man And Nature: A Portrayal Of Environmental Consciousness In Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's Eco-Critical Novel "Aranayak" (1937-1939)*, I have tried to focus on Purnea, in Bihar, its forest, the forest dwellers and on the man and nature relationship. My main aim here, is to establish how the novelist being the

main protagonist himself could see through the lives of the forest dwellers and could give voice to the people who were unheard before. I showed how Satyacharan, the author, wanted to preserve the forest land of Purnea by not letting the British to continue with deforestation and preserve the environment for the survival of its people. Though he was a failure, still his deep love towards nature and the people have made him a true environmentalist. Along with this I have also tried to see how in the post-independence era the Bihar government took necessary measures to preserve the forest lands and rights of the forest dwellers. In the fourth chapter, named, Situating Historically: The Sahitya Akademi Award Winning Eco-Critical Travelogue “Manimahesh” By Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay (1969), I have tried to focus on the travel writing and analyse it historically by taking into account the Gaddis of Bharmaur-Manimahesh, who are a very interesting bunch of tribesmen with totally different characteristics from the tribal people we come across, and I have showed how their rights are being protected and what the government is doing for the betterment of them. Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay, is the first among other novelists who has taken into account the not-so-known tribal community of the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh There has not been any historical research on an Eco-critical Travelogue like Manimahesh and my work would be the first of its kind. By linking this eco-critical text with history and by showing the writer’s love for the environment it has become easier to tag the travelogue as an eco-conscious writing where the writer has kept his eyes on every minute detail of the land, its people and the environment.