

**AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF BADAL SIRCAR,
DEREK WALCOTT AND WOLE SOYINKA'S DRAMA**

Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Arts

By

Atreya Banerjee

Faculty of Arts

Jadavpur University

West Bengal

2019

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Thesis entitled *An Ecocritical Reading of Badal Sircar, Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka's Drama* submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of Professor Samantak Das and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

.....
Countersigned by the supervisor

Dated:

.....
Candidate

Dated:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Samantak Das.

Professor Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta. Professor Ananda Lal. Dr. Epsita Halder. Ms. Malini Mukherjee.

Professor Suchorita Chattopadhyay. Professor Sucheta Bhattacharya. Professor Kunal Chattopadhyay. Professor Kavita Panjabi. Dr. Sayantan Dasgupta. Dr. Sujit Kumar Mandal. Dr. Debashree Dattaray. Dr. Parthasarathi Bhaumik.

The Doctoral Research Committee, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University.

Professor Krishna Sen. Professor Niladri R. Chatterjee. Professor Biswajit Ghosh. Professor Soma Sur. Professor Dhrubajyoti Chattopadhyay. Dr. Madhumita Roy.

Central Library, Jadavpur University. Departmental Library, Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University. National Library, Kolkata.

PhD Cell, Jadavpur University. The Research Section, Jadavpur University. The non-teaching staff, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University.

Anashua Banerji. Gourab Chatterjee. Semonti Neogi. Binayak Bhattacharya. Koel Mitra. Shradhanjali Tamang. Madhuchhanda Ray Choudhury. Anchita Ghatak. Raja Menon. Manodip Raychaudhuri. Sreetanwi Chakraborty. Amrita Bhattacharyya. Sohini Sengupta. Rohit Dutta Roy. Imren Yelmiş. Neha Gupta. Sudeshna Dutta. Pratyay Banerjee. Urmi Sengupta. P. Soujanya.

Abhoy. Aryaa. Shatakshi. Shubharthi. Kriti. Neha. Sonal. Piyush. Atish. Abhra. Ayan. Rituparno. Nilankur. Manashi. Umair. Rahul.

My family: Mr. Pradipta Banerjee. Mrs. Manisha Banerjee. Dr. Arhana Banerjee. (Lt.) Mr. Rabindranath Bhattacharyya. Mrs. Ranja Bhattacharyya. (Lt.) Ms. Bidisha Bhattacharyya. Dr. Chandrachur Bhattacharyya. Dr. Nisha Bhattacharyya. Shaunak Bhattacharyya.

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INTRODUCTION

For the researcher of this thesis, deciding on his final doctoral research topic was born out of his many experiences and moments of inspiration, as a comparative literature student of Jadavpur University since 2007. In his doctoral research, he was sure that he wanted to undertake a comparative study of a number of contemporary literary figures – one of whom had to be from his own knowledge-system (Bengali), as a self-imposed responsibility. When it came to the literary genre, the researcher was clear that he wanted to study either drama or short stories. He decided on the literary figures and then on the genre of drama, after some fruitful discussions with his doctoral thesis supervisor (Professor Das). Eventually, two of the literary figures chosen for the study turned out to be ones the researcher was already interested in and well-acquainted with – right from his post graduate student days in his university department. Ecocriticism is the field of study and the theory through which the play-texts by these figures are examined in this thesis. Ecocriticism as a distinct paper was not taught at that time in the researcher's university department. He got to know more about it from the numerous enriching dialogues with some of the then departmental faculty members (including his MPhil and present doctoral supervisors). These stalwart academicians were kind enough to share with him their own thoughts and writings about the field. This way, the researcher's interest in ecocriticism increased more and more. He also began feeling proud of himself and his research, for two major reasons. Firstly, he would be studying one of the literary figures from his own geo-cultural and linguistic space, who composed his play-texts in the researcher's native tongue (Bengali/Bangla): Badal (Sudhindra) Sircar (1925 - 2011).

It would also be delightful for the researcher to study Sircar with two other contemporary international literary figures. The second reason would be that researching on ecocriticism, and evaluating texts/authors ecocritically are extremely necessary in the contemporary times. In the field of literary studies, the researcher had observed how before ecocriticism, various well-known theories have come up and established themselves because there was a need to do so, and that the time and situation demanded it. Over the decades, caste, class, race and gender became various criteria of critical analysis, in these theories and angles of looking at texts/authors. The researcher also realized that in the present century, more and more ecocritical work needs to be undertaken, as today's times experience a worldwide hazard like never before – that of the gradual degradation and ruination of the natural environment and ecosystem. A doctoral thesis primarily aims at the contribution to knowledge. However, in his own small way, a literature researcher-turned-ecocritic would attempt to address the present grave situation constructively, spread awareness and look at the literary figures s/he is studying for possible solutions that the latter might have expressed in their works.

In the Indian space, the origins of modern conscious ecocritical studies and thought could be traced back to 1972, when the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at a United Nations conference in Sweden, talked about how people who are not in a healthy, harmonious and symbiotic relationship with nature are unhappy and insecure from within. She also pointed out the need for human beings to invoke the ancient Indian ecological wisdom (discussed later in this chapter) to reinstate the give-and-take balance between nature and themselves. Well-known modern and contemporary Indian literary figures who display eco-consciousness in their texts include Rabindranath Tagore (1861-

1941; discussed later in this chapter in more detail), Raja Rao (1908-2006), R. K. Narayan (1906-2001), Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-1988), Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004), Mahasweta Devi (1826-2016), Ruskin Bond (b. 1934) and Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956). Rao's novel *Kanthapura* (1938) shows natural elements like rivers impacting the lives of the human community of a South Indian village. Narayan's collection of short stories, *Malgudi Days* (1943) turns the titular small town and its local environment into a character in itself, which shapes the lives of its residents. Bhattacharya brings in the evils of the Bengal Famine of 1943 in his novel, *So Many Hungers!* (1947), while Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) shows the adverse effects of industrialization on a village, resulting in the plight of farmers, natural calamities and hunger. Mahasweta's novel *Aranyer Adhikar* ("The Right to the Forest"; 1977) is set during the colonial period of India in what became the modern-day Jharkhand. She explores the harmonious relationship between the natural forest environment and a certain indigenous community, which (along with the local environment) experiences various kinds of oppression from "outsiders" like powerful feudal landlords/British allies. One of Bond's well-known novels, *The Room on the Roof* (1956; his debut novel) explores the impact of the local environment on the orphaned protagonist at various stages of his life. The trees pose as assuring parent-like figures to him, making him think of happy memories. Seasons like the monsoon lift his mood, while the forest becomes a supportive presence for the apt expression of his love-life. Ghosh's well-known novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is set in the Sundarbans and talks about issues like a detailed observation of the local ecosystem within the mangrove forests, the impact of those unpredictable rough waters on human life, and the dynamics between the human

community and the local wildlife. His eco-consciousness also finds expression in a 2016 non-fiction book, titled: *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Rayson K. Alex in an important article¹ tells us that in India, concrete academic studies on ecocriticism began in its southern parts, with academician Nirmal Selvamony introducing a paper called “Tamil Poetics” at Madras Christian College, in 1980. In 1996, the paper came to be called “Ecoliterature”. In 2004, the mentioned college successfully hosted a couple of conferences on literature and the natural environment. In 2004-2005, OSLE: Organization for Studies in Literature and Environment India came into being, in Chennai and ASLE India in Puducherry (Pondicherry). The OSLE then began successfully conducting national and international conferences, seminars, workshops, study circles, with influential books like *Essays in Ecocriticism* (2007), *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations* (2014) and several volumes of *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism* (2008). Leading Indian scholars of ecocriticism in the contemporary times include Murali Sivaramakrishnan, Ujjwal Jana and Swarnalatha Rangarajan. Chhaya Datar and Vandana Shiva should also be mentioned, even though they concentrate and specialize more on ecofeminism, rather than the broader field of ecocriticism.

The intention of this thesis is to find out the various ways in which three contemporary literary figures from three different parts of the world, express their concerns/awareness about nature, the ecology and ecological disasters in a specific genre of their work (their play-texts), and in some bigger way unite in their thoughts. The literary figures chosen and focused on, are Badal Sircar from West Bengal, India; Derek Walcott (1930-2017) from St. Lucia, The Caribbean, along with Wole Soyinka

¹ Rayson K. Alex, “A Survey of the Phases of Indian Ecocriticism,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16, no. 4 (December 2014): 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2616>.

(Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka; b. 1934) from Nigeria, Africa. The backgrounds of these playwrights are similar in the sense that they are contemporary (the time-frame is Modern, Post-War), male, educated, from relatively privileged sections of their societies, and in essence, urban. By linking texts of these three figures, based on an ecological point of view, this exercise would be able to cut across the apparent spatial, linguistic and cultural differences between them, and bring them closer to one another, while observing similarities in the responses to various questions in their texts – questions that emerge from the theoretical framework of ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism (first coined in c.1978, by William Rueckert) is the shorter or more popular name for ecological literary criticism. Before ecocriticism was included in literary research, literary analyses were mainly concerned from the perspective of race, gender, class or caste. Ecocriticism came into being out of a late twentieth century consciousness, which is the ecological turbulence in our planet – a big threat to humanity. In order to know about ecocriticism first, one needs to understand what ecology is. Ecology (from ‘oikos’, meaning ‘house’ and ‘logia’ – ‘study of’, in Greek; coined in 1866 by Ernst Haeckel) is “a branch of science concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments... [and also] the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment.”² So, it is concerned with the relationship between living organisms in their natural environment, plus their relationship with that environment. Modern ecology gives significance to Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882)

² “Ecology,” Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed May 1, 2012, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecology>.

concept of adaptation³ (introduced in 1859). Efforts to make ecocriticism a full-fledged discipline began since the boom of environmentalism (late 1960s and 1970s) in the United States of America, and it began solidifying around the 1990s. Ecocriticism as a discipline and as a method brings together the sciences and the humanities, the physical and the spiritual, to analyze the environment, plus find out ways in which the contemporary environmental situation could be addressed and improved. It focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment – how the relationship between human beings and their physical environment⁴ is reflected in literature. It urges human beings to realize that they should change their own ways of life and thinking, and take necessary actions for the prevention of ecological degradation and promote protection of the environment, in the contemporary times.

This is because the identity of the “selves”⁵ of human beings is constructed/defined by their “roots” (familiar physical and cultural environment/s; ‘space’/‘place’ as a category). If this “root” fades away, their identities would become incomplete and eventually disintegrate. Ecocriticism endeavours to preserve this “root” and keep the personal identities of human beings intact. The word “root” here needs to be clarified first, before progressing further. This term is being used in this chapter, for academic convenience. It is, therefore, important to define it. Now in the present times:

³ “Genetics and the origin of species: An introduction,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, accessed May 1, 2012, <http://www.pnas.org/content/94/15/7691>. According to Theodosius Dobzhansky, adaptation is the evolutionary process through which a certain living being becomes better able to live/survive/reproduce in its immediate surroundings/habitats.

⁴ Within time and the development of the ecocriticism theories, the word ‘environment’ (both in terms of physical and the ‘reality’ – meaning the environment or the environmental universe created through human beings by the use of various human institutions like language etc.) began to be analyzed and critically looked upon in broader terms.

⁵ What is meant by “identity” here, is the way a human being views him/herself, and has an idea of, or wants to know how his/her society/culture views him/her.

the twenty-first century, the whole world has become a “global village”. The erstwhile White Western European colonized geographical spaces have already entered their postcolonial phases. In such a global reality, French scholars Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have made us realize that at this point, there could be no “pure”, “unadulterated” knowledge-system, anywhere in the world. So, a person really has no fixed, single so-called “root”. Every “root” has become rhizomatic – no beginning or end; multiple, multifarious, multidimensional, multilayered, and so on. In today’s globalized reality, if one is born in Mexico, spends ones teenage years in Japan, and ones later life in Jamaica, ones “root” would be the summation of the “knowledge” that one has picked-up/imbibed, or have been drawn towards/have found relatable with oneself. This knowledge would be in the form of human culture, various discourses/modes of thought, the local flora and fauna. Also, the knowledge would have been picked from such contemporary postcolonial, globalized knowledge-systems (here, Mexico, Japan and Jamaica), which are no longer “pure”, “pre-colonial” or “pre-globalization”.

Literary studies need to come together with other disciplines. It is also high time that one stopped sharply defining “arts” and the “science”s based on exclusion. As anthropogenic climate change and other ecological crises promise to affect our lived experiences more dramatically and unpredictably than ever before, the field of literary studies might become apparently irrelevant to the most urgent challenges that the human civilization would be facing. A new sense of historical imagination plus new critical and theoretical tools would be needed, when the whole world realizes an impending ecological doom, in unison. By this time, one should realize that the importance of the humanities lies in the questions of values and justice beneath the computed, scientific

figures/data (which indicate the past, present and possibly future environmental states of certain geographical space/s). Questions arise, such as the willingness to sacrifice, to a certain extent, one's own comforts and material well-being, to ensure a better world for posterity and the non-human co-residents on the planet. Or the concern of wealthier nations about poorer ones, to keep them safe from future climatic and economic disasters.

It is widely realized that ecocriticism trickled down from certain Romantic conceptions of nature, as seen in the Romantic period of European Literature (around 1800 to 1850), especially when it comes to conceiving "deep ecology" (coined by Arne Naess in 1973). The main principles of deep ecology (which will reflect a lot of Romantic ideals) will be listed down shortly, but first it is necessary to point out how Romanticism and ecocriticism could differ from one another. Two points could be observed. Firstly, ecocriticism has a socio-political orientation, whereas Romanticism has a philosophical one. Secondly, when it comes to the concept of "education", Romanticism would indicate the realization of the interconnections between nature, its creations (living and non-living) and human beings. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, would voice that education (an institutionalized one, which endorses an anthropocentric world-view) and saving/preserving nature are inversely proportional to each other. The more one gets 'educated' and runs after the capitalist, selfish, material world, the less one tends to care about the ecology and issues related to it.

Now, speaking of deep ecology, here are the main points (brought forth by Arne Naess and George Sessions), taken from Jelica Tošić's useful essay⁶:

1. The well-being and flourishing of non-human life on Earth have value in themselves, independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs would be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation either directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

⁶ Jelica Tošić, "Ecocriticism – Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment," *Working and Living Environmental Protection* 3, no. 2 (August 2006): 43-50, <http://facta.junis.ni.ac.rs/walep/walep2006/walep2006-06.pdf>.

Briefly speaking about the history of ecocriticism, its first wave tended to see nature and human beings as opposed to one another. It held that the proper response of environmental criticism should be to make an active endeavour to protect the natural environment from the depredations of human culture. It looked at how nature was represented in literature, identification of stereotypes (like Arcadia, Eden, savage wilderness) and absences of the natural world in a text. The second wave (in the 1990s) addressed itself to human as well as nonhuman organisms, to wilderness, urban and suburban settings, to all types of literary texts (not just ‘nature writing’). There was a focus on the ways in which human beings and the environment were interdependent/mutually constitutive.

It is important to mention here that in 1968, various thinkers from academia and the industry came together and formed the Club of Rome. Discussions on eco-political issues gave way to ones on limited resources of the planet. In 1972, came about a book⁷ on the “limits to growth” concept by the above team, which inferred that factors such as pollution, overpopulation and reduction of available natural resources lead to the collapse of the world’s economy and stop its growth. The team made the world realize that natural resources/fuels/energy sources for daily living were finite. The earth could not replenish its resources that are exploited by humans, so easily. In this time zone, it is to be remembered that the most important natural energy source was crude oil, leaving coal behind. The team considered their text as a warning and not necessarily a prediction.

⁷ Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers and Dennis Meadows, *The Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* (London: Earthscan, 2006).

In ecocriticism, ecology and ecological concepts are applied to the study of literature. While looking at a literary text, terms reserved previously for environmental protection could be applied – terms for instance, ‘literary hazard’⁸ or ‘language pollution’⁹. The concept of the word ‘nature’ is also problematized. Nature could be seen as representations/constructions by different cultures. Interestingly, these constructions are also the product of a brain and a physiology that have evolved in nature. Nature poses as an entity where one can look to find solutions to one’s problems – a repository of values. Since human culture has produced the crisis that we are in, the study of human cultural production may provide a guide to understand how to find a solution. A text could be seen both as a part of the environment and as an independent ecological system.

At this juncture of the chapter, it is necessary to talk about three concepts that an ecocritic would invariably come across and wonder about, throughout the course of his/her research. These concepts would always make their presence felt, while ecocritically analyzing a piece of literature – looking for answers in those texts of questions that stem from the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. They are “environmental” and “ecological citizenship”s, “care-ethics”/“the ethics of care” (which possibly attaches itself to ecological citizenship) and an overall “eco-literacy”. They would be talked about, one by one.

Environmental citizenship takes into account the fact that we, the human beings, are an important part of our environment. Our future is going to be affected by how we

⁸ Ibid. Lawrence Buell says this about English which has, for political and linguistic reasons, become superior to other languages, despite being unable to express nuanced culture-specific concepts in other cultures/languages.

⁹ Ibid. Dragan Veselinovic states this as the process of uncritical import of new lexical units or words and new syntagmatic/syntactic structures from other languages – notably English, and for equivalents in the host language getting pushed aside in favour of foreign words, for instance, during translation.

treat our ecosystem/s. Also, on behalf of our environment, we should be aware and take it upon ourselves, its responsibility. There should be a deep respect for our non-human organisms and communities. Environmental citizenship has been defined with respect to the relationship between the citizens and the State. There is a focus on contractual rights/entitlements within the public domain. There is a rights-based discourse to cover environmental rights. The State, here, defines the environmental rights (they feature in the respective national laws and the constitutions), to which the citizens give ready consent and have claim over. Now, from here emerges a correlative responsibility to respect the rights of others. The essential points of critiquing environmental citizenship would be that firstly, it presents a territorial notion of citizenship, and secondly, there is an unrealistic localized responsibility – after all, how could one think only of one’s own territory, cutting it off from the rest of the geographical spaces of the world? The “bigger picture”?

Environment citizenship more often than not will overlap with ecological citizenship. In order to understand ecological citizenship, one must be familiar with ecologism. Ecologism states that a sustainable and fulfilled existence should come from a radical shift in the relationship between human and non-human organisms, plus the way of human social and political life. The whole notion of citizenship, here, exists in a non-territorial political sphere – the space in which a redefined citizenship could be located – also known as the “ecological footprint”, which takes into account the environmental impact of human beings on ecological systems. This responsibility, unlike environmental citizenship, is non-contractual with the State or a certain territory. There are many aspects of ecological citizenship. The first one is about duty and responsibility of the citizens,

where their task involves ensuring that ecological footprints make a sustainable impact. This obligation is asymmetrical and non-reciprocal, unlike the rights and responsibilities existing under contemporary citizenship. The second is about virtues, especially that of justice. There should be just distribution of ecological space, and there should be an ecological justice for all (“all”, meaning those who lack voices in the policy-process: the rural-folk, the landless poor, the indigenous communities, and marginalized human and non-human living beings). Wealthy countries, which have larger ecological footprints are not to live irresponsibly on the planet. If necessary, they need to reduce their own ecological footprints, or bar the continuation of unsustainable production and consumption, also getting involved in awareness-campaigns and so on. The third aspect of ecological citizenship is about our everyday living and creating our ecological footprints. This private domain is a significant site of citizenship activity.

It could be observed and understood that care ethics or the ethics of care emerges from ecological citizenship. This term/concept has grown to claim an important position in the field of ecology and ecocriticism, today. With the guidance of Carol Gilligan care ethics as a thought began among feminists, who believed that females (girls, women) approach moral issues with a strong spirit of caring and empathy in interpersonal relationships¹⁰. It is based on/justified by lived experience (especially that of women)¹¹, with intimate relations, trust and commitment. Care ethics understands the world as populated with networks of relationships rather than comprising stand-alone individuals,

¹⁰ Gilligan found both men and women articulating the voice of care, at different degrees and times. However, she realized that there could not be any studies on the voice of care, without women. She argued that the perspective of care ethics was an alternative but equally legitimate form of moral reasoning, which is obscured by masculine liberal justice traditions that concentrate on autonomy and independence. She clarified that the distinction being made was based not on gender, but of theme.

¹¹ Often, care ethics is said to be theorizing the lived experience of mothering.

and is more concerned with tapping on qualities like empathy, co-feeling¹², sympathy, loyalty, compassion, discernment and love in intimate relationships, while believing less in abstract principles/rights. The moral agent, inherent in any individual, should balance care of the self with that of others. Care ethics emphasizes on care as a moral sentiment and response in specific relationships, and the virtues which come along with the latter. Caring would involve participating in the feelings of others by one, not with distanced observation/analysis/judgement, but with active engagement from within – an act of affective imagination. Particular relationships, especially within the family/community are important, so is the non-contractual interdependence of individuals. Altruism is encouraged, where one thinks about others, along with their feelings, vulnerabilities and needs, but not neglecting care for one's own self. According to Gilligan, there are certain levels and transition periods in the development of the ethics of care. Firstly, there is the journey from selfishness to responsibility. It involves the tussle between what one would do and what one should – within their association/connection to others. Secondly, there is goodness as self-sacrifice, which involves the lookout for others and their feelings plus the necessity of not inflicting harm. The third tier is the transformation of the quality of goodness to that of truth. Here, in addition to caring for others and one's own self, one should be honest and real with oneself. Fourthly, there is the emergence of “mature care” with the morality of non-violence. A moral equality needs to be achieved between the self and others. If that means that there needs to be a directive against hurting from an authority, so be it. Here, care would now become a universal obligation. Care ethics advocates recognize its appropriateness to intimate relations and they seek to extend that

¹² It is more than empathy. It goes beyond just understanding what others are experiencing, to actually feeling them. It involves the experience of the complexities of a certain individual's situation, plus a deep, intricate appreciation for the lives of others, which enriches one's own self-understanding.

feature to communities, institutions and other parts of the world – breaking territorial/political boundaries. Care ethics, as is seen, provides normative guidance but there is no prescription of specific actions. Knowledge could be gained through the human connection to others while trying to consider their perspectives in deciding morality and justice. If a spirit of interdependence is brought in leadership and communication, new possibilities and avenues of solving various complex issues would open up.

Physicist Fritjof Capra (b.1939) has come up with a very useful thought – that we should be ecologically ‘literate’. Hence, his (along with David W. Orr’s) concept of “eco-literacy” comes into the picture. When we say that we are ecologically literate, we are firstly, able to understand that the basic element that differentiates living beings and the dead is the process of metabolism or the “breath of life”. This is because both the living and the dead possess molecular structures, proteins and DNA. Now, to focus on what is alive and existing on the earth, we need to see a natural object (for instance, a deer, a human child, a mango or a forest) not as a whole in itself, but something essentially belonging to a “network” that nature has created, where there is a give-and-take process between various organisms (the common saying comes to mind, here, that the waste of one kind of species is the food/resource of another kind). Also, this network does not remain the same. It is subjected to change with the changes in time and circumstances. We need to see these mentioned objects of nature as belonging to a position in the aforementioned natural “web of life”, performing functions to contribute to the various natural processes. Using this enlightened perspective, we need to approach ecological problems and solve/sustain/restore the natural equilibrium. We need to live our lives,

keeping in mind the essential principles of ecology. “Relationships”, “context”, “patterns”, “flow”, “interconnectivity” form the keywords here.

When environmental philosophy began in the West, Eastern thought had not yet played a major role. It has been said that till the second half of the twentieth century, there has not been adequate scholarly attention paid to the East by the environmental philosophers of the West. Ecocriticism as a discipline might not have solidified and taken birth in India, but there has always been an eco-consciousness, an ecological awareness/sensitivity here in our part of the world. Lives of human beings have been intrinsic with nature. The teachings of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, which perceives nature as the form of God format Indian culture and traditions to lay much emphasis on the environment. As ecology was seen as an inherent part of spirituality, in India human beings were forbidden to exploit nature. Ancient India personified the land and earth as a mother¹³ who was a source of nourishment and plentitude for her children (the humans and the non-human organisms). The law of *Rita* ensured that there was integrity and a cordial relationship between human beings and the planet. The law balanced everything in the universe from the macrocosm to the microcosm. The violation of this law would seem to cause great imbalances in the ecological world. So in this context, land was believed to be a sacred living entity and not as a mere resource. However, with the changing times human beings became ruthless exploiters of the land. As mentioned earlier, Rabindranath Tagore is easily among the impactful literary figures who could be connected with literature in relation to ecology in the Indian space. Tagore seems to have

¹³ At this point, the concern is not about how the geographical space/the country falls into the whole patriarchal socio-cultural construction of the “mother” or the “divine goddess”, and how the latter takes away the former’s agency and thrusts its own discourse onto it – silencing/dominating the former’s voice.

demonstrated traces of ecocritical thought or a nascent form of eco-consciousness in his later works. He could be seen as a prefiguration of both the period of decolonization¹⁴ and the subsequent growth of serious ecological consciousness. In works like *Candalika* (1938) or *Raktakarabi* (1923) Tagore places nature and femininity side by side – a variation of the theme that was earlier explored in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (1st to 4th C BC). In the two works mentioned, Tagore explores the idea of the nurturing aspect of nature in a democratic setting. He attempts an ecological critique of the paradigms of authority, gendered relations, love and so on. Talking about *Abhijnanasakuntalam* in the essay 'Sakuntala'¹⁵, Tagore says that the forest retreat (setting) is about hospitality, companionate affection and nurturing universal love. The setting is not really outside society, as domestic rules are very much present. Sakuntala is not ignorant, even though she was inexperienced in external matters. However, deep inside she has implicit trust – the trusting simplicity of nature.

If the hermitage were to be kept at a distance, not only would the dramatic action suffer; Shakuntala herself would remain incomplete. Shakuntala... is linked in spirit to her surroundings.¹⁶

¹⁴ In one sentence it might be said to be the action of changing from colonial to independent status. To describe it very briefly, decolonization refers to the undoing of colonialism, the establishment of governance or authority through the creation of settlements by another country or jurisdiction. The term generally refers to the achievement of independence by the various Western colonies and protectorates in Asia and Africa following World War II (1939-1945). This conforms with the intellectual movement: post-colonialism. Decolonization could be achieved by attaining independence, integrating with the administering power or another state, or establishing a "free association" status.

¹⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, "Shakuntala," in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 237-251.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 240.

External nature ceases to remain so, as it is displayed through Sakuntala's being: "her gestures and movements make her appear one among the plants."¹⁷ She loves the trees and creepers of the forest like her siblings. During her visit to the King (who shoots an arrow of love towards her, just like in the case of the deer, the hunted), "every step is fraught with ties and with pangs of parting"¹⁸ between a human being and the forest. There is a pleasing, harmonious union between human beings and the trees, birds and beasts despite the fact that they retain their own shapes. In *Candalika*, the most important female character is called Prakriti (the word means 'nature' in Bangla). In a micro level, she is a fragment of nature itself. When she is told of the king's undivided attention towards her, that he chose her over others, she refuses to be seen as a victim. She stands up against the king's will to dominate or enslave her in any way. In *Raktakarabi*, Nandini (the female lead character) is expressed through natural processes (the character 'Adhyapak'/Academic tells her that she is gold, made not of dust but of light). Tagore possibly presents a critique of authority through the description of the king. As if authority by itself is unnatural. There is a sense of aridity in the depiction of the king. The king surrounds himself with darkness, with a net. He does not show himself. He is said to slay people indiscriminately: demonic and dangerous. In a section of the play, Nandini is startled to see a dead frog in the king's hand. The king says that he was learning the secret to survive for thousands of years from the frog, which survived inside a stone's hollow. He says that the frog does not know how to 'live', but only to 'survive'. He did not like it, so he shattered the stone. The scene makes one realize the kind of a destructive

¹⁷ Ibid, 242.

¹⁸ Ibid, 241.

psychology that human beings could possibly develop – out of loneliness and gradually alienating from nature and the creatures that co-exist with them.

Whenever ecocriticism in India in the contemporary times is talked about, one cannot forget an important figure greatly associated with it, and that gentleman is Verrier Elwin (1902 - 1964). An Oxford graduate and a self-taught anthropologist, Elwin came to India as a missionary but soon became so fascinated with Indian indigenous communities that he went on to live with them and carried out a descriptive ethnography of them, especially the Gond and the Baiga communities. He had a few observations. He saw how the communities worshipped different elemental forces of nature considering the latter as their parents, and drew their strengths from the latter. That made the community members rather sophisticated and cultured. He also realized that the shifting form of cultivation¹⁹ of the communities, especially the “bewar” of the Baigas, ensured eco-friendliness with the continuity of preservation of their values. Within the Baiga community, he discovered much freedom of women – unlike that among the city-folk. Orality, in the form of poems, myth and folklore is at the centre of their lives. They connect the past and the present to find coherence in their current reality²⁰. Elwin also argued that these indigenous communities need to be kept in isolation from the urban communities to preserve their cultures and ensure their blooming. Without permission, people from outside the former community should not be allowed in their domain. He also cites an example where a part of the Juang community members remember (their

¹⁹ Jasbir Singh and S S Dhillon, *Agricultural Geography* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2006), 335-336. In this form of cultivation, large tracts of forest land are cleared and poor quality soils of that same area are used up for agricultural processes. After two or three years, when the soil becomes unfit for growing crops, the indigenous people are compelled to move to another area and execute the same process once again. The land previously abandoned by the indigenous people has a possibility of becoming fertile once again, and the people might come back to it to grow crops on it, if that happens.

²⁰ Verrier Elwin, *The Baiga* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 305-306.

former Administrator) Mr. Macmillan, a white European man. However, another part of the community became scared of his skin colour and fled deep into the jungle.²¹

An ecocritical reading of a given text comes with a host of interesting questions that arise from certain ecologically-themed strands. Going by the suggestions that Laurence Buell has given for evaluating a text ecocritically, one needs to see if the non-human elements are an integral part of it with a significant presence, not just a prop – thereby representing the interconnectedness of all that has been created by nature. One needs to see in the text how far has human interest been given preference, and that whether human beings are accountable for their (both positive and negative) actions towards nature. Also, whether the environment is presented as a static or a dynamic process, in the text. Some of the questions that have been asked to the chosen texts are as follows: Whether the texts show us in any way that the individual identities of the characters are shaped up by their physical environment; then, the degree of their intimacy with nature and the social environment. Whether there is a possible placing of events or characters described in the texts, against the then historical scenario/movements; whether there are voices in the texts which alert the reader/audience about the ongoing ecological degradation of the environment, along with the consequent threat to the identities of the characters; whether there has been a call for doing something to preserve that space and identity, and a suggestion of possible ways of doing so. Then again, how far has the human community/ecosystem maintained a harmonious and balanced eco-human relationship? During this process of asking questions, the ecocritic has expected to see anthropocentric activities of the human community (transforming into patriarchal ones)

²¹ Verrier Elwin, "Notes on the Juang," *Man in India* 28, No. 1 and 2 (1948): 61.

against ecology (which begins to include marginalized communities and women). Also the traces of narrow and conservative patriarchal capitalist doctrines against ecological principles, and the capitalist transformation of the urban environment causing human suffering the most. The concept of ‘human garbage’²² has also been looked into in the chosen texts. The term refers to the human ‘waste’ produced by the lack of order in patriarchy and consumer capitalism, where the former is cast off by society after their values are extracted. Their potentials, marred. One cannot exclude class and gender factors from an ecocritical/ecological analysis. Even though the physical environment is fore-grounded in the study, class and gender still make their presence felt. Attempts have been made to find out in the texts, whether anthropocentrism (including patriarchy) was dismantled by the forces of nature, in some way. Whether going back to the pure and pristine values in nature rectified evil or some form of injustice, restored happiness. The discipline of ecocriticism is a newly emerging one. It has fluidity in the sense that the ecocritics still need to clearly define its scope and aims and work on stably concluded assumptions, set of principles or techniques. When it comes to India or Indian literature, much work is left to do, in this field. A large number of ecocritical reading of Indian texts, keeping India at the backdrop is much needed. So is the connection of Indian texts to other texts, from other parts of the world, from an ecological point of view. An ecocritical reading of a text would reveal aspects of that text/the concerned literary figure which were not found earlier, in previous ways of approaching it.

²² Michael Verderame, “The Shape of Ecocriticism to Come,” *New Directions in Ecocriticism*, Fall, 2010, https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/25241/verderame_michael_markup3.html.txt. This term comes from Maggie Kainulainen. The concept goes hand-in-hand with ‘urban wilderness’ – the disorientation of human life, decay/degradation of human values as a consequence of aggressive industrial activity, propelled by inexorable human greed.

Now we come back to Badal Sircar, Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka – the literary figures being studied in this thesis. In order to locate Sircar and contextualize him vis-à-vis the contemporary time frame, one must first go back and look at India of the 1920s. At this time a new theatre movement came into being, whose form and content moved away from proscenium theatre. A ‘progressive’ thought flowed which was leftist in spirit, and was resistant towards power-structures like imperialism, fascism and Nazism (Russia was looked up to, as a model for overthrowing a repressive and dictatorial government by the general mass). This new kind of theatre voiced the contemporary socio-political, religious and economic issues, using Western dramatic forms. There was a thematic shift from the erstwhile myth and superstitions to socio-political consciousness. Due to the British censorship and conflict of ideologies within this movement, it remained relatively sleepy in the 1930s. The IPTA (Indian People’s Theatre Association) came into being in the 1940s, influencing and nourishing the contemporary Indian theatrical fabric by highlighting issues of the marginalized minority of the grass-root level – the economically abused and socially trampled. Sircar’s influence was felt in the 1950s, and before him the path was paved by figures like Bijon Bhattacharya (1917-1978) and Utpal Dutt (1929-1993). In the 1960s along with Sircar being very active, Sombhu Mitra (1915-1997) and Manoranjan Bhattacharya (1889-1954) became his illustrious contemporaries. In a similar way, starting to locate and contextualize Soyinka within the purview of this thesis would involve remembering that one of the geographic spaces to be colonized was Africa. White Western European Colonization in Africa started in about the 1870s, and Nigeria in particular became officially independent not before 1960. Due to colonization, African countries like

Nigeria underwent a period of crisis. Before the advent of the colonizers, the indigenous communities all over the continent were embedded in their own culture and traditions. After they arrived in the African space things began to change rapidly, with the former gaining more and more control of every aspect of administration. We must also remember that in the 1930s there was a very powerful intellectual belief that made its presence felt: Négritude²³. The conceptual framework of Négritude called out to dark-skinned people of African origins all over the world, to embrace their heritage and realize the values of their native knowledge-systems – considering these various types of native knowledge/customs or languages as tools of resistance and collective-struggle against the dominating European discourse. In the second part of the twentieth century (especially in the 1950s), we find many African literary figures beginning to write about their community knowledge and customs, inspired from Négritude. This could be seen as an attempt to reinstate the values and ethos of the community teachings. Writing took the form of activism and spreading awareness. Often, we would find these literary artists/activists having exposure to the Western forms of education and texts, even if they grew up with their native community knowledge. This position gave these artists the necessary understanding of the complex conflict of the culturally different kinds of knowledge systems – the Western European ones and the African ones. Besides Soyinka's name as a distinguished figure here, we also find figures like Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), Gabriel Okara (b. 1921; both from Nigeria), Clémentine Nzuji (b. 1944),

²³ Négritude was initiated in Paris by scholars hailing from various French colonies: Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) from Martinique, Léon Damas (1912-1978) from The Guianas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) from Senegal. They looked at bringing dark-skinned African origin people all over the world together, through the search of a common "African-ness". They were also against the practice of aping the White Westerners in order to appear "educated". According to them, real freedom laid in the reaffirmation of the African identity and valuing it proudly.

Sony Lab'ou Tansi (1947-1995; both from Congo) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (b. 1938; from Kenya). In the case of Derek Walcott, the Caribbean is a complex space where multiple cultures/ethnic identities/religiosities and rituals/belief-systems of Africa (where, interestingly, Soyinka is from) and Asia (where Sircar is from) have met – with the hovering supervision of the British, French, Dutch and Spanish colonial empires. The contemporary Caribbean text becomes a preservation of memory and world-views. For the contemporary Caribbean artist, creation of his/her identity becomes the most important step. The history of the colonizers' past doings needs to be faced and accepted. Then, a fresh and independent Caribbean history, with an essentially Caribbean identity needs to be composed. When we speak of Walcott as such an artist and figure, we cannot forget Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant (1928-2011), Raphaël Confiant (1951; all the three from Martinique), Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980; from Cuba) and Jamaica Kincaid (b. 1949; from Antigua). Contemporary Caribbean literary figures like them see themselves as hermits, or in exile. In their texts, they talk about this world, the erstwhile colonial one and the new contemporary worlds opened up. While relating their own identities with the world around them, they express a simultaneous nostalgia and detachment, in their works. Their works in their form and content are derived from the West, yet there have been ruptures and reconstructions – bringing in newer imagination/figures/symbols/metaphors, with the parallel flow of the provincial and the universal.

Moving on to the main chapters of this thesis, each one has been dedicated to one chosen literary figure. On the basis of seniority, the first chapter focuses on Sircar and ecological concerns found in his play-texts. The second one ecocritically analyzes

Walcott, while the third one looks at Soyinka. The first chapter begins by observing how Sircar's Third Theatre method of performing plays (1970s onwards) is inherently environmental-friendly, and that traces of eco-sensitivity could be found in his memoirs (posing as a point of reference for the study). The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings (August 6 and 9, 1945) in the Second World War had the greatest impact on Sircar's psyche. In many of his texts (particularly in *Ebang Indrajit*, *Tringsha Satabdi*, *Pore Konodin*, *Bhoma* and *Baki Itihas*) are found complex images of destruction of the landscape (humans, the flora and the fauna) and an apocalyptic earth, often caused due to the misuse of scientific technology (in texts like *Ebang Indrajit*, *Solution X*, *Tringsha Satabdi* and *Ka Cha Ta Ta Pa*). Sircar seems to believe that the human community is an ecosystem in itself, especially when that community thrives in urban, industrial spaces, where nature/natural elements have limited presence. The original intention of this community would be to maintain peace, care and harmony within its members, and also with the rest of nature. However, the modern-day dystopia in the world is the result of the conflict and disharmony inside the human community and its gradual fracture. A "privileged" section of this human community indulges in vices like power-plays, capitalistic attitudes, greed and selfishness, and begins marginalizing and exploiting the lesser-privileged humans (especially women; the exploited turn into human garbage), flora and fauna – as found in texts like *Ebang Indrajit*, *Shesh Nei*, *Ram*, *Shyam*, *Jadu*, *Sanibar*, *Bhoma*, *Basi Khabar*, *Natyakarer Sandhane Tinti Charitra*, *Pralap*, *Beej*, *Sukhpathya Bharater Itihas* and many more. Animals are marginalized by (especially urban) humans and the formers' images are endowed with negative connotations (as in *Sararattir*, *Solution X*, *Khat Mat Kring*, *Sukhpathya Bharater Itihas*, *Spartacus*,

Samabritto, *Pagla Ghoda*, or *Bagh*). Sircar also sometimes shows instances where the human behaves in a manner that blurs the distinction between him/her and an animal, which s/he himself/herself has manufactured. Landscapes get dragged into human power-politics (as in *Ballabhpurer Roopkatha*, *Tringsha Satabdi*, *Pore Konodin*, *Bhoma*, *Basi Khabar*, *Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas*, or *Samabritto*) and in extreme cases wars/violent events (sometimes referred to, in the texts) take place. These, as Sircar observes, are some of the ways in which humans go against nature. He also shows incidents in some of his texts (as in *Ram*, *Shyam*, *Jadu*, *Sararattir*, *Jodi Ar Ekbar*, *Pore Konodin*, or *Bhool Rasta*), where nature in different ways towers over humans and ends up controlling the fate of their lives, seemingly as an answer to the latter's harmful activities towards the former – making the latter realize their mistakes. Disasters, sickness or illnesses are issues/concepts that Sircar has a sceptical view of. He seems to indicate (in texts like *Solution X*, *Pore Konodin*, *Bhoma*, *Ka Cha Ta Ta Pa*, *Circus*, *Kabi Kahini*, or *Udyogparba*) that sometimes nature alone is not to be blamed for these. In some texts (like in *Ebang Indrajit*, *Ballabhpurer Roopkatha*, *Michhil*, *Suitcase*, *Hattamalar Opare*, *Samabritto*, *Gandi*, or *Bhool Rasta*), characters search for a “home” (not necessarily a physical space, all the time). They are displaced from their familial local environment for various reasons, and have to negotiate with a new one. In that process they realize where their true “home” lies, and their respective environmental imaginations are foregrounded. As a postcolonial literary figure, Sircar is also found to be preoccupied with the concept of “history” and problematizing the established elitist historiography. In most of his texts like *Tringsha Satabdi*, *Pore Konodin*, *Bhoma*, *Basi Khabar*, *Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas*, *Baki Itihas*, *Circus*, *Spartacus*, *Suitcase*, *Lakshmichharar Panchali*,

Sagina Mahato, Pralap, Udyogparba, and Natyakarer Sandhane Tinti Charitra, he questions mainstream history in active and passive ways – the kind of historical narrative that has so far been controlled by the White Western European colonial discourse. Sircar suggests revisiting the past, hitting back that existent discourse, and reconstructing a historiography “from below”: by the very people of the Indian landscape – with the inclusion of the marginalized communities, their figures (in some communities sometimes the supernatural²⁴ is also an accepted part of the ecology), and land history (the transformation of the Indian landscape across time, with its flora and the fauna – free from the way they have been defined and excluded by the existent history, so far). Overall, it is clear that Sircar wishes to “wake” the urban, educated Bengali men and women up, asking them not to be cooped up in the comfort-zones of their cities, their houses and their lives, without a care. They should be aware of issues/threats that are going on in the larger world, step out of their meaningless and monotonous daily-lives and take an active part in solving those issues. This is because sooner or later, their local space and lives would get affected and then it would be too late to fix it. The global in time, would affect the local and vice-versa. This thought is actively found in Sircar’s *Ebang Indrajit, Shesh Nei, Tringsha Satabdi, Pore Konodin, Bhoma, Basi Khabar, Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas, Baki Itihas, Michhil, Circus, Udyogparba, and Natyakarer Sandhane Tinti Charitra*.

The second chapter is on Derek Walcott, as mentioned earlier. Growing up on the island, it is observed that Walcott and his countrymen have always identified themselves

²⁴ In a general sense the meaning of the word attributes it to some force/phenomena in the visible natural surroundings that could not be explained by current scientific knowledge. However, in this research, the word also implies all that the tyrannical dominant discourse currently does not understand/want to understand, especially the beliefs/rituals of the dominated.

in relation to the local natural environment (especially, the sea), demonstrating a strong environmental imagination. If the human community is again thought of as an ecosystem, Walcott too, seems to think of its current state as an essentially damaged one – due to the many human vices, like too much of obsession with industrialization, colonial hangover, capitalistic attitudes, racial and other forms of marginalization of the underprivileged sections, especially women (as seen in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The Ghost Dance*, *Walker*, *The Haitian Trilogy* and so on). As an extension to (colonial or in general) human greed, cruelty and pursuit of power, play-texts like *The Ghost Dance*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, *The Haitian Trilogy*, *Pantomime*, *O Babylon!*, or *Beef, No Chicken* display landscapes, the flora and fauna getting dragged into petty politics, their resources exploited and people in power-positions trying to physically “tailor” the respective entire local environments to suit their whims. Through texts like *Remembrance*, *Pantomime*, *A Branch of Blue Nile* or *Beef, No Chicken*, Walcott seems to protest the colonial construction of the concept, “Third World”, and then forcing that label to entire geographic spaces, including his country. He also makes his reader/audience think about the treatment towards animals. He shows how animals are viewed as inferior by the human characters, how their images are associated with negative human traits, and in some cases the “human” and “animal” distinction virtually gets erased because of human behaviour (in texts like *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The Ghost Dance*, *Walker*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, *The Haitian Trilogy*, *Pantomime*, *A Branch of Blue Nile*, *Malcochon*, or *The Last Carnival*). Walcott also shows the supremacy and the controlling power of nature, as an answer back to the anthropogenic activities towards the environment (in *The Sea at Dauphin*, *Beef, No Chicken*, or *Malcochon*). The relationship between humans and

nature (with its non-human elements) is complex in almost all of Walcott's texts. Natural elements provide the necessary solace/guidance to the human characters but, at the same time, the latter express mixed feelings towards the former (prominent in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The Ghost Dance*, *Walker*, *O Starry Starry Night*, and so on). Extending this theme, Walcottian characters also search for a "home" and experience anxieties of displacement from one natural environment to another (like in *The Joker of Seville* or *Pantomime*). Now comes the overarching concern in the plays, that characterizes Walcott as a postcolonial artist: That of the concern with history, historiography and the consequent identity-creation. Walcott is aware how over the decades, the European colonizers have "captured", "named" and "conceptualized"/"defined" the West Indian landscape, the various human ethnic communities, the flora and the fauna. He is also aware of the mainstream historical narrative (as discussed earlier), constructed by the colonizers. By reading/watching his plays, it would be clear how Walcott first asks his fellow-West Indians to accept the brutal colonial history, then attempt to stop the colonial discourse to drive that discourse. The present and future historical narrative (inclusive in nature, as understood), he says, would be in the hands of the contemporary West Indian citizens. He emphasizes on a "fresh start" and the carving out of an essential contemporary West Indian identity of the people, the land and all its elements – embracing the Creole culture and language and the surviving folklore. Walcott hopes that this contemporary West Indian identity would not put the region and its beings in a situation of oscillation between a Western European and an African one.

Wole Soyinka and his play-texts are the subjects on the third chapter of this thesis. Soyinka strives for an essentially contemporary Yoruban (his native community) artistic ethos in his works and also in the contemporary artists from the community. Concern for the ecology and the state of the environment come out in his plays in various ways. As seen in his other two contemporaries earlier, Soyinka also shows in his plays that when we consider the human community as an ecosystem, we notice that it is breaking down in the contemporary times due to many human vices (greed, selfishness, lust for political power and so on). There are conflicts and power-plays within the community, which results in exploitation and marginalization (by either European colonizers or local neo-colonizers, who are allegiant to the Europeans) of the weaker members and women (like in *The Invention*, *The Detainee*, *King Baabu* or *The Beatification of Area Boy*). There is obsession with science and misuse of it in the name of development, leading to dangers to other humans, flora and fauna (as in *The Invention*, *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *The Lion and The Jewel*, or *The Beatification of Area Boy*). The land (along with its flora, fauna and people) is seen to be exploited for resources (especially oil) and dragged into human politics (in texts such as *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *The Lion and The Jewel*, *The Beatification of Area Boy*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *A Play of Giants*, *Opera Wonyosi*, or *The Jero Plays*). Like his other two contemporaries above, Soyinka implicitly suggests how the act of forceful domination and exploitation is itself unnatural. Soyinka has also given space to show the position of animals in his texts. The human community as depicted in his texts, have mixed attitudes towards animals: sometimes they are considered guides and philosophers, while at other times they are placed on a lower platform than human

beings. As seen earlier, in Soyinka's texts too, animal images are usually associated with negative human traits, and certain situations are presented where certain human behaviour blurs the distinction between what is "human" and what is "animalistic". The complex relationship between humans in Soyinka's texts and animals are explored in *The Detainee*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *Camwood on The Leaves*, *Death and the King's Horseman* or *Kongi's Harvest*. Soyinka also shows instances (as in *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *To Zia with Love*, *A Scourge of Hyacinths*, *Kongi's Harvest*, or *Madmen and Specialists*) where nature reigns supreme, affecting the fate of the human characters, seemingly to teach them a lesson for their treachery towards the environment. The supernatural world in the Yoruban knowledge system is very much a part of ecology. When nature punishes human beings, the supernatural gods and spirits take a significant part in devising it. Human dependence on nature and its elements (not only for survival but also for self identity) are shown in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *The Detainee*, *Camwood on The Leaves*, *Kongi's Harvest*, *The Jero Plays*, or *Madmen and Specialists*. Like his two contemporaries discussed above, Soyinka also is aware of the politics behind the historiography of mainstream history and calls for an alternative one, from below – aiding in identity-creation of the contemporary African Yoruban citizen. It would involve coming to terms with the dark past of colonization, the acceptance of an adulterated African knowledge system and negotiating preserved traditional customs/world views/rites and rituals with that of the contemporary postcolonial outlook.

The method of carrying out this research has involved close reading of the play-texts of the literary figures and the analysis of the thematic based on questions (discussed

earlier) that the theoretical framework of ecocriticism puts forward. The research has looked at how the chosen literary figures respond to such ecocritical questions.

BADAL SIRCAR'S DRAMA: ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

In the academic circles, environmental scientists and ecocritics could be heard saying to one another that the main idea of saving the environment is attached to humanity, and it is the only thing that can preserve nature even without any scientific intervention.¹ While it is not at all an easy task to demarcate between what is “purely” scientific or not, the ecocritic might find himself/herself searching mainly for traces of this so-called “human” element in the literary texts that s/he is looking into. Ironically, it is “human” to create, nurture and preserve, it is also a characteristic feature of some human beings to destroy. However, the word “humanity” usually carries with itself the former connotation, instead of the latter. On the basis of seniority, the first author that will be focused on in this project is Badal (Sudhindra) Sircar (1925 - 2011). Now, the moment we hear of Sircar’s name in the field of art and culture, we immediately think of his most well-known contribution to the field: The Third Theatre. It was one of the greatest innovations in modern Indian theatre. In a nutshell, as known to Sircar scholars and the lovers of his work, his experimental Third Theatre grew out of the First form of theatre – the inexpensive indigenous folk theatre performed in the open, and the Second form – the commercial urban proscenium, which was expensive and robbed the audience of their imagination, active participation or their own analyses. This was due to the fact that Sircar became influenced by theatre stalwarts like Jerzy Grotowski², Julian Beck³, Bertolt

¹ During a personal conversation with a friend and a colleague, who was a researcher of environmental science, in 2015.

² Grotowski’s (1933-1999) “poor theatre” included intense training procedures for actors, focus on the physical skill, performances in non-traditional spaces and the rejection of expensive costumes and sets.

Brecht⁴ and Richard Schechner⁵, as he stayed and travelled in the West at particular phases of his life. Sircar's Third Theatre could be performed anywhere – indoors or outdoors. People from all sections of the society could come and join. Nobody needed to buy tickets, but voluntary donations after the performance were always welcome. This form of theatre ensured live and direct communication between “performer to spectator, performer to performer, spectator to performer and spectator to spectator”⁶, so there was immediate audience feedback. Doing away with expensive costumes, makeup, stage props, lights and so on, Sircar's concentration was on the human body as the most effective instrument for communication to the audience. Overall, he wanted theatre to educate and shift the established thoughts/beliefs of the reader/audience, ultimately influencing them to act in order to change the society for the better. Theatre here, could be considered as a movement. Whenever Sircar has been studied in the academic field, he has been looked at through his theatrical innovation and his socio-political voice. However, in this thesis, his ecological concerns would be studied; how Sircar is

³ The important beliefs of Beck's (1925-1985) theatre (The Living Theatre) included considering acting as action, performances in non-traditional spaces (like, the streets), performing for free and for the lesser-privileged sections of the society for education/awareness, open participation, focus on the physicality and so on.

⁴ Brecht's (1898-1956) epic theatre was influenced by Marxist ideology. Positive effects on the audience (and thereby, the society) was very important. Theatre was seen as a tool to show, instruct and increase socio-eco-political awareness of the audience. He is known for employing the *verfremdungseffekt*/estrangement-effect. While watching a play episode or narration, the audience was expected to get directly involved in observing and freely raising questions. However, the audience was expected to be emotionally distant, with reminders that theatrical performances are artificial.

⁵ Schechner (b.1934) is known for his concept of the Environmental Theatre. The Environmental Theatre attempts to heighten audience awareness of theatre by breaking-down the distinction between the spaces of audience and performers. The audience is encouraged to participate and interact freely with the performers. There are six axioms: The theatrical event is a set of related transactions; All the space is used for performance, all the space is used for audience; The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in “found space” (the action and performers gradually define/transform this space. They use various elements found in that surrounding/environment); Focus is flexible and variable; All Production elements speak their own language; The text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no text at all - more than one scene could be staged at the same time.

⁶ Anjum Katyayal, *Badal Sircar: Towards a Theatre of Conscience* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2015), http://books.google.co.in/books?id=f_CICwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

expressing his eco-consciousness through his play-texts. Additionally, (like in the case of the two other literary figures, Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka) the scope of this thesis has essentially been restricted to the reading and analysis of the content of the play-texts – what is being said through the dialogues. The act of reading the play-texts and not watching them. Still, it is expected that the performance-aspect, or the angle of staging and production of his plays would come into the analysis sometimes, even if it is not primarily highlighted. The two things could never be divorced from one other. It is observed and felt that the way plays have been executed and performed under Sircar's Third Theatre, the very act is much sensitive to the natural environment. There are virtually no elements (like lavish sets or props) used in Third Theatre plays that harm or disturb the natural environment. Moreover, performing on the soil, on the ground, closest to the earth itself, exudes a subconscious appreciation for the latter, and the act of visibly valuing it.

In this chapter, while the task of analyzing Sircar's plays has been taken up, his memoirs (which he named *Purono Kasundi*⁷) are kept at the background, as a possible point of reference towards a greater understanding of him. Browsing through *Purono Kasundi* (meaning "Old Mustard"), one finds that from an early age Sircar's concern has been worldly. While growing up, he would often go on little adventures with the people around him to explore his immediate natural surroundings, in whichever place he was at that moment. We see his particular excitement in describing, for instance, the episode where he goes to see the Elephant Falls at Shillong and (with limited knowledge) ends up

⁷ Badal Sircar, *Purono Kasundi: Pratham Khanda* (Kolkata: Lekhani, 2006).

taking the longer path, rather than the shortcut⁸! His acute attention to the pomelo, magnolia and grandiflora trees surrounding his hostel-building and an almost fellow-feeling with them⁹, also deserves special mention.

The impact of a major phase in world history that would later stay on with Sircar, also finds its nascent expression in this memoir – the phase being The Second World War. In this context, one of the descriptions that he gives in *Purono Kasundi* stands thus:

কলেজের প্রথম বছরেই কলকাতার জীবনে বিরাত এক বিপর্যয় এসে গেলো।

আগ্রাসী জাপানী বাহিনী দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় দেশগুলিকে করতলগত করে বর্মা ভেদ করে উত্তরদিকে এগোচ্ছে, এবার লক্ষ্য মণিপুর দিয়ে ভারতে ঢোকা। কলকাতায় ব্ল্যাক আউট, সাইরেনের মহড়া। সাইরেন বাজলে একতলায় সিঁড়ির পাশে ঘাপটি মেরে বসা। তারই মধ্যে মেজদি আর আমি ঠাট্টা তামাশা খুনসুটি করলে মায়ের ধমক, তারপর একদিন দুমদাম আওয়াজ। পরদিন কাগজে বেরোলো --- খিদিরপুরে আর হাতিবাগানে একটা করে বোমা পড়েছে।...¹⁰

[In my first year of college-life in Calcutta itself, there came a calamity. The aggressive Japanese army, after crushing the South Asian countries and penetrating Burma were moving northwards. This time the goal was to enter India through Manipur. There were blackouts in Calcutta, with the constant siren-drills. The drilling of the sirens meant that we were to sit in a crouching manner beside the stairs of the first-floor. In the midst of that, it also meant my second-eldest sister and me getting a scolding from our mother whenever we joked, quarrelled or created a ruckus. Then one day, there was a heavy “doom-dam” noise. The following day it was published in the newspapers that two bombs have fallen at Khidirpur and Hatibagan.]¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 44-45.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹¹ Translation, researcher's (Atreya Banerjee) own. Henceforth in this chapter, translations of Bangla passages/quotes to English which do not contain footnotes/references would mean that they have been done by the researcher himself.

Besides ecocriticism, one could also see the scope to employ the method of nuclear criticism, while reading many of Sircar's texts. The destructive image of the ending of the world, the fear of a dystopic earth – arising out of this traumatic historical occurrence, are what recur over and over (directly and indirectly) in Sircar's plays. Nuclear criticism would point out that rather than the destruction of the earth and barring of the natural order of things that actually happened in the war, there is this collective fear of what could happen, what could have happened and what would eventually happen, that finds expression in them. Nuclear criticism points out to an impending terrifying apocalypse. It would mean that the highest level of cruelty (human and otherwise) has been reached, and there would no longer be a possibility to bring justice and fixing things. Instead of blaming almost everything on 'natural' disasters, one must question how far those disasters are purely 'natural'. In some cases, aren't human beings also responsible for bringing such situations that give an appearance of a naturally occurred disaster? Sircar seems to be disappointed at the fact that larger concerns of the world are not felt or realized by the folks in his immediate surroundings. His local environment happens to be a contemporary urban part of India – of West Bengal, to be precise. The new Bengali middle-class generation of this urban space happens to lead an uneventful, walled-up, mundane, stunted, repetitive and almost bordering on frustrated life. That is their "comfort-zone". They do not have any ambition to push forward, go beyond their useless, non-meaningful existence, and actually be of any use to the greater world outside. The physical environment where these people reside also seems to be responsible for the way the latter have turned out. It is the post-colonial, post-Independence urban India: dusty, gritty, harsh, disordered, bent on sharply separating itself from the rural world of India. It

pretends not to be aware of the latter's existence. Sircar evidently critiques this strain of thought in his texts. In his *On Theatre*¹², Sircar talks about the dichotomy between the urban and rural life – how the big cities did not crop up as a result of the indigenous economic development of the country, but as products of colonial thought and characteristics¹³. He feels that through theatre, we need to hit at the root of this dichotomy¹⁴. Let a few significant thoughts that have been found in his *Prabaser Hijibiji*¹⁵ (“Scribbles While Abroad”) be mentioned here. In one of the letters he admits that he misses his city, feels restless and is struggling to find a certain expression. The nostalgia of the city also brought with it its political atmosphere of that time – where Sircar was earlier involved. So he is trying to find solace in drama and town-planning.¹⁶ He also expresses the feeling of loneliness and familiar spaces in another country, and how that creates a type of anxiety, an essentially urban one¹⁷. It might be so that he was trying to express this anxiety in his creations.

Now let us analyze Sircar's play-texts. The first play that we are going to look at is one of his iconic ones – *Ebang Indrajit*¹⁸ (“*Evam Indrajit*”/“And Indrajit”; 1963). “Every body continues in its state of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line unless it is compelled by an external impressed force to change that state”¹⁹, says the character of Amal in this existential text. It seems that this necessary “force” could only be created by the character Indrajit, who stands out from the rest of his peers. Indrajit finds Amal,

¹² Badal Sircar, *On Theatre* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2009).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ Badal Sircar, *Prabaser Hijibiji* (Kolkata: Lekhani, 2006).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁸ Badal Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda* (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 2009), 261-312.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

Bimal and Kamal (as indicated by their rhyming names) leading too similar and too drab a life – the kind of life Sircar urges people around him to get out of. Indrajit wants to leave everything in his present life and go away somewhere new, somewhere far – way out of his familiar setting. He seemingly hopes to be of some use to the larger global concerns, rather than wasting away in his present space:

... অনেক দূরে কোথাও! কী আছে অনেক দূরে তাও জানি না। জঙ্গল। মরুভূমি।
বরফের স্তূপ। কতকগুলো পাখি। পেসুইন। অস্ট্রিচ। কতকগুলো জন্তু। ক্যাঙ্গারু।
জাগুয়ার। কিছু মানুষ। বেদুইন। এক্সিমো। মাওরি। ...

... ভূগোলের বাইরে একটা পৃথিবী আছে। বাইরের পৃথিবী। এখানে নয়। অন্য
কোথাও। দূরে কোথাও। বাইরে কোথাও।²⁰

[Some place, you know, somewhere far away. I don't know what'll be there –
jungle probably, or desert, or iceberg. Birds – penguins, ostriches. Wild animals –
kangaroo, jaguar. Strange people – Beduin, Eskimo, Maori...

... There must be a world outside geography. It's not here. But it'll be somewhere
far away – outside – beyond.]²¹

It is felt here that Indrajit (who is channeling Sircar's own voice) will feel more alive if he dedicates his life for the greater good of the global issues. He places different human communities (across different geographical spaces) alongside different kinds of animals – making us realize how humans are just one of the living creatures that nature has created, and how their existence and sustenance are connected to that of the rest of the living creatures as well. Similarly, the urban community in reality cannot exist by denying the

²⁰ Ibid., 269.

²¹ Girish R. Karnad, Badal Sircar, and Vijay Tendulkar, *Three Modern Indian Plays: Tughlaq, Evam Indrajit, Silence! The Court is in Session* (Michigan: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10.

rural Other, which ironically, defines/constructs it. There seems to be a lack of meaning and spiritual evolution in the urban folk in the present times – after the second World War, as well as the Partition of the country. Indian (more specifically in Bengal) urbanity becomes malignant, as it segregates human beings into selfish creatures, cooped-up in their own little bubbles – the alienation from fellow-urbanites, the consequent detachment from one's own self, as well:

আমি বিভক্ত, আমি অণুখণ্ডিত...²²

[I am divided. I am broken into pieces, into atoms...]²³

It seems as if Indrajit and Manasi could only connect on a human level and truly express themselves in a certain natural setting, with green grass all around, under a specific tree.

The character of the Writer remarks thus:

ঐ মাঠে। ঐ ঝাঁকড়া-মাথা গাছটার নিচে।
 ও মাঠে মাটিতে ঘাসে মেশা
 অনেক পুরনো নেশা
 অনেক জরুরি আলোচনা,
 ওখানে প্রাচীন দিন বয়সের প্রথম সূচনা,
 ও মাঠে তরল দিন বহু কথা বোনা।

²² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 285.

²³ Karnad, Sircar and Tendulkar, *Three Modern Indian Plays*, 29.

ইন্দ্রজিৎ আর মানসী! ওরা ঐ মাঠে আবার বসবে। কথা বলবে।...²⁴

[That park over there. Under that shaggy tree. So many words, so many old hopes are mixed in the dust there. And in the green grass, life germinated, was nurtured, was reared up, by so many words weaving and entwining one another in so many glowing days. Indrajit and Manasi, they will sit in that park again. They'll sit on that green grass, and they'll talk...]²⁵

Reflecting on the nuclear bomb and its role in destroying countless natural landscapes,

Indrajit brings to us realizations like this:

Indrajit: আমেরিকার যতো আণবিক অস্ত্র নাকি কতকগুলো সুইচের ব্যাপার। পাছে ভুল করে আণবিক যুদ্ধ শুরু হয়ে যায়, তাই সুইচের নানারাকম অটোম্যাটিক ইন্টারলকিং সিস্টেম করা আছে। রেলের সিগন্যালের মতো। কল্পনা কর, ভুল করে কয়েকটা অ্যাটম বোমা, হাইড্রোজেন বোমা পড়ে পৃথিবীটা ধ্বংস হয়ে গেলো। ভাবতে পারিস?²⁶

[... All those atomic weapons are controlled by buttons. And there are interlocking systems so that nobody can spark off an atomic warfare by pushing the wrong button. Just imagine, a minor oversight could destroy the whole world!]²⁷

A similar atmosphere, with the principal character facing strong emotional and mental crisis is found again in Sircar's *Shesh Nei*²⁸ ("No End"; 1970). The ecocritic would observe three broad points in this text. The first one would be the gradual fracture of the human community. The human community on the earth could have thrived on the

²⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 298.

²⁵ Karnad, Sircar and Tendulkar, *Three Modern Indian Plays*, 44.

²⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 295.

²⁷ Karnad, Sircar and Tendulkar, *Three Modern Indian Plays*, 40.

²⁸ Badal Sircar, *Badal Sircar's Swanirbachita Natyasangraha* (Calcutta: Opera, 1977), 204-275.

values of mutual respect, care and harmony (not only among each other, but also with other living beings), but several vices of human beings have caused that community to fracture. Sumanta, the protagonist of this text, is suddenly put in a Kafka-esque²⁹ court-trial where he confronts the various people in his life. Befitting the title, the text hints at the end that such a trial would continue forever. There would be no resolution or end.³⁰ Sumanta is the product of the contemporary urban human life. He comes across as someone who is fractured inside and as a result, is alienated from the other human beings around him. One sees that this form of alienation begins with immediate family members. One sees Sumanta's dramatic conflict with his mother.³¹ One learns that Sumanta's mother had gone to great lengths to destroy his past love-interest, Monica's life.³² The mother displays certain human vices, such as the desire to control her family members' lives, and intense selfishness. Refreshingly, Monica is seen to be caring about Sumanta's well-being more than her own – even making big sacrifices.³³ Sumanta's professor also shows concerns,³⁴ which the former thinks is a device for controlling him.³⁵ Sumanta realizes at a point of time and declares that in the contemporary society, money is the source of all evil.³⁶ Elsewhere in the text, Sumati (a close friend who is understanding) advises Sumanta to leave his corporate job, after hearing from him about his search for himself.³⁷

²⁹ A reference to *Der Prozess (The Trial)*, a novel in German by the Bohemian literary figure, Franz Kafka (1883-1924), published in 1925.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 213-216.

³² *Ibid.*, 216-217.

³³ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 232-233.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

The ecocritic's second point of observation in *Shesh Nei* would be how the urban characters crave for the presence of nature/natural elements in their gritty and grimy lives – lives that are fuelled by money, industry and competition. Even though the human beings of the city are part of nature, they have consciously shut it out from their lives. Hence, the occasional craving. Sumanta's estranged friend, Prashanta got sucked into politics so much, that at a point in the text he admits:

Prashanta: ... পঁচিশ বছর রাজনীতি করছি। আত্মীয় পরিবার বলতে কিছু নেই... রঙিন সূর্যাস্ত, দক্ষিণে হাওয়া, পাখীর গান —এ সব একটু খেমে নিজেকে ভুলে ভোগ করতে পারি নি কোনোদিন...³⁸

[... Am in politics for twenty-five years. Nothing called relations or family, for me... The colourful sunset, the southern breeze, the song of birds – I've never stopped, let myself loose, and experienced any of these...]

Craving respite from a demanding and claustrophobic job in the past, Sumanta admits at one point that one day he temporarily left all assignments and spent an evening, reflecting amid natural surroundings:

... হ হ করে শুধু মাইলের পর মাইল। সব ফাঁকা হয়ে গেলো, বাড়ী নেই, ধানক্ষেত, পুকুর, মাঠ, ঝাঁকড়া মাথা গাছ—আর খাঁ খাঁ করছে রাত। চাঁদ নেই, শুধু তারা—আর... আমি গাড়ী থামিয়ে নামলাম। বসলাম —একটা খালের ধারে... ছোট নদী বোধ হয়। তারার আলো—আর গাছ—আর মাঠ...³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., 228-229.

³⁹ Ibid., 255.

[... Only miles after miles. All became vacant. No more houses. Rice-fields. Ponds. Playing-fields. The trees with bushy tops—And the desolate night. No moon, only the stars—And... I stopped the car and got down. Sat down—on the bank of a canal... Must have been a little river. The light of the stars—and the trees—and the fields ...]

The third observation of the ecocritic, in this text, would be two interrelated things. Sumanta talks about an event in Bengal of the 1949, which greatly affected him, displaying how certain events of human violence contribute to a major psychological and spiritual breakdown of a human being, and thereby, the entire community:

Sumanta: ... স্থিরচিত্ত জীবনে একবারই হয়েছিলাম... ঐ পথই যখন উনপঞ্চাশ সালে এক ধাক্কায় তছনছ হয়ে গেলো, তখন আর স্থিরচিত্ত থাকবার ... অনেকেরই কিছু হয়নি। হয়েছিল আমাদের মতো গোটাকয়েক লোকের, যারা মনে ক'রেছিল উনপঞ্চাশ সালের ন'উই মার্চ রেল ধর্মঘট থেকে বিপ্লবের সুরু... বিপ্লব হোলো না। রেলস্ট্রাইকও হোলো না... তারা দেখলো —পায়ের নীচে যেটাকে এতোদিন শক্ত জমি ভেবে এসেছে—সেটা কাদা, চোরাবালি।⁴⁰

[... Only for once had I made my mind still... When in nineteen forty-nine, that very path got demolished by a single blow, then keeping my mind still became... Many people were unaffected. Only a handful of us were. Those of us who thought that the beginning of a revolution would be from the rail-strike, on the ninth of March, nineteen forty-nine... There was no revolution. There was no rail strike... They saw – the ground beneath their feet that they thought was solid – that was quicksand, all along.]

This refers to the time when the then Indian Government attacked the Communist Party of India's activities, with indiscriminate firings and arrests (especially of the effective leaders), to curb the Party. Ted Svensson observes:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 234-235.

While analysing discursive attempts to classify antagonistic subject positions as threats, it is particularly interesting to explore how the state dealt with the challenge from the Communists and trade unions. In particular, the case of the impending trains strikes in the spring of 1949 offers an ingress into the evolution of legal and political attempts to make certain political activities illicit.⁴¹

From one event, the reader/audience finds Sircar talking about violent events in general, that shake the human community to the core. An excerpt from the text below, towards its ending, is particularly striking to the ecocritic:

Sumanta: ... কে তুমি?

Two: দাঙ্গায় আমার বাড়ীঘর পুড়ে গেছে। বাপ মা ভাই খুন হয়েছে...

Sumanta: হ্যাঁ হ্যাঁ জানি। কিন্তু—

Two: বোমা পড়েছে। ক্ষেতখামার নষ্ট হয়েছে। জঙ্গলে পালিয়েছি। লড়াই করেছি। ধ'রে নিয়ে গেছে। অকথ্য অত্যাচার করেছে। সব অন্য মানুষ।

Sumanta: সে কোন দেশে?

Two: সে অনেক দেশে। কোনো না কোনো দেশে।

Sumanta: দুনিয়ার কোথায় কি হবে, তাতে আমি কি করবো?

Two: সব মানুষ করেছে। আমি মানুষ। তুমিও মানুষ।

Sumanta: সুতরাং আমাকে লিখতে হবে?

Two: হ্যাঁ, লিখতে হবে।

...

⁴¹ Ted Svensson, *Production of Postcolonial India and Pakistan: Meanings of Partition* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), 124.

Three: একটা প্রচণ্ড বিস্ফোরক শক্তি তৈরি হয়েছে পৃথিবীতে। আমাকে মারতে। সমস্ত মানুষকে, সমস্ত প্রাণীকে মারতে। পৃথিবীকে লুপ্ত করে দিতে।

Sumanta: জানি। জানি।

Three: মানুষ তৈরি করেছে।

Sumanta: তাও জানি। কিন্তু পৃথিবী এখনো আছে।

Three: আছে। হয়তো থাকবেও। কিন্তু ভয়ে বেঁচে আছে। ভয়। যে কোনো মুহুর্তে লুপ্ত হয়ে যাবার ভয়।

...

Three: মানুষ মানুষকে মারছে। ভয় দেখেছে। পঙ্গু করছে।

Sumanta: তাই লিখতে হবে? যেহেতু আমি মানুষ?

Three: হ্যাঁ লিখতে হবে। যেহেতু তুমি মানুষ।⁴²

[Sumanta: ... Who're you?

Two: My house burned during the riots. My father-mother-brother were murdered...

Sumanta: Yes, yes, I know. But...

Two: Bombs dropped. Farms and granaries destroyed. Escaped to the jungles. Fought hard. Taken me away. Unmentionable torture to me. All different people.

Sumanta: In which country?

Two: In many. Some or another.

Sumanta: Some thing or another happening at the world's different corners—what would I do with that?

Two: All done by human beings. I'm human. So are you.

Sumanta: Therefore, I have to write?

Two: Yes. You have to.

...

⁴² Sircar, *Swanirbachita Natyasangraha*, 265-267.

Three: A huge explosive power has been created in the world. To kill me. To kill all humans, all forms of life. To murder the earth.

Sumanta: I know. I know.

Three: Human beings have created it.

Sumanta: Know that as well. But the earth is still there.

Three: Still there. Might be there in the future. But it's surviving in fear. Fear. The fear of extinction, at any moment.

...

Three: Humans killing other humans. Scaring them. Crippling them.

Sumanta: I have to write that? Only because I'm a human too?

Three: Yes, you have to. Because you are a human being.]

It is here that the reader/audience finds Sircar visibly concerned about the human community and its dangerous activities, that ultimately lead to deep concerns of the planet's well-being. Sircar also seems to try to shake the "sleeping" Bengali middle-class urbanite, to go out of his/her cocoon and take some action to stop human violence and therefore, preserve the earth. The reader/audience also observes that in this quoted excerpt, Sumanta is interacting with unnamed characters, called Two and Three. This is probably because Sircar did not feel the need to name these two characters. The characters might represent any human being from any corner of the world (a universalization), and Sircar probably wants the reader/audience to focus on the formers' history and their violent experiences. Their names might not be so important. We will find this device being used in Sircar's plays like *Bhoma*⁴³, too. This point will be discussed there as well.

⁴³ Badal Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda* (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 2012), 293-332.

*Sararattir*⁴⁴ (“*All Night Long*”; 1963) and *Ram, Shyam, Jadu*⁴⁵ (1962) contain traces of the idea that the power of nature would ultimately be victorious against, and in control of the futile attempt to “tame” the former by human beings. *Ram, Shyam, Jadu* is set on a quiet river bank or a steamer-dock, at the outskirts of the city. A small community of people live here and they have a habit of poking their noses into each others’ business. It is due to this fact that the “outsiders”: Ram, Shyam and Jadu get to know about Bhavanibabu and his troubles regarding his family and his shop, from the tea-stall owner, Nabo. Nabo, like the others around him, is worn-out, dissatisfied, beaten and living a monotonous life. He looks forward to meeting new people because of this. When it comes to his local landscape, he comments on the changing of the former across time. He also gives this eerie feeling that it is the land which decides who to accept and keep, and who to drive out!:

ছিল বাবু, বিস্তর ছিল। কালীগঞ্জের ঘাট জমজম করতো । তখন বিস্তর শৌখিন
চায়ের দোকান খুলেছিল এইখানে। টিকতে পারলে না কেউ।⁴⁶

[There were people and things here, Babu – many, many stuff. The river bank of Kaligunj used to be much crowded. Many tea shops of unique tastes were opened here at that time, but nobody could stay on.]

He also adds,

⁴⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 313-356.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 133-197.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

... নদীর ধারের গঙ্গ – এই আছে, এই নেই। এদিকে পাড় ভাঙতে লাগলো – জেটি থাকে না। ... কেৰ্-মে কেৰ্-মে ব্যবসাপত্তরও মার খেয়ে উঠে গেলো । এখন শুধু ঐ একটি ইস্টিমার যেতে আসতে ধরে।⁴⁷

[... The river bank – here now, gone tomorrow! The borders of the bank slowly started to break away – jetties were unavailable... businesses became unsuccessful and moved away, along with the workers. Nowadays, there's only that one steamer that serves commuters back and forth.]

Majorly, the play is about the treachery and the destructive influence of human nature towards its fellow human beings, and ultimately how these titular three men save Bhavanibabu's family from getting swindled off what little is left of their family fortune and their happiness. *Sararattir* shows the forces of nature taking control of one night of the lives of a married couple. The couple is unnamed, through which it could be assumed that Sircar wants to point at the universality of this situation in anybody's life, anywhere in the world. The setting of the play is such that this couple is forced to take shelter inside a dilapidated, old room of a house nearby, because of very heavy rain. They are unable to escape the clutches of nature, on that night. That one night changes their lives and their existing personal perspectives of the world and their own selves forever, as they encounter a strange old man who (in a surreal way) forces the husband and the wife to confront some unresolved issues of their pasts. The couple is revealed to originally hail from Calcutta (the city), who are at present stuck in a rural area/the outskirts of the city. As in the case of the quintessential urban folk, the wish to remain dissociated with and the feeling of superiority and prejudice towards fellow non-human creatures is evident:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The Wife: কী যেন সর সর করে চলে গেলো ওদিক দিয়ে!...

The Husband: ইঁদুর টিঁদুর হবে বোধ হয়।

The Wife: সাপ নয় তো?⁴⁸

[The Wife: Something moved over there and swiftly glided away!

The Husband: Must have been rats, I think.

The Wife: You don't think that it was a snake, do you?]

The fear and helplessness of the couple comes out in lines like these:

The Husband: ... মাঠ থৈ থৈ করছে জলে। ওদিকের রাস্তা তো খাল হয়ে গেছে
নির্ঘাত এতক্ষণে।...

The Wife: ... তা কী করবে কী? বসে থাকবে এখানে?

The Husband: তা বৃষ্টি না কমলে আর কী করবো?

The Wife: বৃষ্টি যদি সারারাত্তির পড়ে?...⁴⁹

[The Husband: The field is brimming with water. The road on the other side must
have become a canal, by this time.

The Wife: So what are you going to do? Keep sitting and waiting here?

The Husband: What am I supposed to do if the intensity of the rain does not
decrease?

The Wife: What if it rains the whole night?]

⁴⁸ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 321.

Also, the main underlying idea of nature in control of the destiny of these three characters, who would not have otherwise met, is voiced quite directly by the old man:

... আমার মনে হয় যা ঠিক করবার প্রকৃতি ঠিক করে রেখেছে।⁵⁰

[I feel that nature had already plotted whatever it had to.]

Similar to the case of *Sararattir*, nature and its elements control and alter the lives of the human characters in *Jadi Ar Ekbar*⁵¹ (“If Only Once More”; 1966), as well. This text reminds one of plays like Derek Walcott’s *The Sea at Dauphin* and Wole Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Jero Plays* (these texts are discussed in greater detail in the following chapters). Like *The Sea at Dauphin* or *The Jero Plays*, the sea (a natural element) in *Jadi Ar Ekbar* poses as an all-powerful entity, keeping everything and everyone at its mercy (in different ways), despite staying in the background. At the beginning of the text, Satya the hotel owner comments on the setting of his lodge and where the events take place:

Satya: ... বর্তমানে গেড়েছি শিকড় এইখানে। বঙ্গ উপসাগরের কূলে
কতিপয় ঘর তুলে নির্মিত হয়েছে এক মনোরম অতিথি—নিবাস। ...

⁵⁰ Ibid., 336.

⁵¹ Badal Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda* (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 2010), 175-227.

নেপচুন হ্যাপি লজ...⁵²

[Satya: ... At present I've set my roots down here. On the shores of the Bay of Bengal.

After constructing some buildings, an idyllic guest house has been given way to... Neptune Happy Lodge...]

It is also curious to note the name of the lodge, which is after the Roman sea-god. It becomes another way for Sircar to imply how the sea controls everything and everyone in that area. Like *A Dance of the Forests*, supernatural entities are accepted by a section of the human society in *Jadi Ar Ekbar*, as an integral part of ecology. The lives of four characters of the text are altered by a local god called Buddhajinn, who originated from the sea. To let the reader/audience know of this local god, the characters of Banalata and Satya discuss about the rituals of the indigenous community of the area:

Banalata [Talking about the ritualistic songs of the local folk]: আর গান। গান শুনে মনে হয়—এ পূজো ভয়ের। যেন কোনো অপদেবতাকে

শান্ত রাখা চাই। ... আচ্ছা সত্যবাবু, বুড়-ঢাজিন কাকে বলে এরা?

...

Satya: ... বুড়-ঢাজিন সমুদ্রে থাকে,

সমুদ্রের অপদেবতা সে।

বুড়-ঢাজিন খেয়ালি দেবতা,

দয়ালু দেবতা, মানুষের দুঃখ দেখে

⁵² Ibid., 179.

বুক ফাটে তার।

কার কোন্ উপকার করা যায়

তাই খুঁজে খুঁজে ফেরে বছরের একদিন।⁵³

[Banalata: And the songs. Listening to the songs makes one feel as if this *pujo* is out of fear. As if, it is necessary to keep a certain demon calm... *Achha* Satyababu, who do they refer to as Buddhajinn?

...

Satya: Buddhajinn lives on the sea.

He is the demon of the sea.

He is a moody god.

Generous. He sees human sorrows.

His heart breaks.

One day, every year

He searches, whom to bestow a favour on.]

In the default reality, there are two couples in the text who are unhappy with their lives. The characters of Ratikanta and Karuna are married, yet Ratikanta finds the satisfactory mental wavelength and compatibility in Banalata. On the other hand, the characters of Sanjay and Atashi have a rift among themselves, as Atashi wants Sanjay to earn more money. Buddhajin, as a representative of the all-powerful nature brings a change to their realities through magic.⁵⁴ In the second reality, Ratikanta and Banalata become a married couple and Atashi becomes the wife of a wealthy businessman. The reader/audience get to see how these characters are still not happy and satisfied with what they have, in the

⁵³ Ibid., 190-191.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 206-207.

new reality – which points out to the greater truth of humanity, that nobody is contented with what they have. The text ends with Buddhajinn changing the altered reality back.⁵⁵

*Ballabhpurer Roopkatha*⁵⁶ (“*The Fairytale of Ballabhpur*”; 1964), is a comedy which centrally features a man called Bhupati. The name “Bhupati” literally means “lord of the earth”, in Bangla, and Sircar seems to have named the character so, purposefully and ironically – in tune with the latter’s situation in the play. In the text, Bhupati is the twentieth century bachelor “king” of Ballabhpur. His ancestors have seen their glory days, but in the contemporary times, everything has fallen apart. There is no fame and fortune, like the days of the past. All that are left are Bhupati, his aged and trustworthy manservant: Manohar, and his dilapidated, old “palace” or mansion, which he is trying his best to sell off. Bhupati realizes that the future is bleak – with time, the surrounding socio-economic realities of his space have changed:

... এককালে সিংহাসনই ছিল। এখনো বিয়েবাড়িতে বরাসন হিসাবে এই ধরনের সিংহাসন ব্যবহৃত হয়। দেওয়ালের কারুকার্য, থাম ইত্যাদি পুরাতন রাজকীয় আড়ম্বরের পরিচয় দিতেছে – কিন্তু সব কিছুই ভগ্নদশায়। ঘরের নিচু অংশে কিছু পলকা আসবাবপত্র – সম্ভা আধুনিক মাল।⁵⁷

[It used to be a throne, at one point of time. Nowadays in weddings, it is used as the special seat for the groom. The royal grandeur of the olden days could be understood through the intricate designs on the walls and the pillars – however, all is in a dilapidated state. In the lower part of the house, there are some light and brittle furniture – the kind of cheap stuff that are built nowadays.]

⁵⁵ Ibid., 224-227.

⁵⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 357-448.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 361.

Here in this paragraph, we see how Sircar places glorified objects of the past, along with that of the contemporary times. The objects of the past are not valued or considered relevant to today's realities. They are mostly used for commercial purposes. We also find Bhupati in a dilemma. After selling the mansion, he would have to relocate to another space – another environment, and adjust with its own set of offerings. He has to move to a much smaller, “ordinary” building. Bhupati is caught between the practical stance to move out of his local landscape (where he has grown up and lived all his life), and an emotional desire to cling on the afterglow of the past and his ancestral home. The contemporary corruption and corrosion of the land, the people and the mansion has its effect on the psyche of Bhupati – the remaining heir of a once-noble and grand ancestry:

Bhupati [to Manohar]: ... তুই না হয় সাতপুরুষ এই বাড়িতে চাকরি করছিস।
মাইনে না পেলেও নড়িস না। যে কিনবে তার কাছে এ একটা ভুতুড়ে পোড়া বাড়ি
ছাড়া কি?⁵⁸

[Bhupati: Well, your folks have been serving this house for seven generations. You don't move out even if you don't get your salary. Whoever buys this house, to him is it not anything but a haunted and dilapidated one?]

Also,

Manohar [to Bhupati, when he hears about people coming in to see and buy the mansion]: দেখতে এলেই কিনবে তার কোনো মানে আছে?

⁵⁸ Ibid., 363.

Bhupati: আরে মানে নেই বলেই তো এতো উঠে পড়ে লাগতে চাইছি। বাদশাহী চাল চালবো, বাদশাহী খানা খাওয়াব, - তারপর জলের দর বলবো। কেনবার ইচ্ছে নিয়ে আসছে। ফকুড়ি করতে তো আসছে না?

Manohar: বাদশাহী চাল চালবে! কী দিয়ে চালবে শুনি?

Bhupati: ধার করে মনোহর, ধার করে! অ্যাদিন সংসার চালাতে ধার করেছি, আজ ধার শোধ করবার জন্য ধার করবো।⁵⁹

[Manohar: They are coming to see the house, does that mean that they are going to buy it?

Bhupati: I know it doesn't, and that is exactly why I am so desperate to make it happen. I will make royal moves like a Badshah, I will serve them food like royalty. Then I will quote the cheapest price. They are coming with a desire to buy the house, not to monkey around.

Manohar: You are going to make royal moves like a Badshah! With what are you going to do so?

Bhupati: By borrowing, Manohar, by borrowing. All this time, I have borrowed in order to run the household. Today, in order to repay my debts I have to borrow, yet again.]

At the end of the text, Bhupati seems to have become 'practical' and made up his mind to go ahead with his plans to move. Eventually, he moves to Calcutta.

*Barapisima*⁶⁰ ("The Elder Paternal-aunt"; 1961) does not really have any visible ecological concerns. It is about a conservative and dominating elder aunt who forcefully tries to marry off her motherless niece and bar the latter and her friends from putting up a play. Eventually, the younger generation (the niece, Anu, and her friends) outwit her and execute their play-project successfully. They are also able to fight for the acceptance of educated, middle-class women to act on stage, from the then conservative society and

⁵⁹ Ibid., 369.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 35-110.

culture. What could be called ecological here, is the broader thought that domination of an outside power on a local space and its inhabitants should not be tolerated. In the postcolonial reality, the time has come for the local to resist any kind of outside oppression.

A beautiful line is uttered by the aunt's husband, which highlights the above thought:

আমাদের দিন গেছে। এখন যাদের দিন, তাদের দাবি সর্বাগ্রা⁶¹

[Our days have gone by. Those who today belongs to, their demands should be met first.]

At a point in the play, the interaction between two children and the aunt illustrates how the latter's intimidating and rough attitude is slowly watered-down by the former, who have no fear for her:

The little boy and girl: অনুমাসী! অনুমাসী!

The aunt: অনুর অসুখ। কী চাও?

The little boy: তুমি কে?

The aunt [initially taken aback by the children's innocent brashness, then calms herself down]: আমি?... আমি তোমার অনুমাসির বড়োপিসী।⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid., 58.

⁶² Ibid., 60.

[The little boy and girl: Anu-mashi⁶³! Anu-mashi!

The aunt: Anu is sick. What do the both of you want?

The little boy: Who are you?

The aunt: Me?... I am the elder paternal aunt of your Anu-mashi.]

Another important line features in the text, which encourages the oppressed to rise up with regained strength and confidence, with whatever tools/knowledge it already possesses, reclaim its own agency, and hit back at the dominating agent:

যার দায়িত্বজ্ঞান আছে, সামান্য একটু শিরদাঁড়া বলে পদার্থ আছে, সে পিসীমার ভয়ে কেঁচো হয়ে পলায় না।⁶⁴

[The one who has a sense of responsibility, possesses a small thing called a spine, that person does not get reduced to an earthworm and flees out of fear of the aunt.]

*Sanibar*⁶⁵ (“Saturday”; 1959) also poses as a critique of the urban life-style, where the importance of money overrides everything in one’s life – how one would do anything to earn it, the big sacrifices that are needed to be made, also the disastrous consequences that happen when one is pushed too hard. In a daydream-like sequence, the central figure, Dibyendu, after getting frustrated by the impossible workload thrust on him by his insensitive boss (Mr. Basu) verbally protests against the latter. For this “disrespectful”

⁶³ “Mashi” is maternal aunt in Bangla/Bengali.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 111-132.

attitude, Dibyendu gets fired from his job. When he gradually breaks this news to his family members, the primary reaction that he faces from them is: “আমরা তবে কী খাবো?”⁶⁶ [“What shall we eat now?”]. In his daydream, Dibyendu even kills Mr. Basu using a pistol. The setting is, yet again, an urban middle-class educated Bengali household, where everyone looks towards Dibyendu (the eldest son) for the primary financial support.

In an academic paper⁶⁷ by Neelima Talwar, which was found to be really interesting and agreeable to the present researcher, two of Sircar’s plays have been talked about: *Solution X*⁶⁸ (1962) and *Tringsha Satabdi*⁶⁹ (“The Thirtieth Century”; 1966). Talwar talks about how plays like these two, were successful in expressing the aspirations and longings of the then Indians (starting from the 1940s). The 1940s offered “a period of transition from colonization to political freedom. During a protracted period of colonization, the Indian theatre space had become politicized leading to the Dramatic Performances Control Act imposed on Indian drama by the British colonizers in 1876.”⁷⁰ Again, it was found that Indian theatre at this time “forged national unity... Politically charged theatre are noticed in the plays... Wherein theatre performance is seen as a vital space for historical reflection and action... They exhibit[ed] the desire of Indian theatre practitioners to critique Science as an important but problematic facet of History.”⁷¹ While concluding, Talwar points out that these plays examine “Science as a demanding,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁶⁷ Neelima Talwar, “The Case for Science-Drama: A Historiographic Perspective” (paper presented at the eleventh national conference of ISSEI, Helsinki, Finland, July 28–August 2, 2008).

⁶⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 1-33.

⁶⁹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 295-334.

⁷⁰ Talwar, “Science Drama.”

⁷¹ Ibid.

new, constantly changing mode of knowledge, but there is a sharp focus on the links between science and political power... [Sircar, in *Tringsha Satabdi*] indicts every historical character who contributed to the creation of nuclear energy in such a way that the audience also begins to see its responsibilities in shaping historical processes. Science is not valorised but problematized... [In the plays] scientific processes, concepts and concerns are grounded in the cultural, historical framework of the playwright/theatre group in a much more explicit manner... [They examine] the political and cultural conflicts that science as a modern institution has posed... [Analyzing the plays will lead to the] recognition of dialogic relationship between Science and Drama within the framework of public performance and reflexivity. It will reveal cultural and political issues that have been confronted in the liminal, vibrant ethos of theatre performances to question, understand, and transform the world.”⁷²

The main concern of the fantasy-play *Solution X*, as Talwar shows us, is “scientific probabilities”, plus its thematic focus is about making fun of scientific experiments that would seemingly do what nature itself cannot (in this case, stopping or delaying the process of ageing)⁷³. In the text *Sambhunath*, the scientist, is seemingly going against the natural plan or process of ageing. He is trying his best to come up with a successful experiment or a formula, to do that:

আমরা রিসার্চ করছি বার্ধক্যকে ঠেকিয়ে রাখবার ওষুধ বার করতে। ...প্রায় বার করে ফেলেছি। কিন্তু দু’ মিনিট তেরো সেকেন্ড পরেই আবার নর্ম্যাল হয়ে যাচ্ছে-⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 7.

[We are researching on a medicine which would hold back the ageing process... We are on the verge of creating it. However, after two minutes and thirteen seconds, the ageing process is again continuing.]

Like in the case of *Sararattir*, the selfish mentality of the urban residents leads them to differentiate themselves from, and not relate themselves to, the non-human forms of life – in this case, animals. The fact that Sircar shows us in *Solution X*, how animals are being exploited for greedy and selfish scientific experiments, might actually have bigger repercussions in the world. The animals, as expected, have no agency, within the perspective of the urban humans:

Sambhunath: কী হলো খরগোশটার?...কী আশ্চর্য, খরগোশটাকে দেন নি সলিউশনটা? ব'লে এলাম যে রিয়াকশনটা আজই না জানতে পারলে শান্তি পাবো না!... টোয়েন্টি ফাইভ সি. সি. দেবেন খরগোশটাকে⁷⁵

[Sambhunath: What happened to that rabbit? ... What weirdness is this, you still haven't given the solution to that rabbit? I have already told you, I won't get any peace until I know about the reaction! ... Give it twenty five cc.]

Again,

Somen [Sambhunath's colleague, another scientist]: একটা খরগোশ আনতে বলি? টেস্টটা হয়ে যাক আজ রাত্রেই।

⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

Sambhunath: না চ্যাটার্জি। খরগোশে হবে না।

Somen: দুটো বাঁদর অবশ্য আছে। কিন্তু সে কি রমেশ সামলে আনতে পারবে?

Sambhunath: বাঁদরেও হবে না।⁷⁶

[Somen: Shall I send for a rabbit? Let the test be done tonight itself.

Sambhunath: No, Chatterjee. A rabbit won't do.

Somen: Two monkeys are in stock, though. However, will Ramesh be able to handle them carefully and get them?

Sambhunath: Even monkeys won't do.]

Sambhunath's wife, Anima, utters a few statements and makes this selfishness explicit – the selfishness of the urban human beings over the non-humans, when pushed to the edge. In a state of panic, she does this when, apparently in the digetic world of the text, Sambhunath's experiment has turned himself into a baby (through the so-called reversal of age!):

... তোমাদের গিনিপিগ আছে, বাঁদর আছে --- তাদের উপর টেস্ট করো। নিজের উপর এই ভুতুড়ে ওষুধ আর চালাতে দেবো না।⁷⁷

[... You have your guinea pigs and monkeys – test on them. I won't let this ominous medicine be applied on you.]

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 18.

She says the above lines when Sambhunath volunteers to drink the solution himself, to observe its effects.

Then again,

[To the Head of the Institute, Dr. Khastagir]: আপনাদের ইনস্টিটিউট কি মানুষের জীবন নিয়ে ছেলেখেলা করবার জন্যে তৈরি হয়েছে? আপনারা রিসার্চ করবেন, আর মানুষ হবে তার গিনিপিগ? ... আপনারা মানুষের কল্যাণের জন্যে গবেষণা করেন। আর তার জন্যে দু'একটা প্রাণ বলি দিতেই হয়।⁷⁸

[Has your institute been built to play with the lives of human beings? You all will conduct research, and other human beings are going to be the guinea pigs? ... Your research is for the greater benefit of humankind. For that a few lives are sacrificed, anyway.]

Anima is seemingly alright with animals (like guinea pigs – in the English language, which has gone beyond the literal meaning of denoting the animal, and now means any “subject” to be experimented upon!) exploited for lab experiments – but a human should be left alone. His/her life is more “valuable” than any other animal, according to her.

There is this multilayered meaning of the word “human”, which Sircar points out, at this particular juncture of the text, when Dr. Khastagir says to the (apparent) baby-version of Sambhunath, that they are trying their best to turn the latter back into a “human”, from his present state!⁷⁹ Again, towards the end of the text, a line points out to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 28.

the kind of future the human race might face, if their obsession for newer scientific innovations (at the cost of any life) increases:

টুটুল বড়ো হয়ে জাহাজ জাহাজ খেলে দোলনাটা ভেঙে ফেলেছে।⁸⁰

[After growing up Tutul has played the ship-ship game on this cradle and has broken it.]

What is felt that Sircar is trying to say here, is that as a human, a child is the most innocent and simple state of being. As a human grows up, childhood and its innocence are left behind. Tutul's cradle symbolizes this state of childhood, which got destroyed as the human being grew up. The "ship-ship game" refers to the embracing of (often potentially dangerous) new technoscientific gadgets or innovations over simpler things in life, by the growing/grown-up human. Tutul was a child once. He is no longer that. As a grown-up, he will soon join the ranks of his father and the other adults around him.

Now, let us look at *Tringsha Satabdi*. Talwar, for our convenience, boils down to the play's thematic focus and its scientific concern. The thematic focus, she points out, is the "explication of Hiroshima to the Bengali/Indian middle-class which is largely indifferent to wider historical concerns"⁸¹, while the scientific concern is this "focus on the atom bomb as [a] product of nuclear science and the participation of great scientists

⁸⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁸¹ Talwar, "Science Drama."

like Einstein in this dystopic enterprise”⁸². The title of the play itself seems to point out to an impending apocalyptic, dystopic world in the thirtieth century. In this text, Sircar (suspending time and space) creates an imaginary platform, where characters who witnessed/were involved in the Hiroshima bombings (for instance, Albert Einstein, Japanese engineer Enemon Kawaguchi, Doctor and diarist Michihiko Hachiya or the widow of the American pilot, Major Claude Eatherly) spring up from their specific historical locations, and interact with each other – reminding the readers/audience of dream-like sequences in other texts. However, in this case, the “dream” could rather be called a “nightmare” – with Sircar himself (through the voice of the narrator) calling the play not something beautiful or wonderful⁸³. Sircar makes us realize, that a more credible historiography would involve piecing together perspectives/voices of these characters and events – fragments giving way to a more “wholesome” and more “true” version of history. This particular point about history/historiography reminds one of another play by Sircar, which will be talked about soon: *Bhoma* (1975). After *Bhoma*, two other texts by Sircar need to be highlighted as well – regarding the concept of “history”. His *Baki Itihas*⁸⁴ (“That Other History”; 1965) and *Sukhpathya Bharater Itihas*⁸⁵ (“Indian History Made Easy”; 1976) also deal with another aspect of “mainstream” versions of history – what the “documented”, and what the “undocumented”/“Other” kind of history are.

In *Tringsha Satabdi*, we get to meet Sarat Choudhury, who is a professor of Bengali literature (presumably a creative being), belonging to the urban, middle-class – a

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 299.

⁸⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 40-97.

⁸⁵ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 333-373.

usual setting in many of Sircar’s other plays. He is called “mad/crazy/insane” (উন্মাদ)⁸⁶ in the play, as opposed to Sadhan (another character in the play, who is Sarat’s friend) – a “non-mad”/“non-crazy”/“non-insane” person, because unlike his fellow Bengali middle-class gentfolk, he is actually concerned about the larger world – the geographical spaces other than his own immediate surrounding or “comfort zone”. At the beginning of the play itself, he poses as the narrator, sarcastically talking about the Hiroshima bombings by the USA, and whether the average Bengali gentleman should be concerned about it or not⁸⁷. He also brings in the incidents of 1978 and 1998, where Indian atomic bombs were dropped at a desert in Rajasthan, years after this play was originally composed – pointing out the increasing relevance of the play, down the flow of time. Through the character of Dr. Hachiya’s description of a patient/survivor who develops symptoms of radiation-sickness, days after the actual bombings⁸⁸, Sircar might be pointing out to the readers/audience how the life-changing effects and the trauma of the bombings would never leave the psyche of those who were not affected, and their future generations. We have Einstein’s character commenting on the uselessness of war and how foolish the different countries are being while competing with each other over power – not thinking about the countless lives lost as a consequence to that:

Einstein: ... যতোদিন দুনিয়ার বিভিন্ন দেশ যুদ্ধের অবসান ঘটতে পরস্পরের সহযোগিতা না করছে, যতোদিন তাদের বিভেদের মীমাংসা আর শান্তিরক্ষা আইনসঙ্গত উপায়ে না করছে, ততোদিন তাদের যুদ্ধের জন্য প্রস্তুত থাকতে হয়। এমন অবস্থায়

⁸⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 300.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.

একটা দেশকে সব রকম পন্থাই নিতে হয়, বর্বরতম অস্ত্রও তৈরি করতে হয়, তা না হলে অস্ত্রপ্রতিযোগিতায় হেরে যেতে হবে।⁸⁹

[Einstein: ... Till the day when the different countries of the world are not helping each other to stop war, their differences are not sorted, they do not take the help of law to preserve peace – they have to be prepared for war. In such a situation a particular country has to choose the path to create barbaric weapons, otherwise it would lose out in that competition.]

Sadhan links the above observation to his critique of the heads of the government of these countries:

ওপর মহলের লোকেদের। যারা দেশ চালায়, যুদ্ধ বাধায়। তারা যদি না বোঝে, তুই আমি কী করতে পারি?⁹⁰

[The higher authorities of the country's administration. Those who run the country and start wars, as well. If they don't understand, what are me and you going to do?]

Sarat is quick to add how the present system of government is constantly ingraining its citizens to ignore the stark realities and just become virtual escapist:

... আমাদের 'অন্য' দিকে মন দিতে হবে! জানালা দিয়ে বাইরের দৃশ্য দেখে বলতে হবে – আহা কী সুন্দর!⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 332.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 333.

[... We have to focus on “the other way”! We have to look out of the window and say, what a beautiful scene it is!]

At the end of the text, Sircar through the character of Sarat, addresses the imagined citizens of the thirtieth century. The atmosphere created is quite ominous. Sarat thinks that it is necessary to give a justification and speak for the people of his (twentieth) century and therefore does so. Those he speaks for are the ones who never participated in the war, never wanted any disruption of world-peace. After not getting any feedback from his audience, he concludes something terrible – he questions whether these thirtieth century citizens exist at all! Maybe the world has ended before it even reached the thirtieth century. Maybe the destructive actions of humankind to the planet in the twentieth century, has not left any condition for the thirtieth century citizens to exist or sustain themselves:

... আমার শতাব্দী নির্দোষ। ত্রিশ শতাব্দীর সুন্দর শান্ত পবিত্র মানুষেরা, শোনো। আমার শতাব্দীও সুন্দর হতো। বিংশ শতাব্দীর মানুষও শান্ত হতো, যদি না মানুষের জন্মগত চিরশত্রু তার সর্বনাশ করতো। ঐ শত্রু, ঐ হিংস্র বীভৎস নরখাদক পিশাচ শতাব্দীর পর শতাব্দী মানুষকে ধ্বংস করবার প্রতিজ্ঞা নিয়ে চলেছে। মানুষের ঐ চিরশত্রু – মানুষ নিজে।...

ত্রিশ শতাব্দী জবাব দিচ্ছে না। হয়তো ত্রিশ শতাব্দী নেই। হয়তো এই শতাব্দীর পরে আর শতাব্দী আসেনি।... চিররাত্রি। সব কিছু – অন্ধকারে ডুবে গেছে।⁹²

[... My century is not guilty. You charming, calm and pure people of the thirtieth century, hear hear. My century could've been beautiful, as well. The people of the

⁹² Ibid., 334.

twentieth century could've been just as calm, if they weren't damaged by their greatest enemy of all times. That enemy – that violent, ugly and cannibalistic demon – is hell-bent on destroying humankind. The greatest enemy of human beings is another human being himself...

The thirtieth century isn't answering. Maybe, that century doesn't exist. Maybe after my century no other century has ever arrived... an everlasting night. Everything – buried in darkness.]

When *Tringsha Satabdi* is being discussed one cannot help but bring in Sircar's *Pore Konodin*⁹³, as well. *Pore Konodin* ("Some Other Day"; 1966) could be considered as a spiritual prequel to the former text. In *Pore Konodin* (a science fiction-like text) the reader/audience sees the character of Shankar (a future-doctor) scribbling something, trying his best to inform the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki about the impending bomb attack. However, he is unable to do so. He gets this news from a future 'foreigner', possibly an alien being, called Serin, during a suspension in time. Serin turns out to be the only foreigner who remains behind, while his allies leave Mohanpur (Shankar's home-town) after a natural disaster. Serin stays back there to compose music out of the deadly event. Reading the text from an ecocritical angle gives three broad points of observation. The first observation is the image of a group of outsiders coming in to settle in one's own home/land/local space. Serin, Omeri, Clea and a few others are beings from the future, disguised as people of a foreign country, and they approach Shankar to rent one of his houses at Mohanpur for a while.⁹⁴ While these foreigners do not visibly invade Shankar's house or cause Mohanpur to get blown-up later, their presence do give the reader/audience an eerie, uneasy feeling – a feeling of getting subtly invaded. Another observation here is the brief historical account of the colonization of Mohanpur, that

⁹³ Ibid., 121-173.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 131-134.

Shankar gives to the reader/audience at the beginning of the text: How rich and valuable the land of Mohanpur was, and how outsiders came and exploited it over the decades.⁹⁵

The second point that is noted in the text is the destruction of two lands – Mohanpur in the past, and Hiroshima in the future. In the past time-frame, while Shankar is sedated by Clea, Mohanpur gets destroyed by a meteor. This was the very event that the foreigners came to witness, having known about it beforehand.⁹⁶ Time gets suspended, and Shankar gets to know from Serin about the impending atomic bomb attacks at Japan, in the future. The ending part of the text when Serin reveals truths like this to Shankar, deserves special attention:

Shankar [on hearing from Serin, about the number of deaths caused by the meteorite at Mohanpur]: আড়াই হাজার? এইসব তোমাদের—ইতিহাসে লেখা আছে, না? ... আট'শো—মাত্র। ... এতেও তোমার সঙ্গীত রচনা শেষ হবে না? আরো দরকার?

Serin: ... আরো দরকার। মোহনপুর নামে একটা অখ্যাত শহরে একটা প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগে আট'শো লোক মরেছে। মহামারীতে আড়াই হাজার। মানুষের ধ্বংসের ইতিহাসে এটা কি খুব বেশি? ... তোমার সময় থেকে উনিশ বছর পরে এই পৃথিবীরই এক যায়গায় এক মুহূর্তে দু'লক্ষ লোক মরেছিলো। ... প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগ নয়। মানুষের সৃষ্ট ঘটনা। ... জাপান। হিরোশিমা। ... ওইখানে আমার রচনার শেষ।

Shankar: ... দু'লক্ষ লোক এক মুহূর্তে মরে যাবে ... তোমরা দেখতে আসবে – সঙ্গীত রচনা করবে – ঠেকাবে না? বন্ধ করবে না?

Serin: ... মরে 'যাবে' নয় শঙ্কর। মরে 'গেছে'! অনেকদিন আগে।⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid., 125-126.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 168-170.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 172-173.

[Shankar: Two thousand five hundred? All of this is written in your history, isn't it? ... Only eight hundred! ... Even this isn't enough to end your music composition? You need more?

Serin: ... More is necessary. In an unknown town called Mohanpur, eight hundred people have died due to a natural disaster. Two and a half thousand due to an epidemic. Is that too much in the history of human destruction?... Nineteen years after your time, two lakhs of people had died in a corner of this world, itself... Not in a natural disaster, it was a man-made cause... Japan. Hiroshima... My composition ended there.

Shankar: ... Two lakhs of people will die instantaneously... All of you will come – compose music – won't you bar it? Stop it?

Serin: Sankar, they 'will' not die. They 'have' already died. A long while ago.]

It is sad to note how Serin makes both Shankar and the reader/audience realize that due to the “games” of the power-hungry and cruel privileged sections of the human community, the general mass have all died psychologically and spiritually, a long while ago. Here in this part of the text, with the topic of mass-death also comes that of newer kinds of diseases that originated due to the calamity – and later due to the radiation from the bomb at Japan. It makes the reader/audience aware of how the earth has been polluted with newer kinds of pollution, with time, and how newer kinds of threats to the living beings have cropped up due to that:

Shankar [to Serin]: কী রোগ?

Serin: তুমি নাম শোনোনি। এর আগে পৃথিবীতে এ রোগ হয়নি কখনো। এখানেই এর শুরু। ঐ উল্কাতে এর মূল।⁹⁸

[Shankar: Which disease?

⁹⁸ Ibid., 171.

Serin: You haven't heard of it ever. Before this, this disease has never happened on earth. It has its origins in that meteorite.]

Another interesting thing to note under this point is the juxtaposition of the two calamities, side-by-side. One (the meteor) is a seemingly natural disaster, while the other (the Japan bombings), a man-made one. Sircar might be hinting at the possible relations between different kinds of disasters all over the world. He might be saying that the urban Bengali middle-class person should not restrict his/her focus on local disasters. They should be aware of the global scenario and connect the dots – find out where things are going wrong, and think of the possible solutions. Sircar seems to be subtly questioning the concept of “disasters” itself. Are so-called natural disasters only brought by nature? Do human beings not have any role in bringing them?

The third observation is Sircar raising the topic of history, in this text as well. As mentioned earlier, time gets suspended in the text and the reader/audience gets to hear of two fatal events in two parts of the world. The foreigners reveal that they knew about both of those calamities, but it was not in their hands to attempt to stop them. After the meteor attack at Mohanpur, Clea says to the very anxious and disturbed Shankar:

Clea: কিন্তু শঙ্কর —অতীতের কোনো ঘটনায় যে আমাদের হস্তক্ষেপ করবার উপায় নেই!...⁹⁹

[Clea: But Shankar, There is no way for us to interfere in any event of the past...]

⁹⁹ Ibid., 170.

She and Serin (in his conversation with Shankar, mentioned earlier) implicitly advice Shankar against playing with time and history, trying to stop a calamity that would eventually happen in the future. Although Shankar eventually fails, in the beginning and the ending parts of the text, the reader/audience sees him attempting to send a warning to the people of Japan about the bombings. As the text begins, Shankar's opening speech sounds like this:

Shankar: ... আমি—বলবো! বলে যাবো! ... লিখে যাবো! জানিয়ে যাবো! স্-সবাইকে! ... বন্ধ করতে—বদলাতে ... যাবে! নিশ্চয়ই যাবে! বাধ্য করা যাবে—যদি চিনতে পারা যায়! ... ওদের—কোনো সময়ে—ভবিষ্যতে ... তাই লিখবো। লিখতে হবে।...¹⁰⁰

[Shankar: ... I will speak up! Will let them know! ... Will write it down! Will let them know! Let everybody know!... To stop it, to change it ... It's possible! Absolutely possible! Possible to force it ... If they're recognized!... Them!... Anytime – in the future ... So I'll write. I have to...]

When the text closes, the speech above seems to echo:

Shankar: আঃ—আঃ—আমি— ... বলে যাবো! ... লিখে যাবো! জানিয়ে যাবো ... যদি-জানতাম ... হয় তো—ঠেকাতাম—বন্ধ করতাম ... আমি—আমি জানাবো—সবাইকে জানাবো!...¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 173.

[Shankar: Ah, ah, I will... Will inform! ... Will write down! Will let them know... If only I had known... I could have prevented it, stopped it... I – I will let them know – Will let everybody know!...]

Bhoma is the next play that is being looked at. It talks about the eternal conflict and contrast between the city and the village, in the contemporary world. Calcutta (now Kolkata), West Bengal poses as the “cruel” city, while the Sunderbans is the rural. A city cannot become “cruel”, heartless or exploitative by itself. It does so, through the human beings who live within it and their actions. In the text, the actions of these city-folk include consciously building the city from natural resources, and the continued exploitation of the rural folks for their own pleasure and luxurious lifestyle:

Three (তিন): না, মানুষের রক্ত গরম।

One (এক): আগে ছিল। এখন ঠাণ্ডা। বিবর্তন। ডারউইনের থিওরি। রক্ত ঠাণ্ডা না হয়ে গেলে মানুষ টিকতো না।¹⁰²

[Three: No. The blood of man is warm.

One: It was. Before. Now it’s cold. Theory of Evolution. Darwin. Had man’s blood not grown cold, he wouldn’t have survived.]¹⁰³

These quotes make us realize that over time, in order to survive the modern society, human beings have turned their own blood “cold”. This is obviously a psychological change. The human culture and society has constructed the idea of being “cold-blooded”

¹⁰² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 296.

¹⁰³ Badal Sircar, *Three Plays: Procession, Bhoma, Stale News* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983), 60.

as being corrupt or unreliable. We also need to note here that in the text, Sircar does not really name the characters who narrate the story of Bhoma and comment on various issues. He denotes them as One, Two, Three and so on, possibly emphasizing the fact that the narrator's name is not as important as the event (Bhoma's story). There is also a universal element here. Any narrator at any part of the world can write/speak/perform some history of an individual indigenous community member or the entire community itself. Sircar also highlights the constant materialistic demands of the city and its people to live in excessive luxury and run after financial development for the industry:

One: মহা-মহা-মহা-মহানগর?

Two-Four-Five-Six: কলকাতা!...

Two: হিন্দুস্থান! ফিয়াট! মারুতি আসছে! মারুতি আসবে!

Four: টেলিভিশন! টেলিভিশন! এসে গেলো! আর ভয় নেই!

Five: পাতাল রেল! উড়াল পুল! দ্বিতীয় সেতু! আর ভয় নেই!¹⁰⁴

[One: The great, great, great city?

Two-Four-Five-Six: Calcutta!...

Two: Hundustan Mark Two! Fiat 1500! The Maruti is coming! The small car!
The people's car!

Four: Television! Television! It's here now! Don't worry!

Five: Metro Rail! Flyovers! The Second Hooghly bridge! Don't worry!]¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khandra*, 297-298.

¹⁰⁵ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 62-63.

From an agrarian society in the natural and rural landscape the city people have constructed their city into an industrial one. They have begun calling themselves “cultured”. Even if the city and its so-called “developed”, modernized culture has emerged from the rural and natural landscape, the former has begun to sharply differentiate itself from the latter, even having a superiority-complex. Throughout the text, Sircar has kept the titular character of Bhoma, joined to the latter’s local natural environment (the flora and fauna of the Sunderban marshes). Without being part of it, Bhoma would not exist. Bhoma shares this perspective of life and worldview, with many other indigenous folk (often in different cultures and geographical spaces), where they cannot distance or divorce themselves from the non-human part of nature and its creatures:

ভোমা জঙ্গল। ভোমা আবাদ। ভোমা গ্রাম। ভারতবর্ষের বারো আনা লোক গ্রামে
থাকে। কোটি কোটি ভোমা। ভোমাদের রক্ত খেয়ে আমরা বেঁচে থাকি শহরে।¹⁰⁶

[Bhoma is the jungle. Bhoma is the cornfield. Bhoma is the village. Three-quarters of India’s population live in the villages. Millions and millions of Bhomas. In the cities we live on the blood of Bhomas.]¹⁰⁷

Also,

¹⁰⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 321.

¹⁰⁷ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 94.

... ভোমার আমলে ওরা সবাই ছিল। ওরা ভোমাকে খেয়েছে, ভোমা ওদের খেয়েছে। সব ছিল – বাঘ, সাপ, কুমির, ভোমা।¹⁰⁸

[... They were all there in Bhoma’s time. They have devoured Bhoma, Bhoma has devoured them. They were all there – tigers, snakes, crocodiles, Bhoma ...]¹⁰⁹

Bhoma embodies a spirit of universality, to the downtrodden indigenous people – who, along with the natural landscape, the flora and the non-human fauna, are marginalized – by both the Western European colonizers’ discourse and the pro-colonial privileged, “civilized” city-folk. Usually, these marginalized communities are considered “pristine”, “virginal” and “invisible” – largely unrecognized and written-off as not “human enough” or belonging to the same platform with the privileged city-folk (as pointed out by Val Plumwood¹¹⁰). The so-called civilized city-folks are often the carriers of the White European colonizer’s legacies. In Bhoma, which is set in the contemporary postcolonial time-frame, the exploiters are not White, or Western, but Indians who have successfully been brainwashed into following the colonizer’s ways of life and philosophies – in the hope of a better, “educated” lifestyle. These privileged-class city-folk not only think of themselves as separated from the rural world, but also have an innate desire to rule over the latter – often thinking that they would win, using their technological tools.

The urbanites do not care if thousands of trees from the rural Sunderbans are cut down – that too, by people like Bhoma – to contribute towards clearing of the land and

¹⁰⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tertiya Khanda*, 325.

¹⁰⁹ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 100.

¹¹⁰ Deborah Bird Rose, “Val Plumwood’s Philosophical Animism: attentive interactions in the sentient world,” *Environmental Humanities Vol. 3*, 2013, <http://environmentalhumanities.org/arch/vol3/3.5.pdf>. Bird Rose talks about how Plumwood explored the term “animism” and pointed out the (unrealistic/prejudiced) creation of dangerous hierarchies within human beings, based on how “animal-like” a particular group/community were.

the construction of the city, nor are they concerned about how that very action would tumble and destroy the local environment and the ecosystem of the villages, as excessive cutting down of trees do. To the urbanites, the trees are poisonous, and people like Bhoma have to undertake health-risks to cut them down¹¹¹. As we all know, due to excessive cutting down of trees the naturally moist forest soil would no longer remain so. It would dry out. Also, the water cycle will not be perpetuated, because there would be no tree to return the water vapour to the atmosphere. The forest lands would fast become barren deserts. People like Bhoma, in the rural space would not be able to sow crops in the barren soil, and would eventually die of hunger – their spectres forever crying out:

ভোমা খাবে বাবু। ভাত খাবে।¹¹²

[Bhoma wants to eat, sir. Eat rice.]¹¹³

Bhoma's recurring hungry cry for the want of rice startles the reader/audience, in many a portion of the text. The city-folks turn into vampire-like entities, sucking the life out of the lesser-privileged, rural ones. We also find in the text, a picture of how powerful authorities of the government rob-off funds which are exclusively catered to irrigation and agriculture in the villages and ultimately the money does not reach where it should¹¹⁴. Sircar describes these exploiters as ones selling off their humanity:

¹¹¹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 331-332.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 328.

¹¹³ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 301.

... সস্তা সস্তা সস্তা -

[... Going cheap, cheap!]¹¹⁵

By the following line, Sircar might be pointing out that if the villages get destroyed, the cities would not be far behind:

কলকাতা ডুবে যাচ্ছে, বাঁচাও বাঁচাও!¹¹⁶

[Calcutta's drowning, help! Help!]¹¹⁷

He brings to attention this hard-hitting fact that just as the city and the village are interdependent and interconnected, the non-human part of nature is as intimate with the human society, in exactly the same way. If one is affected negatively, would it be realistic to assume that the other would remain completely unscathed?

While narrating the story of Bhoma and his sufferings, certain images are put forward by Sircar (present at the beginning of the play): the images of a seed growing and becoming a tree – then a woodcutter cutting it down, resulting in the fall of the tree. Eventually, there is the representation of a machine, by the actors who are

¹¹⁵ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 69.

¹¹⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khand*, 302.

¹¹⁷ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 69.

performing/will perform the play¹¹⁸. The machine would be the ultimate tool of destruction, and pave the way for nuclear weapons and nuclear destruction:

One: ... হিরোশিমার বোমাটার শক্তি ছিল কুড়ি হাজার টন টি-এন-টি। ...

যত বোমা জমেছে, তা দিয়ে এই পৃথিবীটাকে পুরো ধ্বংস করা যায়
চারশোবার।¹¹⁹ —

[... The bomb dropped in Hiroshima was 20,000 TNT...

The total stockpile of atom bombs can destroy the whole world – 400 times.]¹²⁰

Coming to the titular character's mournful story, the text examines his position as a helpless indigenous figure – a “human garbage”. It also makes the readers/audience recall and think about the fact how different civilizations across time, have shaped up the various aspects of a massive landscape named India, especially during the latter's journey from the rural to the urban:

One: ইন্ডিয়া-আ-আ-আ!

Two: ভারতবর্ষ-অ-অ-অ!

One: মহেঞ্জোদারো অযোধ্যা পাটলিপুত্র-অ-অ-অ!

Two: নগর মহানগর মহা-মহা-মহা-মহানগ-অ-অ-অ-র!

One: হরাপ্পা ইন্দ্রপ্রস্থ বারানসী আর?

¹¹⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 295.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 317-318.

¹²⁰ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 89-90.

Two-Four-Five-Six: कलकाता!¹²¹

[One: India–a–a!

Two: Bharatvarsha–a–a!

One: Mahenjodaro, Ayodhya, Pataliputra–a–a–a!

Two: The city the great city the great–great ... great c–i–t–y–y–y!

One: Harappa, Indraprastha, Varanasi and?

Two-Four-Five-Six: Calcutta.]¹²²

*Basi Khabar*¹²³ (“Stale News”; 1978) talks about the Santhal Hool (rebellion) of 1855 against the British colonial and Indian upper caste power-structure in the present-day Jharkhand, India. Before going on to talk about the concerned event – the Santhal rebellion, Sircar gives a picture of the contemporary, urban, middle-class setting. The people in this setting are still under a colonial hangover, taking the colonial form of education and other laws as “given”, blithely oblivious to the perspective of the oppressed Santhal community, which took part in that event – their historical activities: how they first cleared the hilly forests of Eastern India to form agricultural land, how that kind of land began as a base for the industrialized and technologically advanced cities to develop¹²⁴. As mentioned earlier, the colonizer’s linear, scientific, exclusionary “mainstream” history is what prevails in the contemporary urban Indian’s psyche. So does the irrational demarcation between the city and the villages – not the realization that one actually defines the other. Similar to the case of *Bhoma*, Sircar himself mentions at

¹²¹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra*, 297.

¹²² Sircar, *Three Plays*, 62.

¹²³ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khand*, 471-510.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 474-476.

the beginning of the main play, that he has relied on various news, information and perspectives/voices to depict the rebellion¹²⁵. There are no characters from the concerned event acting on the stage, but random narrators/story-performers named One, Two, Three and so on, just like in *Bhoma*.

Regarding the nineteenth-century event of the Santhal rebellion, the space concerned is Damin-i-koh – a forested hilly area in the present-day Jharkhand, India. Reminding one of *Bhoma*, yet again, Sircar uses human props and body-language, to depict natural processes, such as how a seed grows into a tree, how the community first hunts wild animals upon settling, and so on¹²⁶. He calls upon historical facts to foreground the overlooked, forgotten event and the unsung heroes (like Sidho, Kanho or Bhairo) associated with it, more and more. The power-structure which dominates the Santhal community at that time and space, comprises urbanite agents of the colonizers, plus the privileged upper-class landlords of that village. The oppressed community is tired of bonded-labour, misleading and financial cheating by the power-structure, and the latter's disdainful and violent attitude. Hence, they rebel. Since Damin-i-koh was first made into tillable land by the Santhals and they consequently settled there, it soon became a part of their personal identity. It became a definition of who they were, featuring in their version of history, myths, songs, art and so on. That continued for generations. Naturally, their soul would be wounded if historical events lead to the seizure and transformation of that land and the surroundings, by heavier foreign power: the colonizers, followed by their Indian loyalists, as well. Just because these indigenous

¹²⁵ Ibid., 472.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 473-474.

people were not conventionally “educated” and were afraid, they could not stop the power-transfer and the consequent exploitation of their soil:

Four: ... বিপুল পরিমাণ ধান, সরষে ও অন্যান্য তৈলবীজ চালান যেত মুর্শিদাবাদে, কলকাতায়, ইংল্যান্ডে। তার বদলে সাঁওতালরা পেতো –

Five: সামান্য টাকা, লবণ... যার দাম ন্যায্য মূল্যের থেকে অনেক কম।...¹²⁷

[Four: ... Large quantities of rice, mustard and other oil seeds were sent off to Murshidabad, Calcutta and England. In return the Santhals received ...

Five: ... a small sum of cash, some salt... the prices of which added up to something far below a reasonable price for their produce...]¹²⁸

The Santhals had put up with years of mental and physical torture and exploitation, until there came a time, when they couldn't. At one point in the text, this multilayered line reverberates: “মানুষ পৃথিবীর সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ জীব”¹²⁹ [“Man is the greatest creature on earth”¹³⁰].

Side by side (in the stage direction), there is a cacophony of voices which shout, “মানুষ মানুষ” (“Humans Humans”) and “পৃথিবী পৃথিবী”¹³¹ (“Earth Earth”) – as if asking the reader/audience to spot the sarcasm. Sircar also brings forth instances of what the community regards as “knowledge”, as opposed to the Western European one: In the Satkathiya village, there was tremendous oppression of the Santhal community, under the rule of Mahesh Daroga. Sidho, a community member, then informed that in the context

¹²⁷ Ibid., 481.

¹²⁸ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 126. Translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay.

¹²⁹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 483.

¹³⁰ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 139.

¹³¹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 483.

of the rebellion, a God has given instructions in his dreams. According to the Santhal rituals, the messengers of the community then went out to spread that news, carrying a Sal tree branch in their hands¹³². Images of violence are brought up in the text, relating to what the Santhals met with, after they rebelled: The destruction of Santhal village after village, the Nawab of Murshidabad sending soldiers and weapons to kill the indigenous people:

... পঞ্চাশটা হাতিও পাঠাল সাঁওতাল আর তাদের স্ত্রী-ছেলেমেয়েদের পায়ের তলায় পিষে মারতে, তাদের কুঁড়েঘর ভেঙে মাটিতে মিশিয়ে দিতে।¹³³

[... Fifty elephants were whipped into a frenzy and let loose on the Santhal villages. Their feet trampled over Santhal men and women, crushed thousands of their huts into dust.]¹³⁴

Sircar also echoes pro-colonial thoughts of well-known figures of the then Bengal, then juxtaposes them with cries of the rebellious Santhals:

Ram Mohan [Roy]: নীলচাষের দ্বারা কৃষকদের মহা উপকার সাধিত হইতেছে।

Chorus [representing the Santhal community]: হ-উ-উ-ল!...

Bankimchandra [Chattopadhyay] (turning to Chorus): ইংরেজ বাংলাদেশকে অরাজকতার হস্ত হইতে উদ্ধার করিয়াছে!

Chorus (raising their fingers): হ-উ-উ-ল!¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid., 495.

¹³³ Ibid., 501.

¹³⁴ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 155.

[Rammohun: ‘On the whole, the indigo planters have performed more good to the generality of the natives of this country, than any other class of European, whether in or out of service.’

Chorus: Hoo-oo-oo-ool...

Bankimchandra (turning to Chorus): The English have saved Bengal from anarchy.

Chorus (raising their fingers): Hoo-oo-oo-ool.]¹³⁶

Khat Mat Kring (1983)¹³⁷ presents some crucial socio-political issues in India, across time. The play is designed in such a manner that one situation morphs into the next, with a fixed set of actors also changing their roles, accordingly. This method, as we have seen earlier, is not uncommon in Sircar. Mass killing and wiping out large communities of life in an irresponsible and nonchalant manner, using destructive weapons, has been illustrated with an everyday situation: the character of a maid complaining about cockroaches – how there is no end to them and that every time she kills a large number of them, they return¹³⁸. In fact at a latter part of the text, referring back to this point, the character of the Hindu lord of death, Yama, also complaints about infestation of cockroaches. Annoyed with it, he expresses that he doesn’t want to visit the earth.¹³⁹ A scene in the text depicts the slaying of Shambuka, a shudra ascetic by Rama from the *Ramayana*.¹⁴⁰ This is understandably depicted to highlight the evil issue of caste

¹³⁵ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 489-490.

¹³⁶ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 136-138.

¹³⁷ “5 Plays (published in Nana Mukh),” Scribd, accessed September 7, 2016, <https://www.scribd.com/document/177077410/Badal-Sarkar-5-Plays-published-in-Nana-Mukh#>. Full play-text not available.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

system, that still lurks in a massive way in the contemporary Indian society¹⁴¹. What becomes interesting after this, is Sircar's juxtaposition of this incident with that of Hitler killing the Jews, where the Nazi concentration camps are compared to human-killing factories.¹⁴² A more broader and universal theme of discrimination among human beings is highlighted by Sircar. Parts of Joan of Arc's story is also depicted. Joan of Arc is represented through the character of a young girl, Junu, who is later carried off by henchmen (belonging to the power-structure) to be lit up. In that same scene, the thought that human beings are the greatest enemies of one another is highlighted. It is advised not to trust even one's own relatives, as they might backstab one.¹⁴³ Junu's (Joan of Arc) burning morphs into that of a woman's because of domestic violence by her in-laws. That is because of insufficient dowry. So now the scene becomes a representation of domestic violence.¹⁴⁴ In the text, there is also a depiction of how vultures need to survive on dead bodies, when the scene changes to one on a Hindu cremation ground ("svasan")¹⁴⁵. The animal and the human blends into one as we encounter a corrupt character called Lettilal. This vulture-human hybrid speaks like a human being and also gives out calls like a vulture. The image of the vulture (animal) by the playwright has been presumably perceived in a negative light, as the character of Lettilal is a peto (jute-made bombs) seller, who conspires and kills someone in the text.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 115. The issue of discrimination based on caste also comes back in a later scene between a boss (high caste) and an employee (low caste). Due to his superiority complex, the boss misuses his power and threatens to fire the employee.

¹⁴² Ibid., 110.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 111-112.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 115.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 121.

Ka Cha Ta Ta Pa (1993; text currently unavailable) has two important concerns in the light of ecocriticism. Firstly, it depicts the building of a dam on a certain river, and due to that the poor residents are being pushed out of the bank. Secondly, it keeps the Chernobyl disaster¹⁴⁷ at the backdrop and depicts nuclear power plants being installed.¹⁴⁸

What is interesting about *Beej*¹⁴⁹ (“The Grain of Life”; 1973) is the outward image of a germinating seed (a natural process) bringing forth layers of meaning. The germinating seed might represent two things simultaneously: one, revolution in general in a drab and “silenced” society, and two, an unborn inside a single mother (the character of an unnamed girl in the text, who is traditionally placed side-by-side the earth) facing a harsh and prejudiced society. The meaningless, daily grind in the urban life is shown in the following section in the text:

Chorus: ওঠো। খাও। কাজে যাও। ফিরে এসো। ঘুমোও।

...

The girl: (ফিসফিস করে) বাঁচো।¹⁵⁰

[Chorus: Wake up. Eat. Go to work. Come back. Sleep.

...

The girl (whispering): Live.]

¹⁴⁷ Vyacheslav Shestopalov, ed., *Chernobyl Disaster and Groundwater* (Florida: CRC Press, 2002). The event refers to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster (steam explosion and fires) in Ukraine, in 1986. The reactor design was flawed and the plant operators made mistakes.

¹⁴⁸ As told to me by my supervisor, Professor Das, during a discussion. December, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 199-205.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

The characters of four demons probably represent the agents of the dominating power-structure of that society that believes in silencing its citizens and eliminating any form of counter-thought and people who practise that. Going by the second layer of meaning, the demons might also represent the dominating patriarchal agents of the society who do not tolerate the “shameful” act of a woman bearing a child before marriage. The readers/audience realize both the meanings, looking at the section from the text below:

Chorus: বাঁচা তবে কী?

The girl: জানা।

Demon: জানলে সুখ যায়, শান্তি যায়, আরাম যায়। মৃত্যু হয়।

The girl: জানা মানে বাঁচা।

Demon: কে বলেছে?

The girl: সে।

...

The girl: সে বীজ। একটা বীজ। মাটির নিচে। বাইরে আসবে। একদিন আসবে।

...

The group of demons: খোঁজো। বীজ খোঁজো। নষ্ট করো। ধ্বংস করো।

The girl: (চাপস্বরে) না। তাকে নষ্ট করা যাবে না। ধ্বংস করা যাবে না। ...
তাকে খুঁজে পাবে না। নষ্ট করতে পারবে না। ধ্বংস করতে পারবে না।¹⁵¹

[Chorus: What does it mean to live?

The girl: To know.

Demon: Knowledge ends happiness, knowledge ends peace, knowledge ends comfort. It brings death.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 202.

The girl: To know is to live.

Demon: Who said that?

The girl: “That” person.

...

The girl: He [That person] is a germinating seed, under the soil, he will emerge, one day he will.

...

The group of demons: Search for him. Search for that seed. Spoil it. Destroy it.

The girl (in a low voice): No. He cannot be spoiled or destroyed... You won't be able find him, spoil him, or destroy him.]

Even if at the later part of the text, the demons kill the companion of the girl (the character called “Shey” or “That person”)¹⁵², the girl remains unafraid and continues saying, implying her impending childbirth:

The girl: (যন্ত্রণার মধ্যেই) বাঁচো! বাঁচো বাঁচো বাঁচো! আমার মধ্যে বাঁচো! ওদের মধ্যে বাঁচো! সবার মধ্যে বাঁচো!¹⁵³

[The girl (bearing the pain of childbirth): Live! Live live live! Live within me! Live within them! Live within all!]

Now we look at another text that has been mentioned before, *Sukhapathya Bharater Itihas*. As seen in Sircar's other texts, this text also problematizes the concept of “mainstream” history. Again, it tries to inspect what the Indian landscape has gone

¹⁵² Ibid., 205.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

through under the British colonization, from the perspective of the marginal. The setting of the text is that of a school. The character of the Principal of that school slowly transforms into the most powerful and faithful bootlicker of Mother Britannia (a deity-like character who represents British imperialism). Under that kind of a school Principal, the students and teachers sing like this:

Teachers and Students (singing): (গান)

বিদ্যালয়ে শিক্ষালাভে কতো উপকার পাই

শিক্ষা বিনা আমাদের কোনো সদ-গতি নাই...¹⁵⁴

[Teachers and students (singing): Education in schools benefits us so

Without education our salvation, no no no...]

Here, the playwright might actually be sarcastic in his “praise” of education through these characters, because placing in the context of the text, “education” here would refer to the colonial form of institutional education. As students grow “smarter” in this form of education, they often drift away from concerns for their local natural world. They often become too selfish, running after machines and the excessive techno-scientific civilization, at the cost of the natural environment and its limited resources.

Towards the beginning of the text, through the character of the Principal, the playwright highlights the pre-colonial agrarian village society that existed in India. Also, how the backbone of industrialization has always been agriculture:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 337.

Principal: চাষের জমির মালিক –ব্যক্তি নয়, গ্রামসামাজ। গ্রামে গ্রামে কুটিরশিল্প। তাঁতি, কামার, কুমোর, ছুতোর, কাঁসারি, স্যাকরা ইত্যাদি। গ্রামের খাদ্য, গ্রামের সব কিছু, গ্রামেই হয়। ... লক্ষ লক্ষ স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ গ্রাম। মাথার উপর রাজা, বাদশা। তারা রাজস্ব নেয় – ফসলের অংশ। ফসল কম হলে কম, বেশি হলে বেশি। তার বদলে পুকুর খাল কাটে, রাস্তাঘাট বানায়, রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ করে। ... গ্রামসমাজ টিকে থাকে একই চেহারায়ে। রাজায় রাজায় যুদ্ধ হয়, তাতে মধ্যে মধ্যে উলুখাগড়ার প্রাণ যায়। কিন্তু গ্রামসমাজ মরে না। এখানে ধ্বংস হয় তো ওখানে গজায়।¹⁵⁵

[Principal: The real owner of agricultural land is not the individual, but the village society. There is a cottage industry in every village. Weavers, blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, wickers, goldsmiths et cetera. The food and everything else of the village grows within it... There are lakhs and lakhs of self-sufficient villages. The king or badshah is at the head. They collect the revenue – a part of the crops. Lesser the crops, lesser the revenue. Higher the crops, higher the revenue. In return, they build canals, create ponds, construct and protect the roads... The village society survives in the same manner always. Wars take place between kings and sometimes insignificant lives are lost. Yet, the village society never dies. If something gets destroyed here, something else gets erected there.]

It is upsetting to note, though, how Sircar points out in this speech about so-called “insignificant” lives getting lost. How society decides which lives are “significant” (the elite and financially privileged sections of the society) and “insignificant” (the marginal, subaltern¹⁵⁶ human communities, plants and non-human living beings). No wonder at a point in the text, the phrases, “Mathematical history” and “Historical mathematics” are uttered by the character of the Principal.¹⁵⁷ This special phrase could mean two things to the readers/audience of this play. It either refers to the colonial economic exploitation of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 338-339.

¹⁵⁶ Postcolonial scholars/critics borrow this term from Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) usually to denote the lowest layers of the human society who are unrepresented, silenced and often snubbed as having no history. This often includes indigenous communities, especially women of those communities, who do not live in the urban areas.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 347.

India or to the “mainstream” calculative history that chooses which events/figures to highlight and which to erase/sweep under the rug, as per its convenience.

The exploitation of Indian resources form a big part in the text, with numerous instances held up by Sircar. A significant scene occurs when Britannia arrives at a train station platform, all decked-up with the Union Jack. By that time, we see that the teachers have become her ardent devotees. One of the teachers begs Britannia for some silver to buy material from India. When Britannia does not know where to get it, one of the teachers suggests America. Another teacher says that they need cheap labour and Africa is suggested by others, when Britannia is again in a dilemma. They also acknowledge that material from India are very valuable and so they plan to buy everything with the silver, seeking profit in the process. They cheer for the arrival of the East Indian Company, and in that act, they call out the words “British” and “Hindia” one after another.¹⁵⁸ Here, the playwright might be pointing out how the two geo-cultural spaces of Britain and India are getting muddled and merged into a newly complex and confusing one, with the advent of the British colonization. Then again, when the Principal (now Britannia’s bootlicker) says that he has brought his “mother” two and a half lakh pounds (of course, through exploitation of India’s resources), she starts referring to him in terms of endearment like “Sona” and “Manik”, the way many mothers in Bengal address their toddlers. This cements a strange kind of a mother and son relationship between Britannia and the Principal.¹⁵⁹ There is also a shocking sequence in the text where the goddess Britannia successfully amalgamates with the Indian Hindu goddess Kali and becomes a similar

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 341-343.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 345.

entity – worshipped in the traditional Hindu manner.¹⁶⁰ Could this sequence mean that the “upper crust” pro-colonial agents, represented by the teachers and the Principal, have accepted Britannia as their new Kali? Sircar points out at the dangerous situation that had actually happened during Indian colonization. Sircar continues showing further exploitation of India elsewhere in the text, and the heavy influence of industrialized money-circulation – which, in turn, is appreciated by the goddess Britannia:

Britannia: এখন আমার সোনা আমার মানিক হিন্দিয়া থেকে সোনা আনছে, আমার ব্যাঙ্ক সব ফুলে ফেঁপে উঠছে, টাকা খাটাচ্ছে, এখন কলকারখানার ভাবনা কী?... আরও কতো আনবে, কতো আবিষ্কার হবে, কতো কলকারখানা হবে, শিল্প হবে-লন্ডন মার্শেস্টার ডাল্ডি গ্লাসগো-আমার সোনামণি সোনামণি সোনামণি কুচুকুই-ই-ই!¹⁶¹

[Britannia: Now my precious son’s bringing gold and silver from Hindia. My bank-s are swelling, investing money. What’s the worry about factories now? ...He’ll bring more! There’ll be more inventions! More factories will be set up! More industries – London, Manchester, Dandi, Glasgow – my son, my child, my lululululu!]¹⁶²

The Impact of figures like Robert Clive¹⁶³ at that time is shown by the playwright in a significant scene in the text, where the students carry his imaginary body on their shoulders and create a procession with much pomp.¹⁶⁴ Also worth examining is another sequence (illustrated below) where Sircar represents the colonial Indian landscape –

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 368.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 346.

¹⁶² Badal Sircar, *Two Plays: Indian History Made Easy, Life of Bagala*, trans. Subhendu Sarkar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁶³ Robert Clive (1725 - 1774) was a British administrator and a military Major-general who he won the Battle of Plassey (1757) and became in charge of Bengal. He was one of the earliest figures who was behind the formation of the first British base in India. For further reading please see C. Brad Faught, *Clive: Founder of British India* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2013).

¹⁶⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 345.

exploited, impoverished and “raped”, through the figure of an Indian mother who is destitute and has an appearance of a beggar. The characters of the students here continue to voice the downtrodden subaltern children of that mother, while the teachers remain the privileged exploiters of their own land in favour of Britannia:

Students: ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল রেভেলিউশন্।

(শিক্ষকরা আর ছাত্ররা মিলে কারখানার মেশিন তৈরি করলো। হস্ হস্ শব্দে যন্ত্র চলছে।)

[Indian] Mother: খাজনা-আ-আ!

(ছুটে এসে মাটিতে পড়লো। ময়লা কাপড়, এলোচুল, যন্ত্রণাবিকৃত মুখ। ছাত্ররাও পড়েছে মাটিতে, ক্ষুধার যন্ত্রণা তাদের শরীরে। শিক্ষকরা ওদের ঘিরে দাঁড়িয়ে।)

Teachers: আরো চাই। আরো চাই। আরো চাই।

Mother and Students: খাজনা-আ-আ।

Teachers: আরো। আরো। আরো।¹⁶⁵

[Students: Industrial Revolution!

(The teachers and students form a factory machine using their bodies. It is running and making a “whoosh-whoosh” sound.)

Mother: Ta-a-ax!

(She darts towards the floor and falls on it. Her clothes are dirty, her messy hair is let loose, her face expressing intense pain. The Students also fall on the floor. Their bodies express intense hunger. The Teachers stand, surrounding them.)

Teachers: We want more. We want more. We want more.

Mother and Students: Ta-a-ax.

Teachers: More. More. More.]

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 349.

Like in the case of *Khat Mat Kring*, vultures as animals have been viewed with negative qualities of human beings – killers with intense ruthlessness and selfishness. It is difficult to say whether Sircar is getting into the traditional hierarchy of humans and animals (where humans are seen as superior to animals) or expressing his own dislike for vultures. Most probably, he is bringing in that same traditional point of view of the society about vultures, and illustrating a point in the text. We see the characters of the Teachers turning into vultures and tearing off the flesh from the students and Mother India, soon after.¹⁶⁶ The character of the Principal expresses disdain towards the character of the Mother on various occasions:

Mother: খোকা ফিরে আয় খোকা-আ-আ!

...

Britannia: ও কে বাবা?

Principal: কেউ না মা, একটা নেটিভ উওয়ান।

Britannia: কী হয়েছে ওর খোকার?

Principal: জানি না মা, বোধ হয় মারা গেছে। ...¹⁶⁷

[Mother: Son, come back! My so-o-on!

...

Britannia: Who is she, my son?

Principal: Nobody, mother. Just a native woman.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 350.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 358.

Britannia: What happened to her son?

Principal: I don't know, mother. Maybe he is dead.]

Then again,

Mother and Students: পুঁজি। পুঁজ। পুঁজি। পুঁজ।

(কর্তা লাফিয়ে নেমে এসে মাকে ঘাড়ধাক্কা দিয়ে ফেললো)

Principal: গেট আউট। ...¹⁶⁸

[Mother and Students: Capital. Pus. Capital. Pus.

(The Principal jumps down and knocks Mother down by the neck)

Principal: Get out! ...]

Apart from the violence he shows to the Mother (who represents his own homeland), he is insensitive enough to not acknowledge her and relegate her to just a “native woman”, speaking like one of those pro-colonial elite, “educated”, privileged people of Indian origin who have sold their spirit to the West. Another interesting thing to note is how Sircar in the original text, places two similar sounding Bangla words: “punji”, meaning capital or collection and “punj”, meaning pus. In the context of the text, the toxicity of money as capital is highlighted when it is placed beside the concept of pus.

Another impactful sequence in the text takes place towards its closing, where the privileged (the Principal and Teachers) celebrate Indian independence, while the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 372.

marginal (Mother and Students) demand food and security. The voices of the marginal become tired and face possible silencing:

Students [Marching with Mother]: স্বাধীনতা। সমৃদ্ধি। প্রগতি।

(মাঠের তেজ কমে আসছে আস্তে আস্তে। শেষে ক্লান্ত পদক্ষেপ।)

স্বা-ধী-ন-তা। স-ম্-দ্ধি। প্র-গ-তি। খাদি-নতা —খম্দ্ধি—খগতি—থেতে দাও —থেতে দাও।

(ছাত্ররা মাটিতে পড়লো)

Mother: (ফিসফিস করে) থোকা মরছে।¹⁶⁹

[Students: Independence. Prosperity. Progress...

(Marching slows down. At last, they are tired)

I-n-d-e-p-e-n-d-e-n-c-e.

P-r-o-s-p-e-r-i-t-y.

P-r-o-g-r-e-s-s.

Foondependence.

Foosperity. Foogress.

Food. Give us food.

(They fall down on the floor)

Ma (whispers): My son's dying.]¹⁷⁰

The play ends on a hopeful note, even though the marginalized characters are constantly attempted to silence and driven out by the Teachers and Principal through violence. Yet,

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 371.

¹⁷⁰ Sircar, *Two Plays*, 47.

the former continue their protests, and demand food.¹⁷¹ This probably indicates that marginal voices of protest would never go away no matter how much violence takes place to squash them.

The next text by Sircar that we are looking at – *Baki Itihas* – has been mentioned earlier as well. This text also examines history as a concept and talks about life-changing events – how they have transformed/reshaped landscapes all over the world, and their socio-cultural or economic fabrics. The title of *Baki Itihas* itself catches attention, as it poses a question: What about that “unfinished” history? What about that “other” history that never sees the light of the day, and nobody gets to hear about it? Questions like these open up a can of worms in the social, cultural, economic and all the other aspects of our daily lived-experience. The text initially opens in a Bengali urban, middle-class household, where we see characters of an average husband and wife (Basanti, the wife and Saradindu, the husband) in their mundane daily banter, like this:

... ঘরের বাকি অংশে গোটা দুই আরাম কেদারা, একটি লেখবার টেবিল ও চেয়ার এবং ঘরের সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ আসবাব –একটি বুককেস। বই, ফুলদানি, মহীশূরের কাষ্ঠপুতুলি ইত্যাদি ঐ আসবাবটিতে কেন্দ্রীভূত।

...

Basanti: তুমি কালকেও ইলেকট্রিক বিল দাওনি?

Saradindu: (কাগজ নামিয়ে) অ্যাঁ? ওহো, একদম ভুলে গেছি! জামার পকেটে রেখে দাও তো?

Basanti: জামার পকেটেই তো ছিল! কাল অফিস যাবার সময়ে মনে করিয়েও দিলাম।

¹⁷¹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 372-373.

Saradindu: শনিবার এমনিও দেওয়া মুশকিল। বড়ো ভিড় হয়। কাল দেবো ঠিক!¹⁷²

[... In the remaining portion of the room there are about a couple of armchairs, a writing-table and chair and the best furniture of the room – a bookcase. Books, flower-vase, wooden puppets from Mahisur etc., are adorned in that bookcase.

...

Basanti: You haven't paid the electricity bill even yesterday?

Saradindu (putting down his newspaper): What? Oho, I have completely forgotten! Could you put it inside my shirt-pocket?

Basanti: It was inside your shirt-pocket, all along. I even reminded you about it, yesterday!

Saradindu: As it is, paying it on Saturdays is difficult. There's a lot of crowd. I assure you, I'll pay it tomorrow, for sure!]

They discuss writing stories, as well:

Basanti: আমার গল্পের চেয়ে অনেক ভালো হয়েছে।

Saradindu: এটা কি সমালোচনা হলো?

Basanti: আমি কি সমালোচক?

Saradindu: তোমার মনে কী যেন প্রশ্ন রয়েছে একটা?

Basanti: কে বললো?

Saradindu: তোমার মুখ দেখে মনে হচ্ছে।

Basanti: না, প্রশ্ন নয়-তবে-

Saradindu: কী?

¹⁷² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 44.

Basanti: আমি ভাবছি—সত্যি সত্যি সীতানাথ কী কারণে আত্মহত্যা করলো?...¹⁷³

[Basanti: It's much better than my story.

Saradindu: Is this a possible critique?

Basanti: Am I a critic?

Saradindu: You had a question on your mind, what was it again?

Basanti: Says who?

Saradindu: By seeing your face I gather.

Basanti: No. Not exactly a question, but...

Saradindu: Then what?

Basanti: I was thinking ... What was the real reason why Sitanath committed suicide?]

They discuss writing a story of about the character of a middle-class man called Sitanath, who commits suicide for being a sexual deviant and pervert, according to the society. The situation of the mundane conversation between these two characters changes greatly, after that. There comes a massive shift in the atmosphere, tone and concerns of the text in the third act. It is as if Sircar intervenes and hollers at the average Bengali middle-class urban gentleman to stop being cocooned in his created, illusory bubble, be aware about the larger issues that are happening in the world outside, and do something about it. The character created by the husband and wife, Sitanath, jumps out of the imaginations of the husband and wife and appears before Saradindu as a spectre. Mocking Saradindu and his wife's imaginary reasons to kill Sitanath's character in their story, the latter takes Saradindu on a journey of various violent and hateful events and deaths that have

¹⁷³ Ibid., 84.

transformed the world, across time. Sitanath implies that it is wrong for Saradindu and his wife to speculate someone's death in a playful manner, when the formers are acting from a secure and relatively privileged position in the society. Sitanath wishes to present a picture of a grim reality that Saradindu and his wife are unaware of, or have shut their eyes on. This is that titular "other" history.

Sitanath laments on how beautiful the world used to be in his younger days, with words like these:

... উনিশ বছর আগে পৃথিবী সুন্দর ছিল। মানুষরা সজীব ছিল। জীবন মূল্যবান ছিল। উনিশ বছর আগে।¹⁷⁴

[... Nineteen years ago the earth was beautiful. Human beings had life in them. Life was valuable. Nineteen years ago]

These words could also be applicable to a kind of world that existed before human violence, or without it. Sitanath presents a plethora of violent images of historical events and deaths across time and across the globe, in front of Saradindu:

Saradindu: (পাতা উল্টে) এ সব কী সেন্টেছ?

Sitanath: ... রোমের কলোসিয়াম। ক্রীশ্চানদের সিংহ দিয়ে খাওয়ানো হচ্ছে। ... খুঁটিতে বাঁধা ঐ যে মেয়েটাকে পোড়ানো হচ্ছে —ওর নাম জোয়ান অফ আর্ক। — ওটা অপরাধ স্বীকার করাবার যন্ত্র — মধ্যযুগের ইয়োরোপ। ঐ চাকাটা ঘোরালে টানের চোটে মানুষের হাড়গোড় ভেঙে যায়। — নেপোলিয়নের জয়যাত্রার ছবি। ...

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 90.

সাহারা মরুভূমির একটা বাণিজ্যপথ। শিকলে বাঁধা ক্রীতদাস চালান হচ্ছে। ...
চাবুকটিতে ন'টা মুখ ... সব ক'টায় ... লোহার টুকরো। — ওটা আলাবামার
তুলোক্ষেত। ... কাঁটাতারের বেড়ায় ঝুলছে নিচুদরের একজন সৈনিক। প্রথম মহাযুদ্ধ।
... হিটলারের কন্-সান-ট্রেশন ক্যাম্প। ঐ লোকগুলো ইহুদী। ... বাস্কা ছেলেটার
ডান হাতটা নেই ... দ্বিতীয় মহাযুদ্ধের ছবি। ... হিরোশিমা...

Saradindu: এ সব কী ছবি?

Sitanath: খবরের ছবি ... এই তো ইতিহাস। ... মানুষের ইতিহাস। জীবনের
ইতিহাস।

Saradindu: মিথ্যে কথা! এ মৃত্যুর ইতিহাস।

Sitanath: ... মৃত্যুকে বাদ দিয়ে কী জীবন হয়? ...

Saradindu: কিন্তু মৃত্যুর ইতিহাস তো জীবনের ইতিহাস হতে পারে না?

Sitanath: ... হয় তো তাই। আলাদা আলাদা মানুষের জীবনের আলাদা আলাদা
ইতিহাস—হয় তো আছে। এ তা নয়। এ বাকি ইতিহাস। ... কিন্তু মানুষেরই।

Saradindu: ... তুমি আত্মহত্যা করলে কেন সীতানাথ?

Sitanath: তুমি আত্মহত্যা করোনি কেন শরদিন্দু?

Saradindu: ... আমি? আমি আত্মহত্যা কেন করবো? ... বাঁচতে চাই বলে। ...
বাঁচতে কে না চায়?

Sitanath: অনেকেই চায় না।¹⁷⁵

[Saradindu [turning the pages of Sitanath's scrapbook, where he has attached
images of gruesome world-events]: What are all these you have attached here?

Sitanath: ... The Roman Colosseum. Christians are being fed to lions. The girl
who is being tied to the stake and burnt – her name is Joan of Arc – That is a
device to make someone confess their crimes – The European Middle Ages.
When that wheel spins, the tension grinds the bones of the mass ... A photo of
Napoleon's victory march ... Trade routes of the Sahara Desert . Trained slaves
are being transported. The whip has nine ends ... Each of these have ... small
scraps of iron. – That's a cotton field of Alabama... On a barbed-wire fence hangs
a low-ranking soldier. World War One ... Hitler's Concentration Camps. Those
people are Jews ... the little boy does not have his right hand ... Photographs of the
Second World War ... Hiroshima...

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 87-88.

Saradindu: What kind of photographs are these?

Sitanath: Photographs of news... This is history... History of human beings. History of life.

Saradindu: Lies! This is the history of death.

Sitanath: ... Can life exist without death? ...

Saradindu: But the history of death cannot be the history of life, can it?

Sitanath: ... Maybe so. Different human lives might have different histories. This isn't the case, here. This is the remaining history ... Of human beings, itself.

Saradindu: ... Why did you commit suicide, Sitanath?

Sitanath: Why didn't you, Saradindu?

Saradindu: Me? Why should I commit suicide? ... Because I want to live ... Who doesn't want to live?

Sitanath: There are people who don't.]

Gradually, the readers/audience begin to realize that Sitanath might be the sleeping subconscious of Saradindu, which has woken up. Saradindu notices similarities between Sitanath and himself, for instance:

Sitanath: এক বছর পরে বাবা মারা গেলেন। আঠারো বছর আগে। পৃথিবী নামক গ্রহের মানুষ নামক চারশো কোটি প্রাণীর মধ্যে একটি প্রাণী মরে গেলো —আমার বাবা। আঠারো বছর আগে।

Saradindu: আমার বাবাও মারা গেছেন আঠারো বছর আগে।

...

Sitanath: মানুষ হতে হবে। মানুষ। তখন মানুষ হওয়া বলতে বুঝতাম —লেখাপড়া করে পরীক্ষা পাস করা। করে নিজের পায়ে দাঁড়ানো। তার অন্য নাম চাকরি করা। তার অন্য নাম —নিজের অনেকখানি অংশ নিয়মিত বিক্রি করে নিয়মিত গ্রাসাচ্ছাদনের ব্যবস্থা করা। ... বাধা-বিপত্তি ... সব কিছুই বিরুদ্ধে লড়াবার হাতিয়ার একটি মাত্র প্রতিজ্ঞা। ...

Saradindu: আমারও——এই একই প্রতিজ্ঞা। ...¹⁷⁶

[Sitanath: Father passed away, a year later. Eighteen years ago. In a planet called earth, an organism called human died among four hundred crores of them — my father. Eighteen years ago.

Saradindu: My father also passed away, eighteen years ago.

...

Sitanath: You have to be human. A human. Being human at that time meant studying hard and passing exams. Then, standing on one's own two feet. The other name for that was having a job. The other name for that was selling off a large part of oneself to arrange for food... all sorts of barriers in life ... The weapon to fight against everything — an oath...

Saradindu: I made that same oath.]

In fact, after their heated argument, Saradindu actually calls Sitanath by his own name.¹⁷⁷

Apart from the characters noticing similarities with each other, the above section in the text is important, because Sircar opens up a discussion of some other important issues, as well. The character of Sitanath, voicing Sircar, points out the vastness of the earth and the universe, where it is important to realize that human beings are nowhere, compared to those. So, human beings – especially those with power-positions – should not think of themselves as special or entitled. Sitanath also throws the question to his fellow-character Saradindu and also to the readers/audience, as to what it means to be “human”. What does “growing up to be a real human being” mean? Meanwhile, Sitanath continues commenting in his caustic manner on history, humanity and violence:

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 90.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 95.

হ্যাঁ, বাকি ইতিহাস। পরিষ্কা নয়। চাকরি নয়। ... বাকি ইতিহাস! দাঙ্গার ইতিহাস! মহামুন্দের ইতিহাস! রাশি রাশি বছরের হত্যা নির্যাতন যন্ত্রণার ইতিহাস! ... পিরামিডের পাথরে... জালিয়ানওয়ালাবাগের দেওয়ালে, হিরোশিমার পোড়া মাটিতে লেখা রয়েছে!... নির্যাতন হত্যা দাঙ্গা যুদ্ধ —সব কিছু চলবে, সব কিছু মানুষই করবে—তবু মানুষের কিছু করবার নেই। ... যে বৈজ্ঞানিক একটা জন্তুর যন্ত্রণা চোখে দেখতে পারে না, সে-ই একসঙ্গে লক্ষ মানুষ ধ্বংসের অস্ত্র তৈরি করবে। ... এরা সাবাই মানুষ। ... বাঁচবার ভান করছে। অর্থ যখন থাকছে না, তখন অভ্যাস সম্বল করে বাঁচবার ভান করছে। ...¹⁷⁸

[Yes, the remaining history! Not the exams, not the jobs... the remaining history! The history of riots, the World Wars, of torture and pain across time! ... On the rocks of the Egyptian Pyramids, on the walls of Jalianwala Bagh, on the charred soils of Hiroshima it is written! ... Torture, killings, riots, wars — all would continue, all would be initiated by human beings — yet, there’s nothing human beings would be able to do about it... The scientist who otherwise can’t see an animal being tortured, would be the one creating a tool to destroy lakhs of human beings... These are all human beings... Pretending to be alive. When no money remains, they hold on to habits to stay alive...]

Sitanath succeeds in making Saradindu realize that the current state of life and the future would never be peaceful. That is because the burden of the past wars and destruction would trample and haunt them forever. Saradindu’s current “secure” life is a distraction and an illusion from the ongoing real problems in the world at large. On closing of the text after Sitanath leaves, Saradindu declares to the other characters that he has gone “mad” with this new realization, repeating the words: “baki itihās.”¹⁷⁹

*Michhil*¹⁸⁰ (“Procession”; 1974) is set in the city space and by looking at this text ecocritically, we find that on a broader level Sircar makes a rather detailed observation of the urban ecosystem. Sircar displays the kind of power-play that takes place within that

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 93-94.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 96-97.

¹⁸⁰ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 207-239.

ecosystem; within the urban human community network of inter-relationships, the kinds of violence and marginalization that take place. About *Michhil*, Ella Dutta has some interesting observations:

For a long time, Sircar had had the idea of making a kind of montage on Calcutta: scenes of Calcutta streets, people chatting in teashops and in the coffee houses, different scenes in the offices... Suddenly, the idea of Calcutta as a city of processions came vividly upon him... The generation gap and the image of the young man being killed again and again... [The text] is considered by many to have a universal appeal despite its strong Calcutta-oriented origin and its urban sensibility. Sircar... hesitated about its appeal to audiences elsewhere, but their experience proved otherwise; the play was well received even in the villages where the image of Khoka's repeated death is not an abstract idea, distantly removed to the experiences of the urban middle class.¹⁸¹

Two characters in this text who deserve the most attention of the readers/audience are Khoka (a common term of endearment in a Bengali household, for male toddlers/youth) and that of an old man, Buro (meaning “old man” in Bengali). Two things could be observed about these two characters after reading the text. Firstly, the character of Khoka poses as a synecdoche for all those countless “Khokas” of India at large, who sacrifice their lives taking part in processions and movements to change the society for the better.

As the character of Buro attests:

Buro: বাপ মা নাম রেখেছিলো —থোকা। হাজার হাজার বাপ -মা'র হাজার হাজার থোকা। থোকা মানে যে ছোট... বড়ো হয় নি... অপক অর্বাচীন অপরিশ্রুত।...¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 5-6.

¹⁸² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 214-215.

[Old Man: His parents named him Khoka. Thousands of parents with thousands of Khokas. Khoka means little... one who hasn't grown up yet... green, raw, immature...]¹⁸³

In addition to this, Khoka's own cry to the audience is impactful enough to make the latter think hard:

Khoka: আমি খুন হয়েছি। আমি। এই যে এখানে। আমি খুন হয়েছি। আমি! আমি! এই যে—আমি! আমাকে মেরে ফেলেছে। আমি মরে গেছি। এইমাত্র। এইমাত্র খুন হয়েছি আমি। আমি খুন হলাম আজ। আমি খুন হয়েছি গতকাল। আমি খুন হয়েছি পরশু। তরশু। গত হপ্তায়। গত মাসে! গত বছর! আমি খুন হই রোজ। রোজ রোজ খুন রোজ মৃত্যু রোজ! আমি খুন হব কাল। পরশু, তরশু, আসছে সপ্তায়। আসছে মাসে। আসছে বছর! আমি! আমি! দেখতে পাচ্ছে না কেন? শুনতে পাচ্ছে না কেন? আমি! আমি! এই যে এখানে—আমি—খুন হয়েছি—মরে গেছি—রোজ খুন হই—রোজ রোজ খুন রোজ মৃত্যু রোজ—¹⁸⁴

[Khoka: I was killed. I. Me. Here I am. I've been killed. I. I. Here—here I am. They killed me. I'm dead. I was killed just now. I was killed today. I was killed yesterday. I was killed the day before yesterday. The day before the day before. Last week. Last month. Last year. I am killed every day. Every day, killed, every day, dead, every day. I'll be killed tomorrow. Day after, the day after that, next week. Next month. Next year. I, me. Why can't you see me? Why can't you hear me? I. Here I am—I—was killed—I am dead—I am killed every day—every day, every day killed every day dead every day—]¹⁸⁵

The second observation is that Buro poses as the future of Khoka and Khoka, the latter's past. The two realities exist side-by-side at the same time, muddling the present and

¹⁸³ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 21.

¹⁸⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khand*, 211.

¹⁸⁵ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 17.

suspending time – making us realize how similar human conditions have been in the past, is at the present, and would be in the future (a similar thought is found in Sircar’s *Spartacus*¹⁸⁶, discussed later):

Khoka: ... তোমার নাম কী?

Buro: আমার নাম খোকা। ছিল। তোমার নাম কী?

Khoka: আমার নাম খোকা। আছে।

Buro: (আপন মনে) ছিল। আছে। ছিল। আছে।

Khoka: (আপন মনে) আছে। ছিল। আছে। ছিল।¹⁸⁷

[Khoka: ... What’s your name?

Old Man: Khoka. It was. Yours?

Khoka: Khoka. It is.

Old Man (to himself): Was. Is. Was. Is.

Khoka (to himself): Is. Was. Is. Was.]¹⁸⁸

Both of them admit to each other that they are searching for their “real” home, thereby expressing placeless-ness/rootless-ness/displacement from a secure, familiar, harmonious local environment/society, plus some sort of psychological solace:

¹⁸⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 122-180. This play is significant because Sircar, through it, renounces the proscenium stage and begins to perform his third-theatre way.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁸⁸ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 51.

Buro: খুঁজে পাবে?

Khoka: জানি না। কী খুঁজছি?

Buro: বাড়ির রাস্তা।

...

Khoka: ঐ বাড়ি?

Buro: না। অন্য বাড়ি। সত্যি বাড়ি। সত্যিকারের বাড়ি।

Khoka: (আবার ক্লান্ত, হতাশ) একই রাস্তা একই রাস্তা একই—¹⁸⁹

[Old Man: Will you find it?

Khoka: I don't know. What are we searching for?

Old Man: The way home.

...

Khoka: That home?

Old Man: No. Another home. A real home. The really truly only home.

Khoka (tired and despairing again): The same road, the same road, the same...]¹⁹⁰

After all, the text is about a search itself, the search for a true procession as a democratic means of resistance, something that would change the human society and their mentalities for the better, to build a better world. The text talks about various types of processions (many of those have been displayed), across time. This idea could be interpreted by the very first dialogue in the text, where the character of One¹⁹¹ asks why

¹⁸⁹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 238.

¹⁹⁰ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 52.

¹⁹¹ Like we see in some other plays of Sircar, except for Buro and Khoka's character, the rest of the characters in *Michhil* are named One, Two and so on, to universalize the situation.

the lights went out.¹⁹² As the text concerns issues after urbanization, it talks about some disasters which have happened globally. We again come back to a point mentioned earlier. Sircar's possible highlighting of the issue of 'disasters' – natural, man-made and the summation of the two:

Three: বিশ্বব্যাপী তৈল সংকট।

Four: প্রশান্ত মহাসাগরে আবার হাইড্রোজেন বোমার বিস্ফোরণ।

...

Six: কৃত্রিম হৃৎপিণ্ডের আর একটি পরিক্ষা।

...

One: পেরুতে ভূমিকম্প।

Two: বাংলাদেশে সাইক্লোন।

Three: চিলিতে অভ্যুত্থান।

...

One: রেশনে চালের দর বাড়লো।

Two: সর্ষের তেলের বদলে রেপ্-সিড।

Three: গুদামে লক্ষ টাকার চিনি নষ্ট।¹⁹³

[Three: Oil crisis all over the world.

Four: Another hydrogen bomb explosion in the Pacific.

...

Five: Another experiment with the artificial heart

...

¹⁹² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 209.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 215-216.

One: Earthquake in Peru.

Two: Cyclone in Bangladesh.

Three: Uprising in Chile.

...

One: Price hike in rice rations

Two: Rapeseed instead of mustard oil.

Three: Sugar worth one lakh rupees rots in the godowns.]¹⁹⁴

Now it is time to discuss two other broad themes found in this text. One, the urban politics that happen within the city ecosystem – a section of the human community possesses power, and to gain more of it gets involved in corruption. As a result, the other weaker sections of that community suffer various forms of marginalization. Sircar cites instances of the human condition of this marginalization. Two, history and historical events of resistance are brought in – one overlapping the other. Only cries and demands of those “processions” are heard. There is no permanent solution. There are no ends to processions. Time has not healed the urban human community to be peaceful and contented enough to put an end to processions. Let us discuss the points one by one. The first theme is illustrated in the text in this section, where the characters of One, Two and so on repeat the various clichéd and pretentious utterances of powerful figures in the city:

One: আমাদের আরো দুর্দশার জন্য প্রস্তুত থাকতে হবে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী।

Two: ঘন ঘন রাজধানীতে যাই রাজ্যেরই প্রয়োজনে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী।

¹⁹⁴ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 22-23.

Three: তেলের বিষয়ে ব্যবসায়ীদের সঙ্গে কোনো ভদ্রলোকের চুক্তি হয় নি।
খাদ্যমন্ত্রী।

Four: শহরের ফুটপাথ বিলি করবার অধিকার পৌরসভার আছে। পৌরপিতা।

Five: আধ্যাত্মিকতার পথেই দেশের সমৃদ্ধি আসবে। জগৎগুরু।

Six: সার্থক জন্ম আমার জন্মেছি এই দেশে। কবিগুরু।¹⁹⁵

[One: ‘We must be prepared for more critical times.’ Prime Minister.

Two: ‘I run to the Capital again and again only in the interest of the State.’ Chief Minister.

Three: ‘There was no gentlemen’s agreement with the traders about oil.’ Food Minister.

Four: ‘The Municipal Corporation reserves the right to allocate the city’s sidewalks.’ Mayor.

Five: ‘Spiritualism alone can bring prosperity to the nation.’ Jagat Guru.

Six: ‘Blessed am I to be born into this land.’ Poet Guru.]¹⁹⁶

It is curious to see Rabindrath Tagore (popularly known as “Kabi-guru”/ Poet Guru) quoted along with the others in the section of the text quoted above. It might be such that Sircar wants to contrast the corrupt privileged figures and their false utterances with that of Tagore’s, highlighting how Tagore’s original vision of the Indian society has degraded with time. This thought probably has also been illustrated in another portion of the text where a singer starts singing an Indian classical composition, which transforms into one of Tagore’s songs, then into a light pop number, a film song and finally, cries of animals (donkeys, goats, cats and ducks).¹⁹⁷ Now, this might open up a debate on why art forms

¹⁹⁵ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 216.

¹⁹⁶ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 23.

¹⁹⁷ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 233.

are being categorized by Sircar as high-level and low-level, or why are animals being seen as that of a lower-category than humans. Going by an earlier explanation, it might be stated again, that Sircar is illustrating a point to the general mass, going by traditional notions of things. He does that throughout the text, in other places where animals are mentioned. He might not be placing his own beliefs. Coming back to the privileged power-hungry public figures, in the text they are seen distracting the mass and killing the latter's thinking-power with various activities, deflecting the latter's attention from the grim and real issues:

The Master (“Korta”): বেশ বেশ। মানুষকে সুখে রেখো, শান্তিতে রেখো, শৃঙ্খলায় রেখো। মানুষ আনন্দ করুক। শিল্প দাও, কৃষ্টি দাও, সংস্কৃতি দাও। আর্ট। কালচার। রসে ডুবিয়ে দাও মানুষকে। যতো নোংরা প্রশ্ন মনে ওঠে —রসে চাপা দাও। মনে রেখো—মানুষ পশু নয়। রসের বন্যায় ভেসে যেতে, ডুবে যেতে, মানুষই পারে।¹⁹⁸

[The Master: Good good. Keep the men happy, give them peace, discipline. Let people enjoy their lives. Give them art and culture. Art. Culture. Keep them submerged in aesthetic pleasure. Every dirty doubt that surfaces—drown in it pleasure. Keep in mind, men are not animals. Only men can flow along the floodwaters of such pleasure, lose themselves in its depths.]¹⁹⁹

We should also look at this section:

Chorus: বাজার অবতার শ্রীকৃষ্ণকি জয়! বাবা কালোবাজারের চরণে সেবা লাগি — কালাদেব। কালাবাবা পার করোগা। ... ভোট ফর—কালোরাম বাজারিয়া।

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 232-233.

¹⁹⁹ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 45.

(পেটমোটা মুনাফাখোরের ভঙ্গী ধরে নাচ শুরু হলো)

One: চাল!

Two: ডাল!

Three: তেল!

Four: চিনি!

Five: ময়দা!

One: কয়লা!

Two: ভূমি!

Three: কেরোসিন!

Four: বেবিফুড!

Five: টেক্সট বুক!

(আবার ধ্বনি)

Chorus: ভোট ফর কালোরাম বাজারিয়া। ভোট ফর কালোরাম বাজারিয়া।

...

Six: অ মা-আ-আ! মা গো-ও-ও! বাসি রুটি পাই মা-আ-আ! অ মা-আ-আ!

...

Khoka: চুপ করো!...

...

Officer (“Kotal”): কেউ খুন হয় নি। চালিয়ে যাও। ...²⁰⁰

[Chorus: Glory be to Lord Krishna, avatar of the markets. We bow at the feet of Lord Blackmarket. Hail to the Black God! ... Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala!

(They turn into potbellied profiteers and begin dancing.)

One: Rice.

²⁰⁰ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 223.

Two: Dal.

Three: Oil.

Four: Sugar.

Five: Flour.

One: Coal.

Two: Bran.

Three: Kerosene.

Four: Baby food.

Five: Textbooks.

(Slogans again)

Chorus: Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala. Vote for Mr Blackie Marketwala.

...

Six: O Moth-e-e-er. O Moth-e-e-er. A crust of stale bread please, moth-e-e-er. O mother—O moth-e-e-er!

...

Khoka: Stop it...

...

Officer (“Kotal”): Nobody’s killed. Carry on...]²⁰¹

Continuing with the depiction of the marginalized human condition in the contemporary city space by Sircar, two sections in the text are worth noticing. The following quote carries a tone of despair:

One: এ দেশের দরকার মিলিটারি দিক্টেটরশিপ। সব তেড়িবেড়ি পিটিয়ে ঠাণ্ডা করে দেওয়া দরকার।...

²⁰¹ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 32-33.

Three: খালি স্ট্রাইক আর ঘেরাও! এই জন্যই জিনিসপত্রের দাম বাড়ছে।...

Five: দুনিয়ার সব শালা লুটেপুটে থাক্ছে, আমি কেন থাকবো না?...

One: আমরা কি চিরদিন দুর্বল জাতি হয়ে থাকবো? সবে অ্যাটম বোমা তৈরি শুরু হলো!

Three: ছোটলোকদের যে কী বাড় বেড়েছে আজকাল! রিক্সাওয়ালারা পর্যন্ত চোখ রাঙিয়ে কথা বলে?²⁰²

[One: This country needs military dictatorship. They should all be thrashed into order...

Three: Strikes and gheraos all the time. No wonder prices soar...

Five: All the fellows in the world steal and plunder. Why shouldn't I? ...

One: We will remain a weak nation for ever? Just about begin making atom bombs! ...

Three: The lower classes are getting so impertinent. Even the rickshaw-wallahs put on airs.]²⁰³

Then again,

One: তিন বছরেও চাকরি হলো না, বাবা রিটায়ার করে গেলো।

Two: কারখানায় আজ ছত্রিশ দিন লক-আউট, ঘরে হাঁড়ি চড়ে না।

Three: অকালে বৃষ্টি হয়ে ধান পচে গেলো, মহাজনের কাছে দেনার পাহাড়।

Four: ভেজাল তেল খেয়ে বাড়ি শুদ্ধু শয্যাশায়ী, ডাক্তার ডাকবার পয়সা নেই।

Five: ভাইটাকে পুলিশে ধরে নিয়ে গেলো, পিটিয়ে মেরে ফেললো।

One: ছন্দা আমাকে বিয়ে করবে না, বলে দিয়েছে।

²⁰² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khandra*, 231.

²⁰³ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 42-43.

Two: ছেলেটা পরীক্ষা দিলো না, রাস্তায় মস্তানি করে বেড়ায়।

Three: দাদা বৌদিকে নিয়ে ভিন্ন হয়ে গেলো, চিঠিও লেখে না।

Four: বাড়ির কারো সঙ্গে কারো বনে না, চব্বিশ ঘন্টা খিটিমিটি।

Five: আর্ট স্কুলে ফার্স্ট হয়ে ছবি আঁকতে পারি না, সাবানের ক্যান-ভাসার।

Chorus: প্রভু আর তো পারি না। ...²⁰⁴

[One: Three years without a job, even Father's retired now.

Two: Thirty-six days now there's been a lockout at the factory, not a morsel at home.

Three: Unseasonal rain makes all the paddy rot, mountains of debt collect at the moneylender's.

Four: Adulterated cooking oil's given the whole family food poisoning but there's no money to pay for a doctor.

Five: The police took my brother away, beat him to death.

One: Chhanda won't marry me, she told me so.

Two: My son didn't sit for his examinations, joined the street gangs instead.

Three: My older brother and sister-in-law stay separate now, don't even write to us.

Four: I can't bear the people at home, they're always quarrelling.

Five: A first at Art School but I can't even paint. I'm a canvasser for soap instead.

Chorus: Oh Master, we can't bear it any longer...]²⁰⁵

In the next section from the text cited below, Sircar brings up issues like the journey and the inner dynamics of the human community, across time. It shows the

²⁰⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 225.

²⁰⁵ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 35-36.

changes of the human condition in a certain landscape. The conscious hierarchy between humans and animals are also brought up:

One: বিশ্বরক্ষাণ্ডে সূর্য একটা তারা। পৃথিবী সূর্যের একটা গ্রহ। মানুষ পৃথিবীর সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ জীব।

Two: সৃষ্টির গোড়ায় সব মানুষ সমান ছিল। কিন্তু তারা ছিল অসভ্য!

Three: সারাদিন খেটেও পেটভরা খাদ্য তারা জোগাড় করতে পারতো না। তাই তারা সমান ছিল!

Four: তারপর মানুষ পশুপালন শিখলো, কৃষি শিখলো। খেয়ে পরে উদ্ধৃত হলো।

Five: উদ্ধৃত সভ্যতা আনলো। মানুষ সভ্য হলো। সভ্যতা, সভ্য মানুষ, সভ্য সমাজ।

One: উদ্ধৃত ভোগ করবে কে? সবাই? না! যার গুণ আছে, বুদ্ধি আছে, শক্তি আছে।

Two: প্রভুর গুণ আছে, বুদ্ধি আছে, শক্তি আছে। তাই পৃথিবীতে প্রভু আর দাস আছে, থাকবে—এই দেবতার বিধান।

Three: হাতির খোরাক কখনো পিঁপড়ের খোরাকের সমান হতে পারে না—মহাস্থারা বলে গেছেন।

Four: বিজ্ঞানের জয়যাত্রা, সভ্যতার জয়যাত্রা। উত্পাদন বাড়ছে, সম্পদ বাড়ছে, আরো অনেক বাড়তে পারে।

Five: সে সম্পদ সব মানুষকে সমান ভালোভাবে বাঁচতে দিতে পারে। কিন্তু তাহলে প্রভু থাকবে না, সভ্যতা ধ্বংস হবে!...

Chorus: প্রভু! প্রভু!

The Master: সভ্যতার সবচেয়ে বড়ো শত্রু কে?

Chorus: সাম্যবাদ!

The Master: সভ্যতার ধারক বাহক রক্ষাকর্তা কে?

Chorus: প্রভু তুমি!

The Master: কিছু ভাবিস নে বাবারা, তোদের আমি সভ্য রাখবো। সাম্যবাদ পশুদের ধর্ম! ভুলে যাস নি, তোরা পশু নোস, তোরা মানুষ।

Chorus: কিন্তু প্রভু, আমরা যে দুঃখে মরে যাচ্ছি?

The Master: মরে স্বর্গে যাবি, তখন সুখ পাবি —স্বর্গসুখ! পশুদের স্বর্গ নেই। তোরা যেন মানুষ হয়ে মরতে পারিস—এই আশীর্বাদ করি।²⁰⁶

[One: The Sun is a star in the cosmos. The Earth is a planet revolving around the sun. Man is the greatest creature on Earth.

Two: All men were equal at the beginning of Creation. But they were uncivilized.

Three: All day long they worked yet there was never enough to eat. So they were equal!

Four: Then men learnt to use animals, learnt how to farm. Then they had surplus.

Five: Surplus brought civilization. Man became civilized. Civilization civilized man, civilized society.

One: Who would enjoy the surplus? Everyone? No. Only those with virtue, with intelligence, with strength.

Two: The Master has virtue, intelligence, strength. So the world is divided into masters and slaves. And always will be. Thus have the gods willed for us.

Three: That which feeds the ant cannot fill the belly of the elephant. Thus have the great men taught us.

Four: The progress of science, the progress of civilization. Production is on the increase, wealth is on the increase and shows every sign that it will increase further.

Five: So that there will be wealth enough to ensure a good life for all men. But that will eliminate the Master. Civilization will crumble...

Chorus: Master! Master!

The Master: What is the greatest enemy of civilization?

Chorus: Communism.

The Master: Who upholds, preserves and protects civilization?

Chorus: You, Master!

²⁰⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 224-225.

The Master: Rest assured, my children. I'll keep you civilized. Communism is for animals. Remember—you are not animals, you are men.

Chorus: But Master, we are so very miserable.

The Master: There's heaven for you after you die, and heavenly happiness. Animals have no heaven. You'll die as men, not animals: this is blessing...]²⁰⁷

In the last section of the text that would be examined below, historical events with their countless processions have been depicted, which have impacted the Indian landscape. Sircar wishes to make the audience realize whether those processions and the consequent violence have brought in any permanent solution:

Five: ডেথ্ টু দ্য ব্রিটিশ ডগ্-স্।

[মুখে বোম্বার শব্দ করলো]

Four: ডেথ্ টু দ্য টেররিষ্ট-স্।

[মুখে গুলি করার শব্দ...]

One: স্বরা-আ-আ-জ!

Two: অহিংসা-আ-আ!

Three: অসহযো-ও-ও-গ!

Four: সত্যগ্রহ-অ-অ!

Five: চরকা-আ-আ!

One: হিন্দু মুসলিম এক হো!

Two: কুইট ইন্ডিয়া!

Three: ডু অর ডাই!

²⁰⁷ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 33-35.

Four: করেঙ্গে ইয়া মরেঙ্গে!

Five: ব্রিটিশ সাম্রাজ্যবাদ ভারত ছাড়ে! ...

One: লড়কে লেঙ্গে পাকিস্তান! ...

One Part of the Chorus: আল্লা হো আকবর!

Other part of the Chorus: বন্দে মাতারম্! ...

Chorus: মার শালাকে! মার! মার শালাদের! ...²⁰⁸

[Five: Death to the British dogs! (Makes the sound of a gunshot.)

Four: Death to the terrorists! (Makes the sound of a gunshot)

...

One: Free-ee-ee-dom!

Two: Non-violence!

Three: Non-coopera-a-ation.

Four: Satyagraha-a-a-a-a.

Five: Char-kh-ha-aa!

One: Hindus and Muslims unite!

Two: Quit India.

Three: Do or Die.

Four: Karengē ya marengē.

Five: British Imperialists, leave India! ...

One: Ladke lenge Pakistan. We'll win Pakistan by force...

One Part of the Chorus: Allah Ho Akbar!

Other part of the Chorus: Vande Mataram! ...

Chorus: Thrash the bastards! Thrash them! Thrash the bastards!]²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khandā*, 221.

²⁰⁹ Sircar, *Three Plays*, 30-31

It deserves mention that in the same year of composing *Michhil*, that is 1974, Sircar had composed two plays called, *Bhanumatika Khel* (“The Tricks of Bhanumati”) and *Nidhiramer Rajya* (“Nidhiram’s Kingdom”), that are unfortunately unavailable. They never came out on print. Two other plays composed during this period that are available to us, however, are discussed later in this chapter: *Natyakarer Sandhane Tinti Charitra* and *Rupkathar Kelenkari*.

*Circus*²¹⁰ (1969) is another text, where one would get reminded of *Michhil*, and vice-versa. It has an urban setting where there is a crisscross of various people and events, presented to the reader/audience on a single stage. The play overall, critiques the system and implies that it is a meaningless circus, where the citizens are dictated to play the fool. As seen in his many other plays, here too, Sircar implies that economic inequality and consolidation of power is just one section of the human community is unnatural. Two characters in this text stand out: Felu and Kumar, who display rebelliousness in their own ways. Sircar’s concern about history is again brought out in this text, when he shows various events that have ruptured/reconstructed/shaped the Indian landscape, over the years. The presentation comes with an implicit scepticism, as well. For instance:

Samir: ব্রিটিশ সাম্রাজ্যবাদ—

Everybody: ধ্বংস হোক!

...

²¹⁰ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 439-488.

Samir: হিন্দু মুসলিম—

Everybody: এক হো!

...

Samir: বন্ধুগণ! ব্রিটিশ সাম্রাজ্যবাদের দিন শেষ হয়ে গেছে। ভারতবর্ষে তাদের এতদিনকার ঘৃণ্য বিভেদনীতির মুখোশ খুলে গেছে। হিন্দু মুসলমান আজ এক হয়ে এক গলায় গর্জে উঠেছে...²¹¹

[Samir: British Imperialism...

Everybody: Let it get destroyed!

...

Samir: Hindu-Muslim...

Everybody: Unite!

...

Samir: Friends! The days of British Imperialism are over. Their mask of implementing the hateful divide-and-rule policy has been pulled off, in India. Hindus and *Musalman*s have united, roaring in unison...]

Again,

Felu: ... উনিশশো ছেচল্লিশ কেটে যাচ্ছে, হিন্দু মুসলমান কেটে যাচ্ছে, পরস্পরকে কেটে যাচ্ছে। উনিশশো সাতচল্লিশ আসছে, বছর ঘুরে যাচ্ছে, কাটাকাটির বছর, অগাস্ট মাস আসছে, পনেরোই অগাস্ট—জয় হিন্দ!

...

Everybody: (নেপথ্যে) জয় হিন্দ!

Felu: স্বাধীন ভারতকি—

²¹¹ Ibid., 449.

Everybody: (নেপথ্যে) জয়!

Felu: আজাদ হিন্দ!

Everybody: (নেপথ্যে) জিন্দাবাদ!

Felu: কিন্তু কলকাতায় সেদিন আরো জোর এক আওয়াজ।

Everybody: (নেপথ্যে) হিন্দু মুসলিম—ভাই ভাই! হিন্দু মুসলিম—ভাই ভাই!

Felu: দাঙ্গা শেষ। এক বছরের কাটাকাটি খুনোখুনি শেষ।...

...

Everybody: ইয়ে আজাদি ঝুটা হ্যায়—ভুলো মাং, ভুলো মাং।

...

Felu: কালা কানুন।... আজাদ সরকারে যাদের মন ভরেনি তাদের আজাদি ঘুচলো। তাদের পার্টি বে-আইনি হলো, মাটির নিচে গেলো —আন্ডারগ্রাউন্ড। জেল, পুলিশ, লাঠি।...²¹²

[Felu: Nineteen forty six is passing; Hindus and Muslims are slashing each other. Nineteen forty seven is arriving; an old year is ending; a year of slaughter; the month of August is arriving; August fifteenth – *Jai Hind!*

...

Everybody: (Off-stage) *Jai Hind!*

Felu: To the independent *Bharat*...

Everybody: (Off-stage) *Jai!*

Felu: *Azad Hind!*

Everybody: (Off-stage) *Zindabad!*

Felu: But in Calcutta, there was another loud voice, that day.

Everybody: (Off-stage) Hindu-Muslim *Bhai-bhai!* Hindus and Muslims are brothers!

Felu: The riot's ended. The slaughters and murders of a year has ended...

...

²¹² Ibid., 459.

Everybody: This is a false independence – Don't forget, *bhulo mat!*

Felu: A dark law... Independence has ended for those who were not content with the independent government. Their parties became illegal. Sunk underground. Underground. Jails, police, *lathi...*]

Now, it is time to look at the two characters more closely – Felu and Kumar. Reading the play, Felu's name is interesting to note. It comes from the words, "failure" or "to fail", and might point out that he has failed to make the system better, succumbing to the ruthless dictatorship as a mere subject. However, Felu is socially aware and possesses a brilliant mind. He often scathingly criticises and comments on the system and the rulers. His daily coping mechanism in the dictatorial system is through humour. He makes a mockery out of the situation. After all, he is a clown in the "circus", both literally and metaphorically. Dictatorship in the system is presented to the reader/audience in the text by Felu in ways like these:

(অন্ধকার হয়ে গেলো। ব্যান্ড বেজে উঠল —সার্কাসের ব্যান্ড। আলো। ... ম্যানেজার ঢুকলো, হাতে চাবুক।)

Manager: ফ্যালারাম! ফ্যালারাম কোথায়?

(সকলে ছুটোছুটি করতে লাগলো)²¹³

[(The stage becomes dark. The band starts playing. It is a circus band. Lights... The Manager enters. Whip in hand.)

Manager: Fyalaram? Where is Fyalaram?

(Everybody starts running helter-skelter)]

²¹³ Ibid., 446.

Then again,

Felu: আমি কে স্যার?

Manager: তুমি ফ্যালারাম।

Felu: বোধ হয়—না স্যার।

Manager: (হংকারে) ফের বাজে কথা?

Felu: ইয়েস স্যার।

Manager: কী বললে??

Felu: নো স্যার!²¹⁴

[Felu: Who am I, Sir?

Manager: You are Fyalaram.

Felu: I rather... Think not, Sir.

Manager: (Roaring) Again, speaking nonsense?

Felu: Yes, Sir!

Manager: Say what??

Felu: No, Sir!]

In another part of the text, Felu addresses a character, Bishu, saying that twenty years have passed after 1950. Knowing the answers already, he mocks Bishu, asking the latter if (in such a system) he had got a job or fulfilled his dreams. Finally, he invites Bishu to

²¹⁴ Ibid., 447.

join him as a clown in this “circus”, as that is exactly what they are doomed to be.²¹⁵ Felu succeeds in creating an impact on the reader/audience, provoking their thoughts on the dangerous realities waiting to arrive.

Kumar is also successful in creating such an impact. Kumar’s personality is different from Felu’s. He is a mature and presumably middle-aged man. Despite his age and despite the corrupt system of government, he raises his voice visibly at many points, and shows zest in trying to bring in change. Most of his opinions are heard by the reader/audience, during his interaction with the character of Ratna, a close associate. He and Ratna realize a big truth of the present reality, saying at one point:

Kumar: আমি জানি—মরা খুব সোজা, বাঁচা অতো সহজ নয়।

Ratna: কী নিয়ে বাঁচবো আমি? কিছুই যে বাকি নেই আর।²¹⁶

[Kumar: I know – Death is easier. Living, not so much.

Ratna: What will I hold on to, in order to live? There’s no longer anything left.]

Still, the aggressive rebel in him scolds Ratna for her despair:

Kumar: জন্মেছো কী করতে? ... দাম দিতে হবে না? হিসেব চোকাতে হবে না জীবনের সঙ্গে? অন্য মানুষ তোমাকে বাঁচিয়ে রাখবে? তোমার দেনা অন্য মানুষ শুধবে? ...²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ibid., 472-473.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 442.

[Kumar: Why were you born?... Isn't the payment necessary? Isn't settling accounts with life necessary? Will other folks keep you alive? Will other people repay your debt?...]

Like Felu, Kumar displays his awareness of the socio-economic reality in front of the reader/audience, often attempting to think of solutions:

Kumar: বাসস্টপ থেকে হেঁটে আসবার পথে কী দেখলে?

Ratna: কী দেখব? যা দেখা যায় বরাবর?

Kumar: একটা ছোট্ট মাচায় বসে একজন পান বেচছে, তার নিচে ছোট্ট খুপরিতে বসে দু'জন বিড়ি পাকাচ্ছে। ফুটপাথে ফলওয়ালা, কাপড়ওয়ালা, জুতো-পালিশ, ভিথিরি, আবর্জনা আর ষাঁড়। মানুষ রাস্তায় হাঁটছে, গাড়ি হর্ন দিচ্ছে, রিকশাওয়ালা মোটা মোটা তিনজনকে টেনে নিয়ে যাচ্ছে, ঠেলাওয়ালা—

Ratna: এসব কী বলছো?

Kumar: দেখেছো কি না বলো? বাসের হাতল ধরে মানুষ ঝুলছে, ভাঙা পুরোনো বাড়ির পাইপ ফেটে জল ছিটিয়ে পড়ছে রাস্তায়। একটা পকেটমার ধরা পড়েছে, আর যতো চেপে রাখা রাগ তাকে পিটিয়ে ঠাণ্ডা হতে চাইছে। ছেলেগুলো গলিতে ক্যান্সিসের বল পিটছে, রকে বসে থিস্তি করছে, মেয়ে দেখলে শিস দিচ্ছে। ... দশ বছরের ছেলে চায়ের দোকানে চোদ্দ ঘন্টা খাটছে, আর খেতে পাচ্ছে না খেতে পাচ্ছে না কেউ খেতে পাচ্ছে না। ...²¹⁸

[Kumar: What did you see on the way, while walking from the bus stop?

Ratna: What would I see? Whatever is always seen?

Kumar: Sitting on a wee platform, one person is selling betel leaves. Below him inside a small cell, are two people rolling *bidis*. On the footpath, there are fruit-sellers, clothes-sellers, shoe-polishers, beggars, trash and oxen. People walking on

²¹⁷ Ibid., 443.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 445.

the streets, cars honking, the rickshaw puller carrying three overweight people, and the handbarrow-pusher...

Ratna: What all these are you saying?

Kumar: Tell me if you're seeing all this? People hanging from the handle of the bus, water spraying on the road from the burst pipe of an old building. A pickpocket has been caught, and all the repressed rage is calling for satisfaction, through beating him up. On the alleys, the boys are hitting cambis balls; sitting on the porches and cursing among one another; whistling whenever they see a girl... A ten year old boy slogging fourteen hours in the tea-stall, and he can't eat – cannot eat, nobody can eat...]

Again,

Kumar: লাখ লাখ বেকার শহরে। কোটি কোটি খুদে চাষি, ক্ষেতমজুর গ্রামে। সবাই কাজ পেতে পারে, পেট ভরে খেতে পারে! আমি প্রমাণ করে দিতে পারি!

Ratna: কি বলছ তুমি?

Kumar: হ্যাঁ হ্যাঁ সত্যি! কিন্তু হবে না। কতকগুলো লোকের ব্যক্তিগত স্বার্থের জন্যে হবে না! হবে না, কিন্তু আমরা কী করবো বলে দিতে পারো? ভালোবাসবো? মাথা খুঁড়ে মরবো? ঠ্যাং ছড়িয়ে বসে কাঁদবো?²¹⁹

[Kumar: Lakhs of unemployed in the city. Crores of small farmers and field-workers in the villages. Everybody could get work, eat to their heart's content. I'd be able to prove it!

Ratna: What are you saying?

Kumar: Yes, yes, it's true! But it won't happen. Because of some people's personal interests! It won't happen, but could you tell me what we are supposed to do? Love? Die, banging our heads? Kick our legs and cry?]

²¹⁹ Ibid., 446.

The reader/audience understands that Kumar is not someone who would be bogged down. He would continue to go against the grain and rebel, come what may. Towards the end of the text, we find out that Kumar has some sort of a fever.²²⁰ Now, this ‘fever’ could be a literal one, due to his advancing age. It could also be a kind of fever the present system has given him – making him tired and weary of fighting for the most basic rights. Even though, Ratna tries to interrupt and ask him to take rest, his passion for the betterment of the system continues through his speech, despite the fever:

Kumar (with Ratna constantly interrupting him, asking him to rest): জমির মালিকানা ব্যবস্থায় একটা আমূল পরিবর্তন যদি ... ঘটানো যায় তাহলে জমির মালিক, খাদ্যের ব্যবসাদার আর সুদখোর মহাজন ... সেটাকে ... ভাঙা যায় অনেকটা। চাষির হাতে জমি গেলেই কিন্তু সবটা হোলো না রত্না। তার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ... চাই আধুনিক চাষের সরঞ্জাম—সার, বীজ, পোকামারা ওষুধ, নলকূপ ... ব্যাঙ্কের টাকা ধার করে হতে পারে ... শোধ দিতে কোনো অসুবিধে নেই ... চাকাটা কিন্তু ঘোরানো যায়, রত্না।...²²¹

[Kumar: If there’s a radical change in the land-ownership system... Then the landlord, the dealer of food and the profit-oriented moneylender... That nexus... Could be destroyed. All is not solved, Ratna, if the land goes to the farmer’s hands. Along with it... Modern farming equipment is required – fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, tube-wells... Could take loan from banks... Not difficult to repay... The wheel could be turned, Ratna...]

The metaphor of illness, the inequality in the human community, and the concern about the Indian landscape and rights of the contemporary farmers in this text, once again, displays Sircar’s ecological concerns.

²²⁰ Ibid., 485-486.

²²¹ Ibid., 486-487.

*Abu Hossain*²²²(1972), is a comedy and in the fictitious medieval world where it is set, only the characters of the “madmen” seem to speak sense. These men are social outcasts and going by what they say, they are the only ones who point out to the unnatural and imperfect situation of socio-economic inequality. Even if their so-called solutions to this problem are apparently impractical, they are the only ones who at least think of solving the situation. For instance, at one point one of the madmen says thus:

Second Madman (to the guard of the mental asylum): ... আমাকে এক মুঠো সোনা এনে দাও, এখনই সোনার পৃথিবী সৃজন করবো। সুখে স্বচ্ছন্দে সেখানে থাকতে পারবে। সবাই পেট ভরে খেতে পারে, ভালো বাড়িতে থাকবে, গরিব বড়লোক বলে কিচ্ছু থাকবে না, রাজা বাদশা থাকবে না—²²³

[Second Madman: Bring me a fistful of gold right now, and I will create a golden world. You will be able to live there happy and at ease. All would be able to eat to their hearts' content. All would live in big houses. There would be no rich or poor, no kings or Badshahs...]

Also,

Second Madman: সোনা! সোনার পৃথিবী। দুর্ভিক্ষ থাকবে না, অনাহার থাকবে না, লড়াই থাকবে না। এক মুঠো সোনা এনে দাও। সোনার পৃথিবী সৃজন করবো।²²⁴

[Second Madman: Gold! A golden world! No famine, no starvation, no combat. Bring me a fistful of gold. I will create a golden world.]

²²² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 61-119.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 96.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

Another one points out to the then conditions of the farmers, from whom the real food resources are supposed to emerge:

Fourth Madman: ... চাষি! যাকে বলে —চাষা। খেতে পায় না, ছেঁড়া ন্যাকড়া পরা...²²⁵

[Fourth Madman: A farmer! Chasha! He starves, wears torn and tattered clothes...]

Sircar points out to some grave issues (albeit connected to ecology) that transcends his fictitious medieval world to our present reality.

The above thought continues in his *Spartacus* (1972), as well – the time frame of the text and events set in the past (ancient Rome), but having relevance and repercussions in the present age. Sircar shows us how certain phenomena within the human community, and certain human conditions are universal, constant across time. These phenomena include the unnaturalness of enslavement, the torture that slaves go through, and the inevitable protests and struggles for freedom. In fact, at the beginning of the text there are violent images illustrating these phenomena.²²⁶ The character of the Narrator links the ancient and the contemporary ages, Rome and India, saying:

²²⁵ Ibid., 97.

²²⁶ Ibid., 123.

The Narrator: কাজ। খেলা। শাস্তি। কাজ। খেলা। শাস্তি। মানুষের নয়, ক্রীতদাসের।
 ... এখন বিংশ শতাব্দী ... সত্য মানুষ, সত্য সমাজ। তাই কি? আমরা জানি না।
 ... আমরা প্রভু, আমরা দাস। দু হাজার বছর আগে এবং আজ। ... রোম
 সাম্রাজ্যে, ভারতবর্ষে।²²⁷

[Work. Play. Punishment. Work. Play. Punishment. Not of human beings, but of slaves... It's the twentieth century now... Civilized humans, civilized society. Is that so? We don't know... We are the masters, and the slaves. Two thousand years ago, and still now... In the Roman Kingdom, in India, too.]

Hinting enslavement as a result of power-play and exploiting the weaker sections of the human society, the characters of Cicero and Antonius discuss:

Cicero: ... দুনিয়ার মধ্যে রোমই প্রথম দাসের প্রয়োজনীয়তা বুঝতে পেরেছিলো।

Antonius: কিন্তু রোমের আগেও তো দাস ছিল?

Cicero: ছিল। এখানে কিছু, ওখানে কিছু। কিন্তু আমাদের? আমাদের ক্ষেত খামার চালাচ্ছে দাস, বাড়ি তুলছে দাস, জুতো জামা তৈরি করা থেকে শুরু করে রান্না করা, বাসন ধোওয়া, ছেলে মানুষ করা —সব দাস। রোমের আগে পৃথিবীতে কখনো এরকম ঘটেছে?²²⁸

[Cicero: ... Among the entire world, Rome first understood the necessity of slaves.

Antonius: But there were slaves elsewhere, much before Rome?

Cicero: Yes, there were. Scattered here and there. But our slaves? They maintain our fields and farms. Build our houses. From making our shoes and clothes, they cook for us, wash our dishes, raise our children. Has this happened anywhere before Rome?]

²²⁷ Ibid., 124.

²²⁸ Ibid., 128.

Cicero becomes a representation of how power-hungry and treacherous the privileged section of the human community could become. It loses all humanity or qualities that makes it human. When Antonius and Gracchus talk about Cicero, Gracchus has this to say:

Gracchus: বুদ্ধিমান, উচ্চাকাঙ্ক্ষী। এক ধাপ উপরে উঠতে নিজের মাকেও খুন করতে পারে।²²⁹

[Gracchus: Wise, ambitious. To climb a step further, he could even murder his own mother!]

This idea connects itself with *Michhil*. We get to see the privileged sections of the society overexploiting nature's resources, as well. In the text, there is mention of Nubian (North East Africa) gold mines and how labourers are exploited. The mines have been described as hell.²³⁰ History has seen how incessant domination of the lesser privileged, anywhere in the world at any time frame, leads to a rebellion from below most of the time. As predicted, under Spartacus' guidance, the slaves rebel against the Roman State. In the text there occurs a conflict between the slaves and the soldiers, where the both the sides throw spears at each other.²³¹ Calling upon the traditional hierarchy between human beings and animals, the slaves voice out their opinions against their powerful abusive masters saying statements like these:

²²⁹ Ibid., 131.

²³⁰ Ibid., 140.

²³¹ Ibid., 135.

Another Slave: তোমরা মানুষকে কুকুর বানিয়ে লড়াই করিয়ে আমোদ পাও।

Another Slave: দুনিয়াটাকে তোমরা একটা নোংরা আস্তাকুঁড় বানিয়েছো।

Varinia: মানুষকে তোমরা জন্তু বানিয়েছো।

Another Slave: হত্যাকে তোমরা খেলা বানিয়েছো।²³²

[Another Slave: You turn human beings into dogs, then make them fight. Then you gain pleasure.

Another Slave: You have made the world a filthy garbage bin.

Varinia: You have turned human beings into animals.

Another Slave: You have turned murder into a sport.]

The Narrator points out what Spartacus himself had said about the present society due to human inequality and unfair domination within it:

The Narrator: মাটির নীচ থেকে এসেছিলো স্পার্টাকুস। মাটির নীচ থেকে। ধর্মপুস্তকে নরকের বর্ণনা আছে। কিন্তু ধর্মপুস্তক লেখবার আগেও নরক ছিল। এ পৃথিবীতেই ছিল। এখনো বোধ হয় আছে। কারণ মানুষ শুধু সেই নরকেরই বর্ণনা দিতে পারে, যা সে নিজে সৃষ্টি করেছে।²³³

[Spartacus emerged from under the ground. Under the ground. In our religious text, hell has been described. But hell has been there even before those texts. Right here in our world. It might be there, still. Because humans could only describe that hell which they themselves have created.]

²³² Ibid., 162.

²³³ Ibid., 138.

Varinia, the dynamic female slave adds to this by bringing up Spartacus' vision – something similar to what we have seen in Sircar's other texts, like *Abu Hossain*.

Varinia: স্পার্টাকুস এমন একটা দুনিয়া বানাতে চেয়েছিলো, যেখানে দাস থাকবে না, প্রভু থাকবে না। যেখানে সব মানুষ সমান। যেখানে যুদ্ধ থাকবে না, দুঃখ থাকবে না, অভাব থাকবে না।²³⁴

[Spartacus wanted to create such a world, where there wouldn't be slaves or masters. Where, everyone would be equal. There wouldn't be any wars, sorrow or deficiency.]

Suitcase (1972) is set at the backdrop of the Indian landscape in 1942, and historical events in this text assume importance. The character of Shyamal is a revolutionary who has the police at his tail, while Abani has settled down with his wife and job, leaving his revolutionary past behind, a long while back. The reader/audience gets a feel of the historical goings-on at the backdrop of the text, through indirect ways. At one point when Shyamal secretly meets the character of Parul (Abani's wife) and asks her if she believes in their revolution, she responds, saying:

Parul: ও সব আমি বুঝি না। এইটুকু জানি—এটা ইংরেজদের দেশ থেকে তাড়ানোর লড়াই। আমার কাছে এইটুকুই যথেষ্ট।²³⁵

[Parul: I don't understand those things. I just know that – this battle is to drive the English out of our country. This much is enough for me.]

²³⁴ Ibid., 178.

²³⁵ Ibid., 186.

Again, the reader/audience sees the character of Bindu (Parul's neighbor) complaining:

Bindu: ... বলি পড়াশুনো হচ্ছে কিছু? তা উনি [referring to her husband] বলেন—
পড়াশুনা হবে কথেকে? সব ইংরেজ তাড়াতে ব্যস্ত! ইংরেজ তাড়াবে বলে গান্ধী
জহরলালকে পর্যন্ত ধরে জেলে পুরে দিলো, আর এই সব চ্যাংড়া ছেলেরা...²³⁶

[Bindu: ... I say, are there studies going on at all? Then he says – How would anybody study? Everybody's busy driving away the English! Gandhi-Jawaharlal were put to jail because they tried to drive the English out, and these over-smart boys...]

It is interesting to realise that in a selfless fight to save his homeland from foreign rule, Shyamal himself has no home and has to constantly be on the move to escape the agents of the system. He would only be able to create his identity when his country is independent, and he is able to settle in his desired part of the landscape, permanently. When one sees how Abani (who had a past as a revolutionary) has changed and has become selfish and image-conscious²³⁷, one realises the lack of harmony and power-plays within the human community, seeking to disintegrate its foundation.

Inequality, especially economic inequality, forms the overarching theme of *Lakshmichharar Panchali*²³⁸ (“The Panchali of the Wretched”; 1975), the next text to be discussed. The traditional Bangla Panchali form has been reworked by Sircar to give it a contemporary twist. Here it is addressed to the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth

²³⁶ Ibid., 190-191.

²³⁷ Ibid., 194.

²³⁸ Ibid., 241-253.

and fortune. Pacha and his uncle, Khuro (which means a paternal uncle in Bangla) represent the “have not”s of the human society, presumably from a rural part of the country. “Lakshmichhara” literally means one without Lakshmi’s blessings or grace, in Bangla. Pacha and Khuro are such financially underprivileged and deprived beings, the wretched of the society. They present this Panchali in front of the readers/audience, to voice out their marginalized and impoverished conditions. Pacha’s name itself poses as a subtle but important marker, as the word means rotten in Bangla. Pacha has a rebellious attitude towards the unfair and unnatural hierarchies within the human community. He expresses it once, saying:

Pacha: আমিও মানুষ বাবুও মানুষ দু’টো করে হাত
দু’ পা দু’ চোখ তবুও কেন আমরা ভিন্ন জাত?²³⁹

[Pacha: I am human, so is the master. We both have two hands
Two legs, two eyes. Why are we then of different castes?]

Somewhere, his uncle seems to agree, saying:

Khuro: গনতন্ত্রে সবাই স্বাধীন, সবাই থাকে বেঁচে বর্তে ...²⁴⁰

[Khuro: In a democracy everybody is free, everybody lives life well.]

²³⁹ Ibid., 247.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 252.

The uncle continues complaining about the present state of the country:

Khuro: কুঁড়েমি আর ফাঁকিবাজি দেশটাকে ডোবালো ...²⁴¹

[Khuro: Idleness and remissness are drowning the whole country ...]

Criticizing the privileged, wealthy upper class “masters”, he comments:

Khuro (addressing Lakshmi): ... বাবুর সিন্দুক আছে খোলা তুমি আসিবে বলিয়া।
বাবু নিত্য তোমার ভূত্য তোমার চরণ ধরে ...
ভক্তিভরে ঠাকুরঘরে মার্বেল বাঁধাই করে ...
রূপোর পাটে সোনার খাটে তোমার আসন পাতে ...²⁴²

[Khuro: The master’s treasure chest is open for your arrival.

The master is your ever-slave, he worships your feet...

With utter devotion, he creates a prayer-room out of marble...

He lays out your seat in a golden bed, on a silver plank...]

However, the uncle at times does seem to justify the present-day system, showing how he had been successfully brainwashed by it. He at one point in the text, says:

²⁴¹ Ibid., 248.

²⁴² Ibid., 246.

Khuro: ... পাঁচটা আঙুল হাতে আছে, সমান তারা হয়?
 এক মায়েরই পাঁচটা ছেলে এক রকম তো নয়?
 ঢ্যাঙা আছে বেঁটে আছে, আছে ফর্সা কালো,
 বোকা আছে চলাক আছে, আছে মন্দ ভালো,
 কেউ বা আছে সুবোধ বালক, সুবোধ মতিগতি,
 কোনোটা বা পাজির হাঁড়ি, সর্বদা দুর্মতি।²⁴³

[Khuro: ... Five fingers on one hand, are they the same?
 Five sons of one mother, aren't they not the same?
 A tall one, a short one, a fair and a dark one.
 A dumb one, a clever one, a bad and a good one.
 There's also one boy with a good sense of conduct.
 And another who is a pot filled with ever-wickedness.]

He does this to justify ideas like all human beings are not equal in every way. In the human community, one's luck and ability to be shrewd depends on one's success. Not realizing that it is the privileged class themselves who have created troubles for the underprivileged ones, he sings praises of the former at another point in the text:

Khuro: বিপদকালে বাবুরা বাঁচায়।
 উপোস থেকে বাবুরা বাঁচায়।

²⁴³ Ibid., 247.

কর্জ দিয়ে বাবুরা বাঁচায়।²⁴⁴

[Khuro: In times of trouble, the masters rescue us.

From hunger, the masters rescue us.

By lending loans, the masters rescue us.]

Pacha, however, stands his ground and against the unfair situation. Against human inequality and hierarchies. He justifies:

Pacha: ... আমরা যারা গতর খাটাই ফসল ফলাই ক্ষেতে।

দু'টি বেলা দু'মুঠো ভাত তাও জোটে না পাতে।। ...

হেঁসেল ঘরে নাই মা তুমি সবাই উপবাসী।। ...

অবশেষে পেলাম দেখা তুমি বস্তা বাঁধা।

মহাজনের গোলা থেকে লরীর উপর গাদা।। ...

... ঘাড়ে করে মাকে নিয়ে ব্যাঞ্চে চলে যা।

... মহাজনের গোলা হয়ে ব্যাঞ্চে চলে যা।

... মজুতদারের লরী চেপে ব্যাঞ্চে চলে যা।

... কালোবাজার আলো করে ব্যাঞ্চে চলে যা।²⁴⁵

[Pacha: We who slog our bodies, grow crops in the fields

Cannot even get two fists full of rice, two times a day...

You're not in our kitchens, Ma, everybody's hungry...

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 250.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 245.

At last I got to see you, but you were bound in sacks.

On the lorries of the moneylender, straight out of his barns...

... Carry Ma on your shoulders and rush to the bank.

... Turn into the money lender's barn and rush to the bank.

... Climb on to the hoarder's lorries and rush to the bank.

... Lighten up the black market and rush to the bank.]

At the play's closure, Pacha shares his ideal vision with his uncle and also with the readers/audience:

Pacha: না খুড়ো! খোলা বাজার আমাদের দরকার নেই। বাজারই দরকার নেই আমাদের! আমরাই বানাবো, আমরাই খাবো, বেচা কেনার ধার ধারবো না।

Khuro: ... বেচা কেনা চিরকালই আছে!

Pacha: মিথ্যে কথা খুড়ো! চিরকাল ছিল না, চিরকাল থাকবেও না। অনেক বানাতে পারি আমরা, সবাই মিলে ভাগ করে খেতে পারি। কিসের বাজার? কিসের বেচা কেনা? কিসের টাকা কড়ি, বিষয় সম্পত্তি? ...

থানা পুলিশ ব্যাঙ্ক আদালত উঠিয়ে দিয়ে ঘর বানাবো,

ভালবাসার বান ভাসাবো,

আবার মানুষ হবো ...²⁴⁶

[Pacha: No Khuro! We don't need a free market. We don't even need a market. We ourselves will create. We will consume that. We won't care about buying or selling.

Khuro: ... Buying and selling have been there forever.

Pacha: Lies, Khuro! They haven't been there forever. They won't be there forever. We could create huge amounts. We could share among ourselves equally,

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 253.

and consume it. What markets? What buying and selling? What money? What private property? ...

Abolish prisons, police, banks, courts. We would build homes.

We would release floods of affection.

We would become humans once again...]

Pacha points out how in order to be a true human being, one must have humanity. One must respect other human beings and living creatures and not support hierarchies like castes or class – or any other forms of man-made inequality. Through the mentioned last speech by Pacha, democratic socialist²⁴⁷ ideas are heavily flowing into the next play that would be looked at: *Hattamalar Opore*²⁴⁸ (“Beyond the Land of Hattamala”; 1977).

In *Hattamalar Opore*, there are two thieves, who are the principal characters: Becha and Kena. Interestingly, Becha means ‘to sell’ and Kena means ‘to buy’, in Bangla. It so happens in the text that these two characters end up in a parallel world, where they are surprised to find out that there is no concept of currency or money:

Kena: নে! ডাব-টাব খেয়ে—কী করি এখন? ...

ঠিক আছে। কাল তো আবার আসবো এই পথেই, তখন দিয়ে দেবো বুড়ি-মা।

Five [an old woman]: কী দেবে?

²⁴⁷ Briefly speaking, in democratic socialism there is the rejection of an authoritarian/centralized controlled government, and the attempt to transform it into a more politically democratic system. It attacks capitalism (even though it acknowledges its advantages). In case of the means of production, private ownership is called to transform itself to social/collective ownership and control (although it does not advocate complete nationalization of all properties). Rather than being profit-oriented for a few, it caters to the needs of the public. For the people, working becomes meaningful, enjoyable, responsible and motivational – as they work for the benefit of the community and society. Freedom of the individual citizens becomes most important. There is equal opportunity for all and payment according to one’s amount of work.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 375-406.

Becha: ঐ—দামটা!

Five: কী ‘দাম’? ...

‘দাম’? না কি ‘আম’ বললো? না ‘জাম’? কী যে বলে গেলো?²⁴⁹

[Kena: Oh! We drank the green coconut water, what do we do now? ...

Fine. We’ll be coming this way tomorrow, anyway. We’ll pay you then, Old-Miss?

Five: What will you pay?

Becha: Oh, the... price?

Five: What ‘price’? ...

‘Price’? Was it ‘rice’? Or ‘ice’? What the heck did he say exactly?]

They conclude that the new place is a city, as opposed to their village, seeing smoke coming out of some kind of a factory.²⁵⁰ Stark difference is shown between the city and the village, as the characters observe and explore the new place:

Becha: উরিব্বাস! কী বড়ো বড়ো বাড়ি! বাগান! ফোয়ারা! পাকা রাস্তা! সব ঝকঝক তকতক করছে! এ কোথায় এলাম গো দাদা? কলকাতা?

Kena: তোর মাথা! কলকাতা অতো সোজা কি না? ...

Becha: কিন্তু এতো বড়ো শহর?

Kena: কলকাতা এর থেকে অনেক বড়ো। তা ছাড়া কলকাতায় টেরাম্ গাড়ি আছে। এখানে দেখছিস কিছু সে রকম?

Becha: টেরাম্ গাড়ি কী?²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 382.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 380.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 382-383.

[Becha: *Uribbas!* Such big-big houses! Gardens! Fountains! Proper streets! Everything is so spic-and-span and sparkling! Where did we turn up, brother! Calcutta?

Kena: Your thick skull! You think reaching Calcutta is that easy? ...

Becha: But such a large city?

Kena: Calcutta is much larger than this. Moreover, there are t-e-ram cars in Calutta. Are you seeing such things here?

Becha: What are t-e-ram cars?]

Not believing their eyes that there are no policemen, their opinions are skeptical:

Kena [to Becha]: সব টিকটিকি বোধ হয়, সাদা পোশাকে ঘুরছে। এখানে সব উঁচু জাতের চোর, তাই পুলিসও টিকটিকি ছাড়া নেই।²⁵²

[Kena: All might be chameleons. In civil outfits. Here, the thieves are of a higher level, so the police are roaming about in civil outfits.]

They are also surprised when one of the citizens of the new city trusts them blindly and asks them to hand over a ripe Jackfruit to the local doctor.²⁵³ They, of course, mock that person after he is gone, and eat the jackfruit themselves. To their surprise, later in the text, the doctor is not even half annoyed with them, when he finds it out.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Ibid., 383.

²⁵³ Ibid., 388-389.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 403.

Slowly, Becha and Kena get attracted to the principles these citizens live by. They decide that they will continue to stay there and not leave. Citizens like the doctor's character makes them understand, eager to learn their skills of making holes in walls for good purposes, saying:

The Doctor: ... প্রতিটি মার—কাজের মার—কাজের কাজ—কাজ—মানুষ কাজ—
মানুষ কাজ করে—কেন করে—কেন করে—

Kena: ... কাজ—না করে—থাকা—যায়?

The Doctor: ... ঠিক। কাজ না করে থাকা যায় না। মানুষ কাজ করে। কাজ করে পৃথিবীর কাছ থেকে কতো কি আদায় করে নেয়; চাল-ডাল-নুন-তেল থেকে শুরু করে জামা জুতো বাড়ি ঘর বই কলম, কতো কী! সব আমরা কাজ করে বানাই, সবাই মিলে ভোগ করতে পারি, তাই না?²⁵⁵

[The Doctor: Every stroke is that of work. Working for work. Work. Humans and work. Humans work. Why do they work? Why do they work.]

Kena: ... Can anyone live—without work?

The Doctor: ... Correct! One cannot live without working. Human beings work. Through work, they gain so much from the world. Starting from rice-pulses-salt-oil to clothes, shoes, houses, rooms, books, pens and so much more! We produce all these through work, we all could consume them together, right?]

Becha and Kena's song at the end of the text, along with the rest, confirm their change of minds and principles:

Chorus: ... এই দুনিয়ায় যা কিছু দরকারি

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 404.

(আমরা) সবাই মিলে বানিয়ে নিতে পারি।
 সাধ্যমতো খাটবো সবাই, যার যা দরকার নিয়ে যাবো,
 কেনাবেচায় কী ফল পাবো?
 ভাগ করে সব খাবো ...
 ফলতু কেন বাজার যাবো?
 টাকার চাকর কেন হবো?
 ভাগ করে সব খাবো ...²⁵⁶

[Chorus: In this world, whatever is necessary
 We could all create them!
 We'd slog as much we are able to, and we'll take what is necessary.
 What benefit would we get in buying and selling?
 We'll share equally, then eat...
 Why should we go to the market, uselessly?
 Why should we be slaves of money?
 We'll share equally, then eat...]

The principles practiced in the new city (ideas of democratic socialism, as mentioned earlier) seek the harmonious coexistences of not only human beings with each other, but also human beings and nature, natural resources and other living creatures. These people seem to value nature by being grateful for the jackfruit (present in the doctor's speech), creating gardens and parks within the concrete jungle of the city and also finding beauty in the flora enough to make jewellery out of it²⁵⁷. The jewellery made out of flowers

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 405-406.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 399.

would prevent over-exploitation of natural resources like gold or diamonds. Also, interestingly, when Becha and Kena are getting inside the new city, leaving behind their former abode, they come to a garden. The garden, then, poses as the “forest” for renewal, healing and a new beginning. Kena and Becha are “cleansed” from their capitalistic principles.

Although the immediate subject matter is not about ecology, there are texts by Sircar, like *Samabritta*²⁵⁸ (“Thoroughly Concealed”; 1961), *Pagla Ghoda*²⁵⁹ (“The Mad Horses”/“The Wild Horses”; 1967), *Sagina Mahato*²⁶⁰ (1970) and *Bibar*²⁶¹ (“The Cave”; 1968), which contain traces of thought that could be considered tangentially related to ecological concerns. If one looks at *Samabritta*, the text is about the manipulation of physical resemblances of two people. A zamindar/landlord (Sujit) in troubled times tricks his lookalike (Prabir) to swap places and face the former’s troubles. Later, Prabir fights in place of Sujit and realizing Sujit’s treacherous nature, kills him at the end. Justifiably, Sujit’s home and fortunes become Prabir’s. At the beginning of the text, there is a dialogue between the two lookalikes, Prabir and Sujit.²⁶² The first thing to note here is the discussion on how a human being could turn violent when such a situation arises, and s/he breaks the code of morals and ethics within the human community – killing another human being. How society terms this act as “animalistic”, recalling the traditional hierarchy between humans and animals. The second thing to note are two images – The two men’s act of drinking alcohol, placed side by side their verbal glorification of a “twin brotherhood.” The reader/audience cannot help but wonder if Sircar is taking a dig at the

²⁵⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 200-259.

²⁵⁹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 377-438.

²⁶⁰ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 3-60.

²⁶¹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 335-375.

²⁶² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 204-205.

societal construction of patriarchal male chauvinism. The traditional hierarchy between humans and animals is also brought in when at a point Ananga (Sujit's trusted manservant) admits to Prabir that he is as stupid as a donkey. Ananga shows unquestioning submission to higher authorities; highlighting the unjustified "strong" and "weak" sections within the human community, at play.²⁶³ Also, in another part of the text, one finds Prabir intimidated by Shaila (Sujit's wife, Malabika's distant cousin) and wishing that he resembled a baboon instead of Sujit.²⁶⁴

As one continues through the text, one comes by Prabir's continuous search for a "home"; his preoccupation with it. Towards the beginning, he tells Sujit, as they have a conversation:

Prabir: ... চলো। চলো বাড়ি যাই। বাড়ি অনে—কদিন বাড়ি যাই নি। ...²⁶⁵

[Prabir: ... Let's go. Let's go home. It's been a-ges, since I've been home...]

Even at the end of the text, Prabir tells Sujit's daughter, Dipa (who mistakes him for Sujit):

Prabir: বাড়ি? ... অনেক রাতে বাড়ি ফিরেছি। অনেক রাতে। বাড়ি। বাড়ি ফিরেছি।²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Ibid., 215.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 220-221.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 207.

[Prabir: Home? ... I've returned home late at night. Home. I've returned home.]

Having to travel continuously to various parts of the globe because of a past crime, one finds Prabir admitting himself that he does not know who he is. That could probably be because he does not have a home. It seems that he constructs his own identity through the concept of home.²⁶⁷ Additionally, at another point in the text, when Sujit's doctor mistakes Prabir for the former and wonders if the former is alright, Prabir tells the doctor that he has no home.²⁶⁸ While in a conversation, Shaila points a very important fact out to Malabika:

Shaila: সুজিতের জমিদারির অবস্থা কীরকম— জানিস? ... জমিদারি গোল্লায় যেতে বসেছে।²⁶⁹

[Shaila: Do you have any idea of the condition of Sujit's estate? ... It is going to the dogs.]

This image could be connected to a bleak future of the local area as a whole, in general. One thinks of a similar comment and image present in *Ballabhpurer Roopkatha* (discussed earlier). One can also find Prabir trying to fix the sorry state of financial affairs. In a conversation with Sujit's doctor, Prabir points out that the soil in the area

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 259.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 217.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 210.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 213.

would be ideal for making pots and could pave a way for income. A productive cottage industry could be set up in the future.²⁷⁰ Thus we see him using/taking the help of natural resources to improve the living conditions of himself and the entire area. The final point to note in this text from an ecological angle is how the characters who run after urbanity, get tired of the wood and concrete, craving for nature to give them some relief. An instance is shown towards the end of the text, when Sujit comes out of his hiding and visits his house. Conversing with his wife, Sujit says:

Sujit: ও ঘরে দক্ষিণের জানলা দিয়ে অনেকদূর দেখা যায়। সেই নদীর ধারের গাছের সারি পর্যন্ত। ... ঐ জানলা দিয়ে কতোদিন আমি মুগ্ধ হয়ে নিচের বাগানের দিকে তাকিয়ে থেকেছি।

Malabika: (হাসিয়া) বাগান কোথায়? নিচে তো শান বাঁধানো কম্পাউন্ড।

Sujit: ঠিক। শান বাঁধানো কম্পাউন্ড। সেই জন্যেই তো আবার দূরে নদীর দিকে তাকাই। মনে হয় ঐ পাঁচিল ঘেরা সিমেন্ট করা কম্পাউন্ডের মধ্যে কোথায় যেন নদীর ধারের ব্যাপ্তি লুকিয়ে আছে।²⁷¹

[Sujit: One could see miles from the southern window in that room. Till the edge of the trees bordering the river... For so many days I have stared at the garden below from that window, in fascination.

Malabika: (laughing) Garden? Where? There is a paved compound, below.

Sujit: Right. A paved compound. That's exactly why I look at the river afar, again and again. It seems that the river bank is secretly extended till the walled cemented compound.]

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 229.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 242.

Instances such as this are direct hits by the literary artist at the urban human community – how these people in their pursuit of creating a city space, have moved away from nature, rejecting it and sharply distinguishing themselves from it. Ironically, nature does make its presence and importance felt.

Pagla Ghoda is the next play to be discussed. It is set in a Hindu cremation ground. Four men play cards, drink and talk amongst each other. Often the nature of their conversation sounds crude and sexist, with the use of foul language. As they share events of their past, the readers/audience realize how wrongly and disrespectfully they have treated the women in their lives, and how they view women in general. Overall, the text becomes a criticism of patriarchy. A spectre-like female character is also with them (they cannot see her), who morphs into the various women that the men talk about, also communicating certain observations and truths directly with the readers/audience. When one attempts to look at this text from an ecological lens, one first notes the setting. The space is a cremation ground – a complex space that the human society acknowledges and, at the same time, rejects. The society acknowledges the usefulness of the cremation ground to facilitate crossing-over of their dead, whenever such an occasion takes place. However, it is the same society that marginalizes that space – preferring to keep it away from their daily lives, not usually talking about it. Cremation grounds are spaces which are often perceived by the society as dark, supernatural, ominous and so on – something that should not be a part of its daily life. This might be the precise reason why these four men, seated in this complex, marginalized space, are not afraid to show their vulgar side, talking about certain taboos in their lives – not bothered about following societal norms or codes of conduct.

The next thing to look at in this text would be the hierarchies within the human community. These four men are the products of a patriarchal society. They have a misogynistic attitude towards women and they consider animals as inferior – often putting women and animals in the same platform, rendering them as “living” garbage. Mocking women, the character of Satu says to Himadri at one point:

Shashi: ... অলক্ষুণে কথা? বলতে নেই ষাট ষাট? অ্যাঁ? এ তো মেয়েদের মতো কথা হয়ে গেলো হিমাড্রি।

Himadri: ... মেয়েরাই তো এসব সংস্কার মাথায় ঢোকায় ছেলেবেলা থেকে।²⁷²

[Shashi: ... Ominous words? You shouldn't say such things, *Shat shat? Aen?* You talk like girls, Himadri.

Himadri: ... Women are the ones who put these ideas in our heads, right from childhood.]

It is implied by the patriarchal Satu, then, that a man who displays any moral or ethical conscience is not a real man. In order to make the reader/audience realize the mistreatment of women by these men and their attempt to hide their past, the ghostly girl continuously addresses these characters for the sake of the audience (even if the men are unaware of her presence):

The girl: বলবে না? মালতীর গল্প বলবে না?²⁷³

²⁷² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 392.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 397.

[The girl: Won't you say? Malati's story, won't you say?]

And also,

The girl: ... আমি কি মালতী নই? মিলি নই? লছমি নই?²⁷⁴

[The girl: ... Am I not Malati? Or Mili? Or Lachhmi?]

The effect of the alcohol brings out the men's hidden stories about their involvement with various women. The reader/audience also witnesses, at a point, undoing of characters like Shashi, who more or less acknowledges that all his life, he had been someone with loose morals, selfish and cruel.²⁷⁵

Speaking of animals, a dog features in the text. In the beginning, it howls and cries and the character of Satu goes to drive it away, expressing disdain.²⁷⁶ Curiously enough, at a later point, Satu shows a different attitude. The character of Kartik points out how Satu has a dual attitude towards the dog. Sometimes Satu wants to drive it away, while at other times, he calls it lovingly towards him.²⁷⁷ Animals and women, somewhere, find themselves in the same platform – at the receiving end of the men. They

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 413.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 404.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 391-392.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 431.

undergo a similar form of ill treatment by these men. An instance in the text seems to bring forth this idea:

Satu: সেই কুকুরটা। ফের এসে বসেছে।

The girl: না না। এটা অন্য কুকুর। ভুলুয়া মরে গেছে ক—বে।

Kartik: মরুক গে!

Satu: হ্যাঁ, মরুক গে!

The girl: মরবেই তো। লছমি মরে গেলে ভুলুয়া বেঁচে থাকতে পারে?²⁷⁸

[Satu: That blasted mutt! It has come here again.

The girl: No no. It's a different dog. Bhuluya has died a—ges ago.

Kartik: Let it die!

Satu: Yes, let it die! Go to hell!

The girl: Of course it would die. If Lachhmi dies, could Bhuluya live?]

Finally, we note that the ghostly girl (representing all the mistreated/wronged women by abusive and insensitive men) is the only character who seems to be consciously and spiritually close to nature, who appreciates its beauty. At one point, she comments on love being as dangerous as fire.²⁷⁹ The following extract of a speech by the girl at one point, calls for attention:

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 424.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 407.

The girl: সন্কেবেলা আকাশটা কীরকম আস্তে আস্তে রঙ বদলায়, না? আমার ঘরের জানলাটা পশ্চিমদিকে। রোজ সন্কেয় ... দেখতাম। সেই ছোটবেলা থেকে দেখছি। ...

... ঐ সন্কের আলোটাকে না কি বলে—কনে-দেখা আলো। আচ্ছা, কনে-দেখা কেন বলে? কে কনে দেখে? কীসের জন্যে দেখে? ...²⁸⁰

[The girl: Doesn't the sky change its colour gradually, in the evenings? The window in my room is on the west. Every evening ... I used to see it. Right from childhood I'm seeing it...

... They refer to that evening light as the “bride-watching” light. *Achha*, why do they say “bride-watching” light? Who sees the bride? Why do they see her? ...]

The first part of the speech denotes her connection to natural elements and processes, and how happy she feels deep inside, due to that. Curiously enough, we find that she starts questioning the concepts of naming or viewing natural processes by the essentially patriarchal society, which dominates women, animals and also attempts to tailor nature as per its suitability. Sircar here could be showing the reader/audience how this girl is attempting to reclaim her voice as a female subject within this socially constructed patriarchal framework.

Going through *Sagina Mahato*, one finds that overall, it poses as a negative critique of a particular Left activist group in the tea gardens of Bengal. At the onset, issues like inequality and power-plays within the human community as unnatural, could be seen. *Sagina*, a tea garden worker, could be considered as human garbage. This is because he is used and manipulated by that hypocritical party to fulfil their own purposes and establish a strong base, while the basic demands of the innocent workers were left unfulfilled. *Sagina*'s own personality undergoes changes for the worse. One sees women

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 407-408.

talked about as a commodity to be possessed, especially during an argument among the labourers (where Sagina is also present), at a point in the text.²⁸¹ Next, an important extract is worth noting:

Gora [a party comrade]: ... অফিস হয়েছে আমাদের , দুটো ঘর। ... সাগিনা প্রেসিডেন্ট, কাজিমন সেক্রেটারি, আমি অফিস সেক্রেটারি। এক্সিকিউটিভ কমিটিও একটা আছে, কিন্তু কার্যত সাগিনাই সব।²⁸²

[Gora: ... We have an office now. Two rooms. ... Sagina is the president, Kajiman²⁸³ – the secretary, and I – the office secretary. There’s an executive committee, as well. But, virtually Sagina will be all-in-all.]

This scene prepares the reader/audience of the impending dark fate that awaits Sagina, as he is transposed from his familiar state of existence to something different – a labourer leader and also an instrument to be used by the leftist group. This change in Sagina also brings in a change in his personality. He says, at a later point:

Sagina: দেখো কামরেড, এ পড়ালিখা খেলায় কাম চলবে না। দো মহিনা ধরে খুট খুট চিঠ-ঠি লিখছো, ভেজছো। ও শালারাও খুট খুট চিঠ-ঠি লিখছে, ভেজছে। ফায়দা কী হচ্ছে? এ সব নয়া তরিকায় কাম আদায় হবে না। পুরানা রাস্তা ধরতে হবে। পিটেতে হবে শালাদের, কাম বন্ধ করতে হবে।²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khand*, 14-15.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸³ Another Party worker.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

[Sagina: See *Ca-a-mrade*, this study-study game will not work. For two months you are – *khut-khut* – writing letters and sending. Those bastards also – *khut-khut* – writing letters and sending. What good is it to us? These new ways won't get work done. Go the old way. Beat up those bastards. Stop all work.]

Sagina turns away from being a peace-loving carefree tea-garden worker, to someone dark – when the leftist group traps him into its political whirlpool. The last exchanges between Sagina and his associates, at the closing of the text, need special attention. It is cited below:

Sagina: ... পিটেছে। আমাকে পিটেছে। খুব পিটেছে। লেकिन —ঠিক কাম করেছে! বুঝতে পারছি—আমি—বেইমানি করেছি। হাঁ!...

Gora: (কাছে এসে) সাগিনা—

Sagina: ... লেकिन কামরেড, এক ধোঁকাবাজিতে আমি ফেসে গিয়েছিলাম, বুঝতে পারিনি। মজদুরের ভালাই করবার নাম করে খালি বান্দর নাচ নেচেছি। ...

... ঐসি ইউনিওন ফির বানাতে হবে—তুমি না থাকলে চলবে না। আউর কাজিমন ভাই ভি—

Gora: তুমি কোথায় যাবে?

Sagina: (অবাক হয়ে) ইখানে থাকবো। ফির কুথা যাবো?

Gora: এখানে থাকলে ওরা মারবে তোমাকে—

... মেরে ফেলবে তোমাকে এরা—

Sagina: ... মরলাম কি আজ? ...

... আরে এ ছেদিভাই, বোতল নিকালো। জেরা তাকং চাহিয়ে।²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 59-60.

[Sagina: Beat me up. They beat me up. They beat me up so much. But – they are right. I now understand – I – betrayed them.

Gora: (walking close to Sagina) Sagina –

Sagina: But *Ca-a-mrade*, I was trapped in a hoax myself – I couldn't understand. In the name of doing good for the labourers, I have danced like a monkey – repeatedly.

... We have to create such a union again. It won't work if you don't stay. Also brother Kajiman. –

Gora: Where will you go?

Sagina: (surprised) I'll be here itself. Where will I go again?

Gora: They'll beat you up if you stay here –

... They'll kill you –

Sagina: ... Did I die today? ...

... *Arre E Chhedi-bhai*, bring out the bottle. Need little strength.]

We see here how Sagina finally understands that he was caught in a rotten political trap, and how he was used and manipulated. He suddenly finds that nobody is in his support anymore. His own people attack him, viewing him as a traitor. They have now becoming a recurring threat to him. He accepts his bleak fate and prepares to live in a sorry state. The ending of the text, this way, is indeed tragic.

Overall, *Bibar* gives a gritty and bleak picture of the corrupt contemporary urban human community. The protagonist, Pradyot is a product of that kind of a community. He is aware of his filthy personality and his crooked actions, as a means for survival. There are instances in the text, where he includes the audience members in his corrupt community, as well, addressing and telling them that they are like him. They should skip their innocent acts:

Pradyot [Addressing the audience]: ... আর তুমি নিজে চাঁদ? মারো ঝাড়ু।
তুমোও যা আমুও তাই।²⁸⁶

[Pradyot: ... And you yourself, *Chand*²⁸⁷? *Maro Jharu!*²⁸⁸ Get to the point. What you are, I am too.]

Then again,

Pradyot: (দর্শকদের) দৃশ্যটা কেমন? বেশ জমাটি প্রেম মনে হচ্ছে না? বাইরে থেকে তাই মনে হয়।... [Talking about Neeta²⁸⁹] মিথ্যে বলে বুঝতে পারছে? টের পাচ্ছে? তাতে কী? কিছু তো বলতে পারবে না, আমিও যে টের পাচ্ছি। পরস্পরের পাপ কাটাকাটি করে ইকুয়াল টু সমঝাওতা—তুমোও যা আমুও তাই।²⁹⁰

[Pradyot: (To the audience) How's the scene? Doesn't it seem like a solid kind of love? It seems so from the outside... Can she understand the lie? Is she aware? So what? She can't say anything, I am also aware. The sins of each other cancel one another, that's equal to compromise – What you are, I am too.]

Pradyot's corrupt and seedy lifestyle, coupled with his rising unhappiness turns him into a murderer – that of his own lover, Neeta. He says thus, after the deed:

²⁸⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 347.

²⁸⁷ A sarcastic way of addressing someone (usually a male) putting an innocent act, in Bangla.

²⁸⁸ A sarcastic way of asking someone to stop beating around the bush and come straight to the point, in Bangla. Literally means 'beat the broom.'

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 337. Neeta is described as a free-thinking young woman. She is Pradyot's lover.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 347.

Pradyot: নীতা নেই। মরে গেছে। আশ্চর্য, তবু নিজেকে কিছুতেই কথাটা বিশ্বাস করতে পারলাম না। তাকে নিজের হাতে মেরে ফেলেছি, অথচ বিশ্বাসই হচ্ছে না—সে নেই। তাকে আর কখনোই দেখতে পাবো না, ছুঁতে পাবো না। ...²⁹¹

[Pradyot: Neeta is not there. She's dead. It's surprising that I still can't believe those words. I killed her with my own hands, still I can't believe she's not there. I won't be seeing her again, touching her again ...]

The reader/audience witness a glaring answer to the question: To what degrees could a human being degenerate, if pushed to the limits?

*Gandi*²⁹² ("Encircled Boundary"; 1977) is an adaptation of Brecht's *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis*²⁹³ (*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*; 1944). It is about how a biological mother leaves her child behind, to be rescued and raised with good values and sacrifices by another woman. In the end, justifiably, the woman who raises the child as her own gets to keep him. In the conflict between nature and nurture, nurture wins this time. Towards the closing of the text, two speeches need to be noted for their importance. The first one is of the character of the lawyer, who speaks for the child's biological mother – a rich and vain wife of the governor:

²⁹¹ Ibid., 375.

²⁹² Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 407-470.

²⁹³ Brecht's play is "set during a feudal insurrection in the 13th century, [and] concerns the struggle of two women over the custody of a child. The dispute between the governor's wife, who abandoned the child during the insurrection, and the young servant who saved the child and cared for him is settled by an eccentric judge who places the child in a chalk circle and declares that whichever woman can pull him from the circle will be granted custody. When the servant, not wanting to harm the child, lets the governor's wife have him, she is awarded the child, having demonstrated greater love than the natural mother." ("The Caucasian Chalk Circle," Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed May 1, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Caucasian-Chalk-Circle>.)

Lawyer [to Kirtichand, the judge and intellectual]: ... যা বলছিলাম —রক্তের সম্পর্ক। সবচেয়ে গভীর সবচেয়ে পবিত্র রক্তের সম্পর্ক হলো—মা আর তার সন্তানের সম্পর্ক। ... ইনি সন্তানকে দশ মাস গর্ভে ধারণ করেছেন, চরম কষ্টে জন্ম দিয়েছেন, নিজের রক্ত পান করিয়ে পুষ্ট করেছেন। এই পবিত্র ঘনিষ্ঠ রক্তের সম্পর্ক কেউ নষ্ট করে দিতে পারে না। মায়ের কোল থেকে সন্তানকে কেউ ছিনিয়ে নিতে পারে না। এমন যে বনের বাঘিনী, সেও সন্তানহারা হলে উন্মাদিনী হয়ে—²⁹⁴

[Lawyer: ... As I was saying – blood relations. The deepest and purest blood relation is – that of a mother and a child... This woman has carried her child in her womb for ten months. Given birth to him in utmost suffering. Nourished him by draining her own blood. No one can destroy this deep and pure relationship. No one can snatch a child from his mother’s lap. In fact, when a tigress of the forest loses her cub, she becomes insane and ...]

However, in the text, the biological mother of the child did nothing of that sort to protect and nurture her child. In fact, in troubled times, she even left him behind. As a result, the reader/audience has no sympathy for her. On the other hand Soma, the governor’s wife’s subordinate who adopts the child, has this to say in order to seek justice:

Soma: আমি সাধ্যমতো ওকে মানুষ করেছি। প্রায়ে প্রত্যেক দিনই কিছু না কিছু খাইয়েছি। বেশির ভাগ সময়ে থাকবার একটা জায়গা জোগাড় করেছি। আর —আর অনেক ভুগেছি। নিজের সুখের কথা ভাবি নি। ওকে সকলের সঙ্গে ভাব করতে শিখিয়েছি, ভালবাসতে শিখিয়েছি। অনেক কাজ শিখিয়েছি। মানে, যতোটা পারে —খুব ছোট তো এখনো?²⁹⁵

[Soma: I’ve raised him up with the best of my ability. Almost everyday, I’ve fed him some scrap or another. Most of the time, I’ve arranged a place for him to stay. And, and I’ve suffered greatly. I never thought of my own comfort. I’ve taught him to make friends with everyone, to be affectionate to everyone. Taught

²⁹⁴ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 462.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

him to do a lot of work. I mean, whatever he is able to do ... he is quite young now, isn't he?]

One notices in the text that there is glaring economic inequality in the society depicted. The text begins with some underprivileged citizens begging for some basic amenities:

Beggar woman [to the royal soldiers]: আমার ছেলেটা মরে যাচ্ছে বাবা, দু'টি চাল—

...

Citizen 2: হজুর আমাদের গ্রামে বড়ো জলকষ্ট, একটা কুয়ো যদি—

Citizen 3: হজুর খাজনা দিন দিন বেড়েই চলছে, খেতে পাই না—²⁹⁶

[Beggar woman: My son is dying, Sir. Two grains of rice, please –

...

Citizen 2: Sir, there's a big water crisis at our village. If a well could have been –

Citizen 3: Sir, the taxes are increasing day by day. We don't have anything to eat –]

Injustice within the human community shows itself when elsewhere in the text, the reader/audience finds the privileged people out of touch with reality and leading a super-lavish lifestyle – often at the cost of the poorer population. The selfish and vain governor's wife says at a point to please a visitor:

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 409.

Governor's wife [to a landlord, their associate]: বাঃ, দক্ষিণের মহলটার কথা কবে থেকে বলছি না? সেটা এবার তৈরি হচ্ছে। ওদিকের নোংরা বস্তিগুলো ভেঙে বাগান হবে।²⁹⁷

[Governor's wife: *Bah*, wasn't I talking about a mansion at our south for a long time? It's being constructed now. On that side, the filthy slums would be destroyed for a sprawling garden.]

At another point one finds her instructing her group of subordinates:

Governor's wife: দক্ষিণের বারান্দা দিয়ে যেন বাগান ছাড়া আর কিছু দেখতে না হয়। ঐ যতো নোংরা বস্তি আছে সব যেন—²⁹⁸

[Governor's wife: Ensure that through the south verandah, nothing but the garden is to be seen. All those filthy slums, they should ...]

This woman is the same person who, during an attack in her home, escapes by only showing concern about her expensive material possessions like her saris and jewels. She does not show any concern for her own child, and leaves him behind.²⁹⁹ No wonder at one point, the narrators make the reader/audience realize that if the privileged sections of the human society continue to be irresponsible, dire times would be ahead. If ever that

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 410.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 413.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 417-418.

section starts chipping off, it would carry the underprivileged section with it too. They are dependent on each other:

First narrator: শক্তিমানের প্রাসাদ যখন ভাঙে—

Second narrator: অনেক চুনোপুঁটিও তখন চাপা পড়ে মরে।³⁰⁰

[First narrator: When the palace of the powerful crashes –

Second narrator: Many measlies also then get buried and killed.]

Inviting nature in a child's life for his/her healthy development is necessary, so is the association of childlike innocence with nature. Thoughts like these are seemingly communicated by Sircar through the following instances. Firstly, we could go back to Soma's speech earlier, and look at the values that she attempts to instil in the child – all are derived from nature. Next, we could look into a speech by one of the narrators in the text, made at the time when everyone attempts to escape the mansion and Soma decides to take the abandoned child along with her:

Narrator: ... —বিপদে ডাক শুনে যে বাঁচায় না,

সে আদরের ডাকও শুনতে পাবে না কোনোদিন।

শুনতে পাবে না ভোরের পাখির গান। ঝরনার মিস্তি হাসি। ...³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 415.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 419.

[Narrator: ... Whoever does not come to save after hearing a call for help,

He would never hear affection's call.

Wouldn't hear the songs of the birds of dawn, the sweet laughter of the waterfalls
...]

Escaping the attacked mansion, and all the capitalistic evils associated with the gritty city-life, the child is brought to a new space – a space of mountains, forests and ploughing fields.³⁰² Sircar might be providing the child and Soma the postcolonial natural space of exile – where exile for the “slave”/underprivileged gradually leads to recuperation from injuries of the past, recovery, new beginnings, new confidence and reinstating a stronger sense of self. The natural space becomes the healer here. In the following chapters, it has been discussed how this idea comes up in texts of Walcott and Soyinka as well.

Now comes the last point to note in *Gandi*, reading it from an ecological angle. Referring to the traditional hierarchy, animals have continued to be treated as inferior beings compared to humans, by the characters of this text. When the selfish governor's wife escapes her mansion and abandons her son, a female servant calls her an animal and inhuman – for showing qualities the society does not expect from human beings.³⁰³ In another part of the text, a conversation takes place between a messenger and a servant of the officer:

³⁰² Ibid., 423.

³⁰³ Ibid., 417-418.

Messenger: ঘোড়াটা দম ফেটে মরে গেলো। শেষ পাঁচ ক্রোশ পথ শুধু দৌড়েছি।

Servant: সঠিক কাজ করেছে। রাজকার্যে তাই প্রয়োজন। ঘোড়াটাকে দেখে শেখো।³⁰⁴

[Messenger: The horse died as it was out of breath. The remaining five krosh, I just ran.

Servant: You did the right thing. That is a necessity in royal duties. Observe and learn from the horse.]

Here, the horse is clearly seen as an inferior creature, and its death is seemingly not important enough. Elsewhere, at a later part of the text the character of Kirtichand attempts to confuse Sivdas, a guard. Even in jest he shows his condescending views on animals. In front of Sivdas using bizarre logic, he justifies killing rabbits because they destroy plants and weeds. He also declared that rabbits have no soul unlike human beings, and that he had learnt this from ancient Hindu scriptures.³⁰⁵

Reading through *Kabi Kahini*³⁰⁶ (“The Story of the Poet”; 1963), the first thing to note from an ecological angle would be the inclusion of a certain personal experience of Sircar himself, in the text. Referring to that experience of his own life, Sircar himself must have felt like human garbage. The other point to note would be the portrayal of a destructive human community in that specific town (like in *Michhil*). Centred on an Assembly Election, two candidates (Manibhushan Majumdar and Chidananda Brahmachari) are pitting against each other in the text. We see how other lives get affected by it, and how human beings try to harm one another using character-

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 412.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 443.

³⁰⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 449-530.

assassination tactics and abusing their powers to dominate others. Going back to the first point, about his personal experience, Sircar writes in *Purono Kasundi*:

১৯৪৫ সালে একটা নির্বাচন গেলো। ... কলেজ থেকে আমরা দু'তিন জন নির্বাচন অফিসে যেতাম, আমাদের ভোটার্স লিস্ট টুকতে দেওয়া হয়েছিল। খুব একঘেয়ে কাজ, তবু নির্ণায় সঙ্গে বেশ কদিন ধরে টুকেছিলাম। অনেক পরে জানতে পেরেছি কাজটা আগেই করা ছিল, শুধু নতুন ছাত্র-কমরেডদের ব্যস্ত রাখবার জন্যে এই অনাবশ্যিক কাজে লাগিয়ে রাখা হয়েছিল। তেরশটি সালে লেখা নাটক 'কবিকাহিনি'তে যদি এই অভিজ্ঞতাটা ঢুকে যায়, আমাকে খুব দোষ দেওয়া যায় কি? ...³⁰⁷

[An election took place in 1945... Two or three of us from our college, used to go to the election office. We were given a task to copy the voters' lists. It was a boring task, yet we diligently copied the lists for many a day. After quite some time, I got to know that the task had already been done earlier. This unnecessary task was kept for the new student-comrades, only to keep them busy. If this experience goes into the play *Kabi Kahini* composed in 1963, can any blame be put on me? ...]

Parallel to Sircar's experience above, we find the character of Arabindo being unnecessarily exploited by Manibhushan. Towards the first part of the text, he has a conversation with Manibhushan's daughter, Lily:

Arabindo [to Lily]: ... -এই একটা খসড়া করতে দিয়েছেন তোমার বাবা ... চিদানান্দেবর একটা স্ল্যান্ডারের জবাব।...

Lily: মায়ের ঐ পত্রিকায় অনেক আধুনিক লেখা বেরোয়।

Arabindo: ... একটা লেখাও কেউ বার করতে পারবে যাকে ... রুচিসম্মত নয় বলা যেতে পারে?

³⁰⁷ Sircar, *Kasundi*, 108.

Lily: হ্যাঁ, কিন্তু—আপনি জানলেন কী করে?

...

Arabindo: ... আমি পড়েছি। প্রত্যেকটি লেখা পড়েছি।...

... প্রফ দেখে দিলাম যে? মাসীমাকে শুধু ফাইন্যাল প্রফটা দেখতে হয়েছে।

Lily: ... সারাদিন তো বাবার ইলেক্-শন নিয়ে খাটছেন।

Arabindo: ... বাবাকে বলা আছে—মেসোমশাইয়ের ইলেকশান পর্যন্ত আমার ডিউটি এখানে।³⁰⁸

[Arabindo [to Lily]: ... Your father has given me this draft to write ... an answer to a slander by Chidananda...

Lily: In mother's magazine, many modern writings are published.

Arabindo: ... Can anybody point out a writing ... Which could be said that it's not tasteful enough?

Lily: Yes, but how do you know?

...

Arabindo: ... I have read. Every writing ...

... Haven't I read all the proofs? *Mashima*³⁰⁹ only had to see the final proof.

Lily: ... You are slogging with father's election duties, all day.

Arabindo: ... I've already told my father. Till *Meshomoshai*³¹⁰'s election, my duty would be here.]

The reader/audience gets to see Arabindo's dedication towards the election, and also how he is working for Lily's mother's magazine, as well. Yet, when Manibhushan realizes that Arabindo's write-up to glorify him and throw mud on Chidananda's character is

³⁰⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Pratham Khanda*, 454.

³⁰⁹ In Bengali it means a maternal aunt. However, one can address an unrelated older woman, out of respect, by this as well.

³¹⁰ In Bengali it means a maternal aunt's husband. However, one can address an unrelated older man, out of respect, by this as well.

inadequate, he immediately starts looking for a replacement writer – right under Arabindo’s nose:

Manibhushan [telephoning the local high school headmaster]: ... হ্যালো—বাংলা অনার্স কে আছে? ... সনৎ বোস? কেমন, বেশ চালাক চতুর? ... লিখতে টিখতে পারে? ... শুনুন তাকে এখুনি পাঠিয়ে দিন আমার বাড়ি...আরে, ক্লাস আছে তো কী? ক্লাস আর কাউকে দিয়ে ম্যানেজ করে দিন ...³¹¹

[Manibhushan: ... Hello – Who’s there with an Honours in Bangla? ... Sanat Bose? How is he, is he clever and intelligent? ... Can he write and all? ... Listen, send him to my house, immediately... *Arre*, so what he has class? Manage it by sending someone else there...]

Manibhushan attempts to hide the fact from Arabindo and gives the later unnecessary tasks, like copying the voters’ lists. Lily lets Arabindo know that that task has already been done. It becomes obvious how Arabindo gets harassed just for the sake of being kept busy.³¹²

Now comes the next point that is noted in the text. We have already seen Manibhushan making his people (like Arabindo, and later Sanat) devise methods to assassinate his rival’s character, so that he impresses the mass and gets their votes. We also find at a point, Manibhushan stooping to levels where he is trying to exploit issues like food shortage in India to manufacture his image of popularity, in a shallow manner.³¹³ Abusing his power over Sanat, the high school teacher on probation, when one

³¹¹ Ibid., 458.

³¹² Ibid., 457-462.

³¹³ Ibid., 462.

of Manibhushan's election campaigners accuse Sanat of being Chidananda's spy, Manibhushan threatens him subtly:

Manibhushan [to Sanat]: (প্রায় দুঃখিত স্বরে) এর পর তো তোমার কনফার্মেশন আমি রেকমেন্ড করতে পারবো না। ... তুমি তাহলে সত্যিই চিদানন্দ ব্রহ্মচারির লোক?³¹⁴

[Manibhushan: (almost in a sad voice) After all this, I can no longer recommend your confirmation... You are Chidananda Brahmachari's man, for real then?]

Pushed against a wall, Sanat now discards his decency and shows how even an otherwise-decent human being becomes cunning and crafty to protect himself/herself. Sanat points out a magazine (called *Sankhachil*) to Manibhushan, that he had brought with himself:

Sanat: এই দেখুন স্যার! আমি যদি চিদানন্দের লোক হবো, তবে এটা কেন নিয়ে আসবো আপনার কাছে? ... চিদানন্দ ব্রহ্মচারির কবিতা আছে এতে। ছবিও আছে। ... বিপ্লবী কবিতা নয় স্যার — পড়ে দেখুন! অশ্লীলতার জন্যে বাজেয়াপ্ত হয়ে গিয়েছিল শঙ্খচিল!³¹⁵

[Sanat: See this, Sir! If I were Chidananda's man, why would I ever bring this to you? ... It has Chidananda Brahmachari's poems. Also pictures... It is not revolutionary poetry, Sir – do read it! *Sankhachil* was confiscated because of obscenity-charges!]

³¹⁴ Ibid., 528.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 528-529.

Sanat, thus, uses his hidden cunning to manipulate Manibhushan into thinking that Chidananda's 'obscene' writings and pictures could be used to defame the latter. Sircar shows us that things like these are what the urban human community resorts to, in order to survive. The last thing to point out would be a speech with layered meanings by the character of Kanai Dutta. Kanai turns out to be a news reporter, who disguises as the chief guest (the poet Swarajit Sanyal), and comes to Manibhushan's household to investigate. While conversing with the rest of the characters, he shares this 'joke' at one point:

Swarajit [Kanai is disguise, speaking to the rest of the characters]: মিশনারি সায়েব আফ্রিকার জঙ্গল থেকে রিপোর্ট পাঠাচ্ছেন দেশে বড়ো পাদ্রিসায়েবকে। লিখছেন—
—এখানকার নরখাদকদের আমি অনেকটা সভ্য করে এনেছি। বড়োসায়েব লিখলেন—
—সে কী? আমি যে শুনলাম —ওরা এখনো মানুষ মেরে থাকে? ইংরেজ পাদ্রি
জবাবে লিখলেন—হ্যাঁ, তা থাকে, তবে ছুরি-কাঁটা দিয়ে থাকে! ...³¹⁶

[Swarajit: Missionary-*sayeb* is sending a report from the jungles of Africa to the high-priest-*sayeb* of his country. He writes – I have civilized these cannibals to a greater degree. *Boro-sayeb* then wrote back – What are you saying? I have heard that they are still killing and eating human beings? The English priest wrote in answer – Yes, that they are. But, they are using knives and forks to eat! ...]

Thus, through this so-called joke, Kanai mocks at the concept of civilization and education. He indirectly points out to the reader/audience how these concepts have had ridiculous interpretations and understandings by authority figures – something that is still prevalent at this day and age.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 500.

The humorous play, *Bichitanusthan*³¹⁷ (“Varied Programmes”; 1964) presents a probable slice of Sircar’s own life³¹⁸, where a group of people is trying to stage various cultural programmes. The play is concerned about the chaos and the fuss in executing such a project. A section of the text is cited below, where we witness such a chaos among the various characters:

Mukul: একটা আজগুবি কথা বললেই তো হয় না? চব্বিশ ঘন্টায়—

Sudhin: হবে! হবে! হবে!

Mukul: কক্ষনো হবে না! হতে পারে না!

(সুধীন হঠাৎ একটা চেয়ারের উপর লাফিয়ে উঠে দাঁড়ালো। মানিকও সেই সুযোগে মুকুলের গলা টিপে ধরলো।)

Sudhin: যদি সবাই আমরা একসঙ্গে জোর দিয়ে বলি, হবে—

Shyamal: ... বলো বীর, চির উন্নত মম শির!

Sudhin: বলো তোমরা। হবে না?

Everyone: (একসঙ্গে) হবে।

Manik: (মুকুলকে) কী? হবে না?

Mukul: (সরু গলায়) হবে।

Manik: ... আমি হল্ বুক করতে গেলাম ...

Sudhin: ... নাও, শুরু করো সবাই —

Mukul: (চিৎকার করে) কিন্তু তোমরা সবাই কি একেবারে খেপে—

... গেছো নাকি?

³¹⁷ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 1-38.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. Sircar gives a hint here, in the preface.

Manik: (সুধীনকে) মুকুল কি আবার গোলমাল করছে? ...³¹⁹

[Mukul: Blabbing something imaginary doesn't make anything work! Within twenty four hours ...

Sudhin: It will happen! Will happen! Will happen!

Mukul: It will never happen! It just can't!

(Sudhin suddenly jumped over a chair and stood on it. Getting an opportunity, Manik grabbed Mukul's throat, as well.)

Sudhin: If we all say yes together, with conviction, it will happen...

Shyamal: ... Say, you warrior. With my head always held high!

Sudhin: All of you answer, won't it happen?

Everyone (together): Yes, it will happen.

Manik (to Mukul): What? Won't it happen?

Mukul (in a shrill voice): Yes, it will happen.

Manik: ... I'm going to book the hall ...

Sudhin: ... Okay, let's begin, everyone –

Mukul (Shouting): But have all of you completely gone... crazy?

Manik (to Sudhin): Is Mukul creating a ruckus again? ...]

Keeping the humour in it aside, the whole text could be seen as a metaphor for chaos or a disorganized state within the human community, especially in the urban space. The human community lacks organization and harmony and, therefore, is unable to tackle many situations/projects/problems/crises. Due to the lack of harmony of working together, they make situations more complex. Such a problem or situation could be ecological disasters. Due to various vices like greed, laziness, lack of awareness, ego and

³¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

so on, the human communities all over the world are not yet on the same page to tackle and prevent it.

*Pralap*³²⁰ (“Delirium”; 1966) is also a text where one finds the characters preparing to stage an event. They are rehearsing a play based on the life of an everyman called Manab (which means ‘a male human being’ in Bangla). Like *Ebang Indrajit*, this play also has an existential spirit – often expressed by some of the characters. The play begins with an account of the environmental changes that the earth underwent, since its creation. The birth of human beings and their evolution in body and mind.³²¹ Through this, Sircar might be implying that all the marked changes that needed to happen, did so before the development of human beings. The transformation of the earth (from various aspects) had a meaning, then – a purpose, a positivity. After that, everything has become stagnant and there would be no positive changes in the future. Sircar, seemingly fed up with the contemporary human reality, wishes to make the reader/audience realize the contrast between the “then” and the “now.” One of the characters, Jyoti, seems to voice this out at a later part of the text:

Jyoti: ... লক্ষ লক্ষ বছরের বিবর্তনে শিম্পাঞ্জির মগজ মানুষের মস্তিষ্কে পরিণত হয়েছে। হয়ে বলছে—আমি তো কিছুই করছি না!³²²

[Jyoti: ... Due to the evolution over the lakhs of years, the brain of the chimpanzee has transformed into that of the human being. Then, it is saying – I’m not doing anything meaningful!]

³²⁰ Ibid., 229-294.

³²¹ Ibid., 232-233.

³²² Ibid., 243.

Jyoti seems to be the character who expresses the existential crisis that human beings feel at the present time. Regarding the play that they are rehearsing, he comments:

Jyoti: ... এই নাটকটার মূল প্রশ্ন —জীবনের কোনো অর্থ আছে কি না? যদিও আমি বলি—সেটা আসল প্রশ্ন নয়। আসল প্রশ্ন হোলো —অর্থ আছে কি নেই —সেটা খুঁজে বার করবার কোনো অর্থ আছে কি না।³²³

[Jyoti: ... The main question of this play is – Is there any meaning in life? Still, I say – that’s not the real question. The real question is – the act of finding out whether there is any meaning or not – is worth any meaning.]

Again in another instance, he says something similar:

Jyoti: প্রত্যেকবার এই একই ব্যাপার। এই একই কথার চক্র। একই কথা নিয়ে চর্কিপাক। একই কথার চারিপাশে—³²⁴

[Jyoti: The same matter, every time. The same encircling of words. Circling round with the same words. Around the same words ...]

A certain speech of the character of Tarun is important to pay attention to. It makes the reader/audience realize that even though the human community was meant to live harmoniously (not only among themselves, but also with other living beings), at present

³²³ Ibid., 245.

³²⁴ Ibid., 236.

due to their greed, selfishness and power-hunger, they have become alienated from one another and also from their own selves.

Tarun: যদি ধরে নেওয়া যায় পৃথিবীর সমস্ত মানুষ একই জাতি ... সব মানুষই পরিণামে একই মৃত্যুর করাল গহ্বরে ... একজন মানুষের জীবনের সুখ-দুঃখ যাবতীয় মানুষের সুখ-দুঃখকে প্রতিফলিত করে ... অবশেষে দারিদ্র, হতাশা ও যন্ত্রণার মধ্যে মৃত্যুমুখে পতিত হয়, তবে সামগ্রিক বিচারে সেই জীবন তার একার নয়, আমাদের সকলেরই, এবং তার জীবনের অর্থ বিশ্লেষণ করলে আমাদের সকলেরই জীবনের অর্থ—³²⁵

[Tarun: If it is assumed that all the people of the world are of the same species... All human beings are eventually doomed to die the same death in a terrifying, dark chasm... The happiness and sorrow of one person's life reflects the happiness and sorrow of all human beings... Finally, they fall into poverty, despair and pain. However, in the overall judgement, that life is not his alone. It is of all of us. And describing the meaning of his life means describing the meanings of all our lives –]

Like the previous two texts, yet another text by Sircar where there are characters preparing to stage a certain event (here, a play) is *Udyogparba*³²⁶ (“Period of Preparation”; 1982). The play that the characters would be performing, in *Udyogparba* is on the Indian *itihasa*³²⁷, *The Mahabharata*. In fact, the title of Sircar’s text alludes to an episode in *The Mahabharata* itself, where the armies of both the sides are preparing for the upcoming war of Kurukshetra. The characters of this text are a teacher and a few

³²⁵ Ibid., 247.

³²⁶ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 511-539.

³²⁷ It would not be appropriate to call *The Mahabharata* (2nd-3rd CBC) an ‘epic’ or ‘history’, as these terms are created in the West, having their own characteristics/concepts. Using the concepts of the Indian space and for the sake of cultural-specificity, it would be more applicable to call the text an *itihasa*. Very briefly, an *itihasa* is an ancient Sanskrit Indian narrative, where some legendary and traditional historical events, and idolized figures are recorded. There is creative usage of myths by the recorder. Tales and myths within the *itihasa* are used to teach the general mass lessons in religion, spirituality, ethics and morals.

students. The students are denoted by numbers (One, Two and so on), as seen in other plays by Sircar, for universalizing them and focusing on the events and subject matter, rather than the names. Looking at *Udyogparba*, the ecocritic notices two broad points. Firstly, it raises the issue of discrimination and inequality within the human community, based on class and caste. Secondly, it condemns war. Speaking of the first observation, one gets to see that *The Mahabharata* has such an intimidating impact on the general mass, that most would never question or analyze it. For example, at the beginning of the text, one sees that the character of Two (one of the students) is openly blinded by his devotion to the holy text.³²⁸ In fact, later one finds Two playing a character in *The Mahabharata* who clearly believes in the caste-system, glorifying it. One witnesses that character's prejudice and open vocal hatred towards the farmers/lower caste members.³²⁹ In the battlefield, that same character insults that of a lower-class farmer, through mockery:

Two: বাবা, এতো বুঝে ফেলেছিস, তবু মুনিঋষিরা তোদের আশ্রমে পুরে বেদ পড়াচ্ছে না?

Three: কী বলতে চাও?

Two: চাষার ব্যাটা চাষা, গোমুখ্যু গবেট!³³⁰

[Two: *Baba!* You've understood so much, still the sages aren't pushing you all into the *ashrams*, and teaching you all the *Vedas*?

Three: What do you want to say?

³²⁸ Ibid., 515.

³²⁹ Ibid., 520-521.

³³⁰ Ibid., 519.

Two: The son of a farmer is a farmer. An illiterate idiot!]

However, despite all this, the students (who belong to the present society) do point out this very flaw of *The Mahabharata*, that was discussed above:

Five: আমাদের হোলো নাটক!

Seven: প্রগতিশীল নাটক।

One: হ্যাঁ, জনসাধারণের কথা বলতে হবে।

Two: মহাভারতে জনসাধারণ কোথা? সব তো রাজা মহারাজা—³³¹

[Five: We are doing a play!

Seven: A progressive play.

One: Yes, we need to speak about the mass.

Two: Where is the general mass in *Mahabharata*? Everything is about kings...]

The next observation, as mentioned earlier, would be Sircar's critique of war through this play. While the enactment of *The Mahabharata* is going on, the reader/audience sees one of the soldiers talking about how farmers have been dragged to the battlefield against their will:

³³¹ Ibid., 517-518.

আমরা কি আর সেধে এসেছি? ঘাড় ধরে এনেছে... গ্রাম থেকে দাদা । চাষ করে
থাছিলাম।³³²

[Have we come on our own will? They have dragged us by our necks... From the
village, brother. We were feeding ourselves by cultivation.]

At another point, these soldiers discuss about the power-hungry and corrupt upper
classes, amid the ongoing war:

... রাজার যতক আছে আত্মীয় পরিজন,
যুদ্ধের শলা যারা বেশি করে দিচ্ছে,
এই কারবারে তারা ততো লুটে নিচ্ছে।...

... ব্রাহ্মণ আছে কতো জানিস এ ব্যবসায়?
রাজার পুরুত যতো সব এতে লাভ খায়।
ভিক্ষার চালকলা বাইরেই দেখা যায়...

... রাজার বাড়িতে যদি থাকে কোনো যোগাযোগ,
ঋত্রিয় ব্রাহ্মণ সকলেরই মহাভোগ।...³³³

[... All the relatives and friends that the king has,
Those instigating the war, the most,
In this business, they are looting the most ...

³³² Ibid., 518.

³³³ Ibid., 523.

... Do you know how many Brahmins are there in this business?

All the king's priests make the maximum profit from this.

The rice and fruits they get by begging is just a façade from the outside ...

... If one has connections to the king's household,

Kshatriyas, Brahmins – all would eat to their stomach's fill ...]

Exploitation and the loss of lives of animals (cows, horses and elephants) during the war, is also mentioned.³³⁴ Lastly, with the closing of the play, the character of One makes a speech in verse. It is not difficult to realize Sircar's own voice coming out of that character. The character of One comments on wars across all ages, as long as humanity has existed, connecting the Kurukshetra war with that of atomic and hydrogen bombings in the present reality:

... কাহারো কাটিল রথ কাহারো ধনুর্গুণ।

কাহারো ধনুক কাটে কারো কাটে তুণ।।

কাহারো কাড়িয়া পড়ে দস্ত দুই পাটি

বুকে বাজি কোনো বীর কামড়ায় মাটি।।

...

কর্দম হৈল রক্তে নদী স্রোত বয়।

মাগর উথলে যেন প্রলয় সময়।।

অবশেষে হবে শেষ আসিবে যখন।

³³⁴ Ibid., 533-535.

অ্যাটম হাইড্রোজেন এবং নিউট্রন।³³⁵

[... Somebody's chariot slices, others' bowstrings
 Somebody's bow breaks, others' quivers
 The two sets of somebody's teeth slash to the ground
 Some warrior's chest beats loudly, as he bites the dust.
 ...
 Blood turns the soil into clay, the river currents flow.
 Tidal waves in the seas, as if it's the apocalypse.
 The war will stop when comes,
 Atom, hydrogen and neutron bombs.]

The next play that will be looked at is *Natyakarer Sandhane Tinti Charitra*³³⁶ ("Three Characters in Search of A Playwright"; 1974), which is Sircar's adaptation of Luigi Pirandello's³³⁷ *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*)³³⁸. Four important characters are featured in the text: The Expensive/'Dami', the Mid-priced/'Majhari', the Cheap/'Sasta', and the Playwright. It is not difficult for the reader/audience to make out that the first three characters represent the three classes of the contemporary Indian society, and glaring inequality within the human community.

³³⁵ Ibid., 539.

³³⁶ Ibid., 255-275.

³³⁷ Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) was a Sicilian literary figure and playwright. Respected as a great contributor of modern drama, his plays dealt with subject matters like illusion and reality, the human personality in flux, the clash between art and life and the difficulty/confusion/problematic of producing art. His drama as art became in such close proximity with reality, that it became difficult to distinguish between the two. Some of his techniques included the 'play within a play', where actors often appeared as audience and vice-versa; Or the tragic sense joining the comic to produce the ethos of humour.

³³⁸ The play is about a group of actors who are preparing to rehearse for a Pirandello play, and are interrupted by the arrival of six characters. These characters are looking for an author. According to them, the author who created them did not finish their story, rendering them as unrealized characters, not been fully brought to life. ("Short summary," Pirandelloweb, accessed May 20, 2015, <https://www.pirandelloweb.com/pirandello-in-english/1921-six-characters-in-search-of-an-author/>.)

The first observation in the text is that of the kinds of attitudes that these three characters have. The Expensive is confident of his power because he has money. He thinks that he could make the society better, for he has apparently found the root of the problem:

Expensive: প্রশ্নটা হোলো – ইগ্-নোরেন্স। একটা কলোস্যাল ইগ্-নোরেন্স... অফ দ্য জেনারেল পাবলিক।³³⁹

[Expensive: The concern is – Ignorance. A colossal ignorance... Of the general public.]

Expensive talks about the economic crisis of the country, that gheraos and strikes only deepen that crisis. They do not provide any solution.³⁴⁰ This topic also tends to remind the reader/audience of *Michhil*. Expensive, without realizing, attempts to manufacture his own propaganda for creating atom bombs and thrust it on the general mass. He says to the Playwright that some foreign forces are brainwashing the general mass into believing that utilising the national wealth for making atom bombs is dangerous. That the money needs to be used to feed the hungry. However, according to him, the mass does not realize that the bombs would be used only to explode mines and nothing else.³⁴¹ At a point, he even goes on to give an seemingly condescending “expert” opinion on drama as an art form, saying:

³³⁹ Ibid., 259.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 261.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 262-264.

Expensive: ... নাটক এমন একটা জিনিস যা অভিনয় হয়। এবং অভিনয় এমন একটা জিনিস যা দেখতে বুঝতে লেখাপড়া জানা দরকার হয় না।...³⁴²

[Expensive: ... Drama is something that is enacted. And acting is something that doesn't require education, in order to be understood...]

Through drama, Expensive wants the Playwright to disseminate the former's opinions to the masses. The ecocritic takes notice, as the topic of the communication-gap between the city and the village starts creeping into the text. In a conversation, the Playwright corrects an assumption of the Expensive about the village residents:

Playwright: ... ঘুষের শেয়ার, ব্ল্যাক মার্কেট, কন্ড্রোলের চাল —এসব আজকাল গাঁয়ের অশিক্ষিত লোকেরাও বোঝে।³⁴³

[Playwright: ... Share of bribes, black market, controlled rice-distribution — Even the illiterate villagers understand these things.]

Next comes the examination of the character of the Mid-priced – who could be said to represent the middle-class Indian. The reader/audience sees the communication-gap between the city and the village residents more and more, when this Mid-priced interacts with the other characters. A few excerpts from the text are needed to be taken into account, where this comes out. The first excerpt is below:

³⁴² Ibid., 261.

³⁴³ Ibid., 259.

Cheap: আমার কতা আপনি জানবেন কেমন করি? আপনি তো আমারে চেনেন না!

Mid-priced: কে বললো চিনি না? তুমি জনগণ।

Cheap: আশ্বে না বাবু, আমার নাম মহাদেব মণ্ডল। দ্যাখলেন তো? আমারে আপনি চেনেন না। আমার কতা আপনি—

Mid-priced [now directing his attention to the Playwright]: ... আগে একটু এর কথা শুনে নিই।

Cheap: ... আমি বসটি ততোক্ষণ। বসে থাকা অভ্যেস আছে আমাদের...³⁴⁴

[Cheap: How would you know of my condition? You don't even know me!

Mid-priced: Says who? You're the general mass.

Cheap: Actually not, *Babu*. My name is Mahadeb Mondal. See? You don't know me. About my condition, you...

Mid-priced: ... First let me hear from him.

Cheap: ... I'll sit somewhere, till then. We are used to sitting and waiting...]

Then again,

Mid-priced [indicating the Cheap]: এইখানেই আসছে ওর কথা। মানে —জনগণের কথা।

Cheap: যতো বলতেছি আমার নাম মহাদেব মণ্ডল—

Mid-priced [to the Playwright]: ওর দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখো। ঐ শোষিত নিপীড়িত অত্যাচারিত জনগণের দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখো... উপোস করে মরে যাবার স্বাধীনতা... অন্ন নেই, বস্ত্র নেই, আশ্রয় নেই, শিক্ষা নেই—

Cheap: ... হাঁ বাবু, ঠিক কতা...

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 266.

Mid-priced: বোসো বোসো, ব্যস্ত হোয়ো না। আমি বলছি সব...

Cheap: বলেন বাবু... কিছুই নাই আমাদের।

Mid-priced: কিন্তু একটা জিনিস আছে।

Cheap: অ্যাঁ?

Mid-priced: শক্তি। অফুরন্ত শক্তি... পৃথিবী ওলট-পালট করে দেবার শক্তি।
ঐক্যবদ্ধ সংগ্রামের শক্তি।

Cheap: ঠিক বুঝতেছি না বাবু, একটু সহজ করি বলেন।³⁴⁵

[Mid-priced: Here exactly comes the topic about *him*. That is, the topic about the general mass.]

Cheap: Been telling you for so long, that my name's Mahadeb Mondal –

Mid-priced: Look at him. Look at the exploited, afflicted and tortured mass... The freedom to perish out of hunger... No rice, no clothes, no shelter, no education –

Cheap: ... Yes, *Babu*. Right words...

Mid-priced: Sit, sit. Don't be impatient. I'm telling him everything...

Cheap: Say, *Babu*... We don't have anything.

Mid-priced: But there's one thing.

Cheap: *Aen?*

Mid-priced: Strength. Infinite strength... Strength to turn the world topsy-turvy.
The strength for a collective struggle.

Cheap: Don't really get it, *Babu*. Simplify, please.]

This is when the Mid-priced is essentially interacting with the Cheap. Sircar, through humour, is clear in showing the pretentiousness of the Mid-priced about knowing the concerns of the underprivileged communities in the villages. The two classes have difficulty in communicating and fathoming each other's perspectives about various (often

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 268.

social and economic) issues. The underprivileged has got used to “waiting” and surrendering to his/her “ill-luck”, due to various ways of oppression, across time. This is something to think about, for the reader/audience. Then comes the next extract:

Playwright: কিন্তু আমি তো ওকে [the Cheap] চিনি না—

Mid-priced: আমি চিনিয়ে দেবো।

Playwright: তার চেয়ে বরং ওর সঙ্গে একটু আলাপ করে—

Mid-priced: (অধৈর্য হয়ে) হ্যাঁ হ্যাঁ আলাপ করবে বৈ কি, কিন্তু ওদের যা মূল সমস্যা সেটা তার আগে তোমাকে বুঝতে হবে। আমি বুঝিয়ে দিচ্ছি, শোনো। এই সমাজ—শ্রেণীবিভক্ত সমাজ। ধনতান্ত্রিক সমাজ ব্যবস্থায় শ্রেণীবিন্যাস কীরকম হয়, সেটা আগে জানা দরকার। তারপর জানা দরকার আমাদের ভারতবর্ষের আধা-ঔপনিবেশিক পরিবেশে ধনতান্ত্রিক বিকাশ এবং সামন্ততান্ত্রিক কাঠামোর বর্তমান—³⁴⁶

[Playwright: But I don't know him, *toh* –

Mid-priced: I'll introduce him to you.

Playwright: Instead, let me have a little conversation with him...

Mid-priced: (getting impatient) Yes, yes. Of course, you'll get to know him. But first, you need to understand their main concerns. I'll make you understand. Listen. This society is divided by class. It's important to know how class system functions, in a capitalist society. Then it is important to know about the present framework of feudalism, and the blooming of capitalism in a semi-colonial environment in our *Bharatbarsha* –]

This is when the Mid-priced interacts with the Playwright. The same communication problem continues, between the two classes. The fake pretentiousness of the Mid-priced, and his show-off of fancy language also continues. One also notices the audacious

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 269.

patronizing attitude of the Mid-priced towards the Cheap. The Mid-priced has given himself the “divine” right to speak for the Cheap, and does not let the Cheap speak for himself. This is precisely something that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak had attacked in her significant essay: *Can the Subaltern Speak?*³⁴⁷ Curiously enough, there comes a change in the Mid-priced, soon after. His so-called concern for the poor and the oppressed, his desire to work with the them and change the society disappears. This happens when the Expensive unofficially offers him a job, at the former’s enterprise. Mid-priced agrees to the offer, and the reader/audience soon understands that he will eventually become an ally of the Expensive and the elite class.³⁴⁸

The next interaction that happens is between that of the Playwright and the Cheap. Their exchanges are important for the ecocritic to pay attention to, because of the issues that are raised by Sircar, through the characters. Here, the Cheap requests the Playwright to compose a play about the former and his people, and to raise the issues of water, fertilizers and pesticides in that play. The Cheap expresses how these are not easily obtainable to him:

Cheap: কিছুই মেলে না বাবু। কালোবাজারে মেলে, তা সে আগুন দর, ছুঁতি পারি নো। সরকার সারের দাম দ্বিগুণ করে দ্যালেন, ইউরিয়া এখন পাঁচ টাকা কেজি। এদিকি জল কিনতি গেলি পাঁচ টাকা ঘন্টার কমে কেউ দিতি চায় না। ছ’টাকাও চায়। বলে, কী করবো? খোলা বাজারে ছ’টাকা লিটার ডিজেল কিনে এর থেকে কমে কী করি দেবো?³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 67-111.

³⁴⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 270.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

[Cheap: We don't get anything, *Babu*. It's in the black market, but fiery rates. Can't even touch. Government doubled the price of fertilizers. Urea now five rupees a kg. And here to hire pumps for water, nobody allows less than five rupees per hour. Sometimes, six rupees even. They say, what would we do? We buy diesel six rupees a litre from the open market. How could we lower the price than this?]

And again,

... পনেরো কাঠা জমি কুল্লে, আর ভিটেটা তিন কাঠা। দু'বিঘে ভাগে [for sharecropping] পেয়েছিলুম গত বছর। তা বিস্টিতি—³⁵⁰

[... Total fifteen *kottah*³⁵¹ of land, and my ancestral home is on another three *kottah*. Got two *bigha*³⁵² in share, last year. But the rains—]

The Playwright faces the same hurdles in communicating with the Cheap, just as the Mid-priced did:

Playwright: কিন্তু ঐক্য? শ্রেণী? সংগ্রাম?

... শক্তি? বিক্ষোভ? বিস্ফোরণ?

Cheap: বোঝলাম না বাবু।

Playwright: বুঝলে না? জল ওষুধ ইউরিয়া ডিজেল—এগুলো তো বোঝো?

Cheap: তা না বুঝলি আমাদের চলবে কেন বাবু? চাষ করে খাই—

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Local measurement of land. 1 *kottah* is 720 square feet.

³⁵² Local measurement of land. 1 *bigha* is 14400 square feet.

Playwright: কিন্তু ওগুলো যে আমি কিচ্ছু বুঝছি না ভাই।

Cheap: আপনি গেরামে কোনোদিন যান নি?

Playwright: না!...

Cheap: ... একবার গেরামে চলেন। গেরামের কথা নাটকে লেখেন।

Playwright: গ্রামের কথা নিয়ে অনেক নাটক আছে... চাষীদের অবর্ণনীয় দারিদ্র । জমিদার জোতদার মহাজনের অত্যাচার... বৌ মেয়ে লুট করা... ইউরিয়া ডিজেল কোথাও দেখিনি। ইউরিয়া দিয়ে কি নাটক হয়?

Cheap: কিন্তু বাবু, ইউরিয়া ছাড়া যে চাষ হয় না?...

... মাজরাপোকা লাগলো। ওষুধ পাইনো...

... আই. আর. এটের³⁵³ বীজটা বি. ডি. ও.-র³⁵⁴ অফিসে পেলুম তাই।... আমারই পাশের জমিতি নগেন বারুই ... ওর অবিশ্যি নিজের শ্যালো পাম্-প্-সেট আছে। আর আমরা ওর কাচ থে-ই জল কিনতি হয় সাত ট্যাকা ঘন্টায়...

...

Playwright: ... চুপ করো!... কী পেয়েছো কী! এই সব নিয়ে নাটক হয়!

Cheap: ... না হলি যে চাষ হয় নে?

Playwright: ... চাষের কথা নাটকে কী হবে? দরকার 'চাষির কথা'...

Cheap: চাষ বাদ দিয়ে চাষির কথা কি করি হবে বাবু?³⁵⁵

[Playwright: But unity? Class? Struggle?

... Power? Protest? Explosion?

Cheap: Could not understand, *Babu*.

Playwright: Could not? Water, pesticides, urea, diesel – understand all these?

Cheap: How can we survive if we can't understand these, *Babu*. We survive on farming.

Playwright: But I can't understand those, *bhai*!

³⁵³ IR8 is a type of paddy.

³⁵⁴ BDO is the Block Development Officer.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 273-274.

Cheap: Haven't you ever been to the villages?

Playwright: No...

Cheap: ... Come to the villages for once, write about the villages in your plays.

Playwright: There are a lot of plays talking about the villages... The indescribable poverty of the farmers. The torture of the landlords, head of the farmers and moneylenders... abduction of the farmers' wives and daughters... Never seen urea or diesel anywhere. Could there be a play with urea?

Cheap: But *Babu*, farming is impossible without urea...

... There were stem-borer insects. Couldn't get insecticides...

... Got the IR8 seeds from the BDO's office, thankfully... The landowner beside mine, Nagen Barui... He has his own shallow pump-set, though. And I have to hire it for seven rupees, an hour...

...

Playwright: ... Keep shut!... What nonsense have you churned up? Plays could be composed out of these!

Cheap: ... Without these farming couldn't be done.

Playwright: ... What's the use of the topic of farming in plays? The "farmers' story" is needed...

Cheap: How could the farmers' story be possible without farming, *Babu*?]

The reader/audience gets angry at the insensitivity and ignorance of the city-bred Playwright – how he has certain constructed notions of what goes on in the villages, and on which topics plays should be composed. The Cheap teaches the Playwright that the time has now come for a much-needed paradigmatic shift in playwriting – to compose one, on a realistic issue which the contemporary village faces. That could never be done staying isolated in the city, with its comforts. The Playwright's character understands it, unlike the Mid-priced or the Expensive, and declares:

... নাটক লেখা হোক না হোক, গ্রামে একবার আমাকে যেতেই হবে। এবং গিয়ে পড়ে থাকতে হবে, যদিও না জমি-সার-জল, শক্তি-শ্রমী-সংগ্রাম, ফ্যামিলি প্ল্যানিং-ডিজেল-অ্যাটমবম্—এই সব কটাকে মেলাতে পারি।...³⁵⁶

[... Whether plays gets composed or not, It's necessary for me to go to the villages. And I have to set up home there until I find the connections between – land-fertilizer-water, power-class-struggle, family-planning-diesel-atom bombs...]

In this speech, the Playwright (and Sircar) expresses his ecological awareness, citing its basic principle: Everything in this world, is connected to everything else.

Reading Sircar's *Bagh*³⁵⁷ ("The Tiger"; 1965), the next text for the discussion, might remind the reader/audience of the fairy story "Beauty and the Beast". The main character is called Bagh, which means tiger in Bangla. The play is an interaction between Bagh and an unnamed urban educated woman that he has kidnapped. The mood fluctuates all over the text, and ends with the two very different characters becoming friendly with one another. From an ecological point of view, one will note three broad points in this text. The first point would be the character of Bagh's inability to relate to the human community, even if he is human himself. Bagh likes to associate himself with a beast – confirming to the stereotypical way in which the "civilized" human community perceives animals – and calling upon the traditional hierarchy between human beings and other living creatures:

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 275.

³⁵⁷ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 99-120.

Bagh [to the woman]: ... এ ঘরটা কী জানো? বাঘের গর্ত! বাঘের ডেরা। এ তোমার বালিগঞ্জের ফ্ল্যাট নয়! নিউ আলিপুরের ছিমছাম হ্যাপি লজ্ নয়! ... (নিজের বুকো টোকা মেরে) বাঘ! ব্যাঘ্রাচার্য মহাশর্দুল! শের খাঁ দ্য টাইগার! ... তুমি এখন আমার হাতের মুঠোর মধ্যে! হাঃ হাঃ! থাবার মধ্যে! বাঘের থাবা।
...³⁵⁸

[Bagh: ... Do you know what this room is? The Tiger's hollow! The Tiger's lair. This isn't your flat at Ballygunge. Or the nifty Happy Lodge at New Alipur! ... (Tapping his chest) The Tiger! *Byaghracharya Mahashardul! Sher Khan*, the Tiger! ... You are in my fist, now! Ha Ha! Inside my claws! The claws of the Tiger ...]

Yet, at another point in the text, we are surprised to see a contradiction in him. The reader/audience, along with the character of the woman discovers that even if Bagh had had no formal education (he makes fun of institutional education, in turn), he is well-read:

The woman: কিন্তু তুমি তো অনেক পড়াশুনো করেছো—

Bagh: আলবাৎ পড়েছি! নোট নয়—বই! বই পড়েছি! (শেল্-ফু দেখিয়ে) ঐ সব বই দেখেছো? ওর প্রত্যেকটি আমার!...³⁵⁹

[The woman: But you have studied a lot –

Bagh: Absolutely, I have! Not notes – but books! I've studied books! (Pointing his bookshelf out) See all those books? Each of those belong to me! ...]

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 102.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 109.

He shows familiarity with literary figures like Mayakovsky, Dylan Thomas, and even the economist Keynes.³⁶⁰

Now comes the second point. Bagh, in various ways, tries to problematize the concept of animals and comment on it – knocking down the demarcation between “civilized” human beings and the “uncivilized” animal kingdom. He says at one point, commenting on the hypocrisy of the humans of the city:

Bagh [to the woman]: হ্যাঁ ... জানা আছে! তোমাদের সুট-টাই-রুজ-লিপস্টিক-মার্কা জানোয়ারগুলোর বেলেলাপনা জানতে কিছু বাকি নেই আমার।³⁶¹

[Bagh: Yes ... I'm informed! There's nothing left for me to know about the deviant behavior of your suit-tie-rouge-lipstick-stamped animals.]

Again, he observes something profound, making us recall the concept of the “survival of the fittest”³⁶²:

Bagh: জীবন একটা জঙ্গল! যতো সব বুনো জানোয়ার —ছোট বড়ো যতো সব জানোয়ার পা টিপে টিপে ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছে —চোরের মতো—ভয়ে ভয়ে—কখন কার শিকার হয়ে যায়, এই ভয়ে চোরের মতো। ... কয়েকটি হিংস্র মাংসাসী জন্তু —আর বাকি সব পালে পালে হরিণ, ছাগল, খরগোশ! ... তুমি তো ঐ হরিণ খরগোশের দলেই! ...³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 105.

³⁶² The phrase was used by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) on reading Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* (1859). It refers to Darwin's theory of "natural selection". For details on the theory, please see Charles Darwin, *On The Origin of Species* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860), 77-83.

³⁶³ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Dwitiya Khanda*, 111.

[Bagh: Life is a jungle! The whole lots are wild animals – small ones, big ones – all trotting about cautiously – like thieves – fearful – who knows when one gets hunted – that’s their fear... Some are violent flesh-eating animals – and the rest are herds of deer, goats and rabbits! ... You are among those rabbits, aren’t you! ...]

Talking about the last point of observation in this text, the voice of Sircar through the character of Bagh becomes clearer to the reader/audience, when Bagh comments on the larger concerns of the world. The image of the destructive atom bombs creeps in the characters’ conversation. Like we have seen in his other texts Sircar, through Bagh, criticizes the urban middle-class privileged Bengali’s cocooned existence, and his/her lazy lack of awareness of issues threatening humanity. Below are a couple of speeches by Bagh and the woman to support this observation. One finds Bagh saying:

Bagh: ... বক বক বক বক কল কল কল কল ভ্যার ভ্যার ভ্যার ভ্যার —কথা!
চাকরি করতে যাও —কথা! রাস্তায় যাও —কথা! চায়ের দোকানে যাও —কথা!
সিনেমায় যাও, থিয়েটারে যাও—কথা! মানে নেই, অর্থ নেই—শুধু কথা কথা কথা!
... যারা সত্যিকারের বিদ্বান —তারা জানে কথা। বড়ো বড়ো পণ্ডিত —কলেজের,
ইউনিভার্সিটির প্রফেসর—তারা জানে! কিন্তু ... বলে না। বলতে চায় না। ...
আসল কথা চেপে যায়।...³⁶⁴

[Bagh: ... *Bak bak bak bak kal kal kal kal bhyar bhyar bhyar bhyar* – meaningless words! Go to work – words! Go out on the streets – words! Go to the teashop – words! Go to the cinema, the theatre – words! Only words words and words – no meaning, no genuinity! ... Those who are really educated – they know the right words. The mighty erudite, university professors – they know! But ... They never say. They don’t want to say... They suppress the right words ...]

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 110.

Then again,

Bagh: ... ভ্যার ভ্যার ভ্যার ভ্যার। জন্মাচ্ছে, বড়ো হচ্ছে—ভ্যার ভ্যার করছে। ...
বুড়ো হচ্ছে, রোগে ভুগছে —ভ্যার ভ্যার করছে। বিছানায় শুয়ে শুয়ে ভ্যার ভ্যার
ভ্যার ভ্যার করতে করতে পটল তুলছে। একবার ভেবে দেখছে না —ভ্যার ভ্যার
থামিয়ে কিছু করা যায় কিনা!³⁶⁵

[Bagh: ... *Bhyar bhyar bhyar bhyar*. Taking birth, growing up – mouthing all
bhyar bhyar nonsense... Growing old, suffering in sickness - *bhyar bhyar*
nonsense. Laying in the deathbed, and dying, mouthing *bhyar bhyar bhyar bhyar*.
Not for once thinking of doing something other than stopping their *bhyar bhyar*
nonsense.]

The woman agrees to Bagh's observation, adding:

The woman: হ্যাঁ হ্যাঁ, দাঙ্গা! যুদ্ধ! ওগুলো কেন? শুধু ঘরে বসে বসে ভ্যার ভ্যার
করলেও হতো। আবার মারামারি কাটাকাটি করা চাই! তাও কামান বন্দুকে কুলোয়
না—অ্যাটম বোমা!

Bagh: অ্যাটমবোমা! অ্যাটমবোমা বানাচ্ছে! কী করবি? দুনিয়া রসাতলে পাঠাবো!³⁶⁶

[The woman: Yes yes, riots! Wars! Why do those? They could've stayed at home
and blabbered *bhyar bhyar*. Still, they had to fight and kill! As if cannons and
guns weren't enough, they had to go for atom bombs!

Bagh: Atom bombs! They're creating atom bombs! What would you all do? Send
the world to hell.]

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 115.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

The woman finally becomes more socially aware, with Bagh's guidance:

The woman: অথচ কতো লোক খেতে পায় না। ফুটপাথে শোয়ে। এ সব কথা কেউ ভেবে দেখে না।³⁶⁷

[The woman: Still, so many people can't eat. They sleep on the footpaths. Nobody is concerned about these things.]

One might observe that Bagh's sensitivity and awareness about the larger concerns of the world were factors that alienated him from the rest of his fellow human beings. This way one might recall the character of Indrajit as well, which was discussed earlier. Bagh's comfort with his perceived "bestial" identity is virtually identical with that of the woodcutter Chantal of Walcott's *Malcochon, Or, Six in the Rain* (discussed in more detail in the third chapter).

Sircar's plays like *Bagh*, *Abu Hossain* or *Hattamalar Opare*, have fairytale-like elements on the surface. As seen above, it is entirely a different story when the reader/audience examines them closely, and finds Sircar's indirect commentary on various aspects of the present reality. The ecocritic's examination of Sircar's texts would come to a close with an analysis of two more plays by him, which contain that spirit of a fairytale in their narratives. These texts are *Rupkathar Kelenkari*³⁶⁸ ("Scandal in the Land of Rupkatha"; 1974) and *Bhool Rasta*³⁶⁹ ("The Wrong Road"; 1988). *Rupkathar*

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 116.

³⁶⁸ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tritiya Khanda*, 277-292.

³⁶⁹ Badal Sircar, "Bhool Rasta," *Desh*, September 5, 1992, 30-35.

Kelenkari will be examined first. This text is set in the fairytale-like land of Rupkatha (the word is equivalent to fairytale in Bangla). There is the character of a prince called Bajrakumar and his subjects, followed by a so-called “evil” character of a demon. The role of the media and newspapers is influential in this land. At the beginning of the text, the newspaper vendors and readers praise the prince’s heroism through exaggeration.³⁷⁰ Halfway through the text, the media starts doubting the princes’ credentials, and the truth of him slaying the demon. Rumours start spreading. As the character of the King’s Minister puts it at one point:

Minister: ... রাজ্যে একটা গুজব রাষ্ট্র হয়েছে —বজ্রকুমার না কি রাক্ষস বধ করেননি, ফাঁকি দিয়ে রাজস্ব ও কাঞ্চনমূল্য³⁷¹ আদায় করেছেন... রাক্ষসগুলোর লাশ যখন পাওয়া যাচ্ছে না, তখন বজ্রকুমারের কাছ থেকে এ বিষয় কিছু শুনতে পেলে ভালো হয়।³⁷²

[Minister: ... There is a rumour circulated in the kingdom – That Bajrakumar has not killed any demon, he has gathered kingdoms and Kanchanmulyas through a hoax... Now that the corpses of the demons are found nowhere, it would be best if some statement is heard from Bajrakumar about this matter.]

It is also laughable for the reader/audience to see at a point, the character of the paper vendor (and Sircar’s voice behind him) commenting on a stereotypical template found in a fairy tale. It is something that the general mass is used to – good versus evil; the stereotypical “good”, “brave” prince killing the “evil” demon, and doing the kingdom a

³⁷⁰ Sircar, *Natak Samagra: Tiritiya Khanda*, 279-280.

³⁷¹ The currency of the Land of Rupkatha.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 289.

favour.³⁷³ Along with this image crops up the ecological thought of defending one's "land", "home", "personal space" from "evil" of all kinds. However, when one talks about Sircar's *Rupkathar Kelenkari*, the playwright brings in a twist. The demon appears in the king's court but is found out to be a peaceful and docile creature, completely opposite of the people and the media's perception of him:

The demon: (হঠাৎ হাউমাউ করে কেঁদে উঠে) দোহাই ধর্মান্তার, আমি নেহাৎ মুখসুখ্যু সাদাসিদে রাক্ষস; রাক্ষসকুলের সাবেকি সনদের জোরে পুরুষানুক্রমে রূপকাথার দেশে একটু আধটু উপদ্রব করে আসছি। দুষ্ট লোকের পরামর্শে আজ আমার এই দুর্দশা। আমার অপরাধ ক্ষমা করুন ধর্মান্তার, ক্ষমা করুন।³⁷⁴

[The demon: (Wailing suddenly) Your Holiness, I'm a completely illiterate and naïve demon; due to the traditions of generations of demons before me, in the land of Rupkatha, I've been creating minimum nuisance, here and there. Today, my sorry state is due to the ill advice of wicked people. Forgive my crimes, Your Holiness, forgive me.]

The mastermind behind the periodic fake-killing shows of the demon, the construction of the demon and the prince's images and the secret deal between the two, turns out to be Kuberram – The owner and editor of the Tepantar Newspaper of Rupkatha. As the representative of the (apparently) all-powerful media, Kuber's arrogance and patronizing attitude is seen in his speech, when all is revealed:

³⁷³ Ibid., 281-282.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 289.

Kuber: ... আজকাল ফিল্ম বানাই। কোতো পৌরাণিক গল্প পটাপট কাটিয়ে দিই...
কুথায় থাকতো এতদিন ঐ হাঁদা রাক্ষস? কোন রাজপুত্রের খাঁড়ার ঘায়ে কোবে
কাবার হইয়ে যেতো... বজ্রকুমার? তাঁরই বা কি দোশা হতো?... এই যে এতো
বড়ো জমিদারি... কার দৌলতে? রাক্ষসের সঙ্গে রফা করে দেশে দেশে তাকে
মারবার বুদ্ধি কে দিয়েছে? এই কুবেররাম!³⁷⁵

[Kuber: ... I make films nowadays. I snip-snap so many mythological tales,
conveniently... Where would this slow-witted demon be staying, all this while?
Would've vanished by now, with a blow from some prince's falchion...
Bajrakumar? What would've been his state, even?... See this huge estate...
Acquired because of whom? Who has given him the advice to make a deal with
the demon, and mock-kill him in various kingdoms? This Kuberram!]

The fairytale thankfully has a happy ending. If the prince, the king and Kuber are seen as the privileged and powerful section of the human community, the demon could represent the 'outsider', the Other, the subaltern, and the underprivileged. Sircar brings in a fairly sound resolution to the crisis, harmoniously blending the two sections of the human community with respect and equality. The demon's position (along with who he represents) is well-off at the end:

The demon: কিন্তু মহারাজ, আমার কী গতি হবে? এতদিন ঘি দুধ খেয়ে আমি
তো মানুষ খেতেও ভুলে গেছি!

Bajra: কিছু ভেবো না রাক্ষস, অনেক কাঞ্চনমূল্য জমিয়েছি। তার থেকে তোমার
পেনসনের ব্যবস্থা হয়ে যাবে!³⁷⁶

[The demon: But My King! What will my fate be? After having ghee and milk,
I've forgotten to eat humans!]

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 290.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 291.

Bajra: Don't worry, demon, I have saved up a lot of Kanchanmulya. Arrangements for your pension would be made from it.]

Following the narrative style of a fairytale, with a fitting world created in it, Sircar's *Bhool Rasta* narrates a story of a pampered prince. To heal his ailing mother, it becomes necessary for the prince to bring a magical Ambu-fruit from a magical place called Jambu – he and his father had to stoop down to nature for the cure, that no amount of money could bring about. Jambu is supposedly, a place deep into the forests, with danger lurking in every corner. By undertaking this quest, a big, unprecedented change happens to the prince. The prince gets removed from his luxurious four-walled life in the palace, and comes down to the villages and forests of his kingdom – witnessing and experiencing the real life of his subjects. He literally comes in direct contact with the pristine natural world, and the people living in it with high regards for it. The excerpt below from the text, is towards the end, where the prince meets and interacts with a young woodcutter (presumably of his own age). This woodcutter, a child of the natural world brings about the big change of attitude in the arrogant, class-conscious, and unaware prince. The section (like the whole text) is humorous but also philosophical. Ecological values would also be found in it:

ধীরে—ধীরে—চোখ খুলো—খুলো আঁখে, তো—নওজওয়ান এক লড়কা! ছোটি ধোতি,
উপর নাপা, নীচে নাপা। হাতে কুড়ালি, পাশে লাকড়ি, মুখে হাঁসি...

[The Woodcutter] তুম কৌন্ হো?

... [The Prince] আরে? জংলী আদমি

জানওয়ার—আপ বলতে জানে না? চিড়কে বোলে রাজাকা বেটা—তু হয় কৌন? হাঁ রাজাকা বেটা শরিফ আদমি... আমীরকে ‘আপ’ বলতে জানে, গরিবকে ‘তু’।

... হস্ দিয়া নওজওয়ান। [The Woodcutter] কার্ঠুরিয়া আছি কার্ঠুরিয়া। কার্ঠকুড়ানি মা-কা কার্ঠ-কার্ঠুরিয়া বেটা... আভি বোল্—তু কৌন হয়?...

... [The Prince] ‘আপ’ বুলতে জানিস না?

... [The Woodcutter] ‘আপ’ ক্যয়া হোতা হয় রে?... হামি জানি ‘তুম’ আওর ‘তু’। মাকে বলি ‘তুম’, আর জঙ্গলকা জান্-ওয়ার জঙ্গলকা চিড়িয়া —তাদের বলি ‘তু’, উরা সব দোস্ আছে না? তুম ভি মুঝে ‘তু’ বোলে তো তু ভি দোস্ বন্ গয়া।

... [The Prince] হম হয় রাজাকা বেটা যুবরাজ ... রাজা কাকে বোলে সিটাও জানে না? ... এ জায়গার নাম কী আছে?

[The Woodcutter] নাম? সুনসান জঙ্গল।

... [The Prince] রাজা কৌন আছে?... রাজা! ভগ্-ওয়ান! দেওতা!

... হস্ দিয়া কার্ঠুরিয়া... [The Woodcutter] ইহাঁকা দেওতা হয় আসমান... সারে পেড়... জঙ্গলকা জানওয়ার আওর চিড়িয়া। দেওতা আছি হামি আর হামার কার্ঠকুড়ানি মাতা।

... [The Prince] ভাই, বহৎ ভুখ লাগী, খানেকো কুছ মীলেগি?...

... ভুখ—ক্ষুদা—গরীবকি জ্যায়সী, রাজাকী ভি ত্যায়সী, ফারাক নেই বিলকুল...³⁷⁷

[Slowly, slowly—Open your eyes—Eyes open and lo!—A young man. Wearing a small loincloth, upper-body bare, legs bare. Axe in hand, pieces of wood by his side, smile on his face...

(Informally) Who are you?

... *Arre?* Idiotic wild man.

Beast! Doesn't know how to address with respect—with “aap”. The price gets annoyed and says—(Informally) Who are you? Yes, the king's son is a gentleman... Has the sense to say “aap” to the wealthy and “tu” to the poor.

... The young man laughs. Woodcutter, I'm a woodcutter. The woodcutter son of a wood-collector mother... Now say—(Informally) Who are you?

³⁷⁷ Sircar, “Bhool Rasta,” 34.

... Don't know how to say "aap"?

... What is "aap", *re*? I know only "tum" and "tu". Refer to mother as "tum" and say "tu" to the animals and the birds of the jungle. They are my friends, aren't they? If you say, "tu" to me, you will also become my friend.

... I am the king's son, the heir to the throne... He doesn't even know what a king is?... What's this place called?

Name? Remote Jungle.

... Who's the king? King! God! *Deota*!

... The woodcutter laughs... The *Deota* here is the sky... All the trees... The animals and birds of the jungle. I am a *Deota* and so is my wood-collecting mother.

... *Brother*, I'm very hungry, could I have something to eat?...

... Hunger—Starvation—It's the same for the poor and the king, there's no difference...]

At the end of the text, the prince's transformation is complete. He forgets his old palace life, his parents, his arrogance and his class-consciousness. Man-made hierarchies prove to be baseless and nature helps to disintegrate it. The prince becomes a child of nature, goes back to it, starts appreciating its values, and lives a simple but spiritually fulfilled life with the woodcutter – who becomes a sibling-like figure to him. The plants and animals soon become the prince's friend:

দিন—দিন—দিন—বহু দিন—রাজাকা বেটা... কাঠুরিয়া বনে গেলো। নাস্তা গা, নাস্তা পা, হাতে কুড়ালি, কাঠুরিয়া বেটাকে বোলে 'তু', বোলে 'ভাই', কাঠকুড়ালি মাতাকে বোলে 'তুম', বোলে 'মা', জঙ্গলকা জানওরকে চিড়িয়াকে বোলে 'তু', বোলে 'দোস্ত'। কৌন হয় রাজা পিতাজি?... কয়া হয় অশ্বুফল? সব ভুল গয়া, একদম ভুলে গেলো সব কুছ...³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 35.

[Days pass—Days—Many many days—The king’s son... Became a woodcutter. Bare torso, bare legs, axe in hand, says “tu” to the woodcutter’s son, says *bhai*, says “tum” to the wood-collector mother, says *Ma*; says “tu” to the animals and birds of the jungle, says “friend”. Who’s the king, his father, any longer? ... What’s the Ambu-fruit? He has forgotten everything, absolutely forgotten ...]

The above exercise was an attempt to look at Badal Sircar’s play-texts from an ecocritical angle. It was very interesting to see Sircar’s ecological concerns manifesting in layered ways in these texts. Be it, his adoption of the third theatre method which proved to be eco-friendly, or his ecological concerns in the content of his plays. His overarching concern for most of his plays was the effect of the atomic and nuclear bombs on landscapes and people. He wanted to shake the “sleeping” middle-class Indian to get out of their stagnant lives and do something to make the planet a healthier place to live in. His heart seemed to pain, seeing the glaring economic and social inequalities, baseless power-plays and exploitation within the human community – a community that was made for harmony and affection. He was sad to see a great divide between the village and the city. He also showed concern about animals. It could be said that nature was not a silent, voiceless prop in his plays. Even after raising issues like these, the ecocritic feels that somewhere, Sircar wishes to spread a message through his texts – one of optimism. From an eco-conscious angle Sircar, somewhere, hopes that after reading/watching his plays, his readers/audience would have a deeper realization: The realization that all is not lost; that the human community (beginning in India and then spreading to the rest of the world) would join hands and take action to prevent the planet from “sinking”. By doing so, they would also heal the various conflicts within their community. It could be apt to

say that despite no apparent proof of his connection/interaction with Carol Gilligan or her works, Sircar displays a strong care ethics activist in himself.

DEREK WALCOTT'S DRAMA: ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Derek Walcott (1930 - 2017) was born, brought up and nurtured in St. Lucia, in the Caribbean. His complex identity in its immediate form, was that of mixed ancestry: that of White European and African. From the idea that is gathered about him – reading his works, hearing his interviews, and looking at what others have written about him – is that Walcott had initially experienced an inner tussle of having to confirm to the “ways” of either of the two knowledge systems¹ present in him. As time progressed, he had accepted those multiple and multilayered knowledge systems in him, and had grown comfortable with the uniqueness. He, in his own way, had endeavoured to carve out this unique postcolonial St. Lucian Caribbean identity of that very “chaos” and “cacophony” that historical events of the world had thrust on his land and his people: we see it in his usage of language², the creation of characters, the employment of local folklore, and so on. Walcott’s works powerfully indict colonialism and its effect on culture and language. He is concerned primarily with defining the Caribbean as a culture distinct from, yet in dialogue with Western traditions. We will find a similar strain of how a unique postcolonial identity has shaped up, in the hands of Wole Soyinka in his works, in the next chapter as well. We have already seen it in Badal Sircar’s creations, in the previous chapter. About St. Lucia and its connection to Walcott, Edward Baugh has a lot of interesting things to tell us:

¹ If we hypothetically consider them in their “pure”, “pre-contact” states, that is.

² The different kinds of Creole languages that people of the Caribbean use. Essentially they are born out of the rupture of the European languages (like English or French) and their domestication, to suit the needs of the Caribbean culture-specific expressions. Excerpts from Walcott’s various texts will show that, shortly.

St. Lucia is a mountainous island of lush tropical vegetation, with rain forests, picturesque bays, and enticing white-sand beaches, famous for its volcanic mountain lake, Soufrière, and its Pitons, spectacular twin peaks rising out of the sea... The apparent inconsequentiality of the island has been a dynamic of Walcott's inversely proportionate celebration of it in his work... various features of the St. Lucian society in which Walcott grew up became important concerns of his writing and factors in his depiction of the Caribbean... divisions of class, color, race, and culture, all aspects of the legacy of colonialism and slavery. Particular areas of significance within these categories include language, religion, folklore, and the economic deprivation of the black majority. Walcott's personal origins and family context conditioned his views on these matters. One of the impressive characteristics of his writing is the way in which he integrates personal, autobiographical material into his presentation of public, communal issues.³

Baugh also lets us know that even though in the later period of his life, Walcott spent more and more time in the United States of America, he periodically came back to the island for activities. He was still very much in contact with the place⁴.

Looking about his birthplace, the young Walcott somehow came to realize that his unheralded surroundings were eminently remarkable despite their historically marginalized status. That which may be disdained as local, parochial, ordinary, provincial, insular has at the same time the virtue of being close, familiar and unexpectedly rich in potential.⁵

³ Edward Baugh, "Derek Walcott," The Nobel foundation, accessed Dec 4, 2012, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-article.html.

⁴ Ibid., 476.

⁵ Robert Hamner, "Introduction: Out of the Ordinary, Derek Walcott," *Callaloo* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 1.

Walcott had posed as an “artist in an emerging society [who] has a profound obligation to give expression to a society that has not yet created its own authentic voice.”⁶ “Walcott’s sustained exposure to World History and literature gave him an understanding of the world as merely a collection of provinces. So, the microcosm of St. Lucian life is replicated in the wider international world.”⁷ In Walcott’s contemporary post colonial Caribbean reality, there has been an effort to reclaim the term “province” (with its earlier limited and restrictive qualities) and then endowing it with positive characteristics. There is this acknowledgement of a spiritual relationship between the landscape and the people, with the infusion of the spirits of global cosmopolitanism plus local or national pride.⁸ Walcott (showing signs of an ecologically sensitive and concerned literary artist) realizes that “the proudest city is a dot on the face of the earth. Earth itself is a dot in the sky. Placed against this scale of nature, we are all small islanders and forget it at our peril.”⁹

Also,

“The contrast between the vastness of the surrounding sea and the intimate scale of the island, with the additional complication of a hidden depth within the island’s small compass, sustains Walcott’s imagination, early and late. A specifically St. Lucian scale of nature is his first frame of reference.”¹⁰

Walcott strives to create heroic figures out of ordinary characters, who are simple and close to the earth and its elements. In his texts, we will find representations of generality,

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Paul Breslin, “Derek Walcott’s ‘Reversible World’: Centers, Peripheries, and the Scale of Nature,” *Callaloo* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 10

¹⁰ Ibid., 16

of common people. Breaking away from the hero-like grandeur of the earlier times, they call our attention to what they stand for, rather than to themselves.¹¹ As the postcolonial artist, Walcott through his art, sees writing back as a primary stance to clear the clutter of the empire from the New World Adam's¹² open-space. For Walcott, nature exists/is prioritised before culture and culture originates from it. As indicated before, the space called Caribbean has been conceived of as having no stable cultural origin.¹³ The mixing of different knowledge systems has created oscillating minds which have taken the safer path of 'mimic'ing the White Western European colonizer. The islands became independent in the 1950s and 60s (St. Lucia, in particular, achieved independence in 1979 from centuries of French and British control), but the Caribbean people of different national and racial origins continued to be influenced by the European world-views and belief-systems.¹⁴ Two of the significant themes that are found in Walcott's compositions are "the intricate relationships between the colonized and the colonizer and the ways in which the Caribbean is gashed between different places and loyalties."¹⁵ Later in his works, Walcott has also dwelled on the "changing social patterns' observed in the West Indies after the independence..."¹⁶ Out of the history of the colonizer and the colonized in the Caribbean space, Walcott carved out a body of realistic, but lyrical, literature. It showed oppression, plus gave the marginalized their own literary voice through an

¹¹ Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3-8

¹² I understand it as the postcolonial "third world" human being, who is looking to start over, freshly, heavily burdened with history, but has a desire to drop that baggage and not be a slave to it.

¹³ Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 50-51

¹⁴ Bharatender Sheoran, "A dilemma of Caribbean Populace: Post-Colonial conflicts and Identity crisis in Derek Walcott's Plays," *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities* 1, no. 5 (Feb 2014): 1-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

interesting concoction of folklore, the art of storytelling, theatre and dance. Also, Walcott adapted, transformed, and re-imagined the various Western traditions with which he was familiar, to voice out the uniqueness of the West Indian cultural mix. In order to create a unique form of contemporary postcolonial Caribbean literary art, Walcott and the other literary artists from there looked at theatre and dance, derived from the varied forms of Caribbean carnival. The carnival has been an important element in the contemporary Caribbean literature and other forms of art. Though initially, Walcott was sceptical that the young Caribbean nations would be tempted to veer themselves more towards tourism than art using the element of the carnival. Nevertheless, the carnival in the works (especially in the plays) of Walcott reminds one that it will always be the foundation of any Caribbean theatre. As a modernism-influenced artist, Walcott, in his plays, infused elements like the East Asian theatrical traditions, especially the Japanese noh and kabuki theatres. Other elements include Greek tragedy, the history pageant and social drama.¹⁷

Let us now talk about Walcott's ecological concerns, as brought out in his plays, one by one. In this thesis, Walcott's plays are concentrated on and they are the primary texts. Walcott is, perhaps, more popularly discussed with reference to his poetry and his persona of a poet. That would be the subject of another project, another thesis. Here in this thesis, we discuss his play-texts. The first play, perhaps his most famous one that comes to mind is *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970)¹⁸. Two words that we first note when we read the text/watch the performance are, "Monkey Mountain" and "Makak". As our discussion about this text progresses, we will gradually understand these two words

¹⁷ Robert D. Hamner, "Introduction," in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 1-12.

¹⁸ Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 207-326.

on a deeper level. The physical space/setting given by Walcott in the text is a “West Indian Island”. By this stance, he might be pointing out to the English (this might extend to other European languages like French, as well) speaking Caribbean countries, going through the same postcolonial experience. As in the case of Caribbean countries like Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, St. Lucia, Guyana or Belize, historically this “island” in the text presumably has been peopled by generations of multiple races brought by the White colonizers as slaves, from different parts of the world (during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). We find a quest for identity and “home”/“land” among the characters here. The land, with its flora and fauna and its botanic familiarity with the characters poses as an important element in shaping up the latter’s environmental imagination and (both community and individual identities). The title of the text refers to a dream that its protagonist experiences, and it gives new shape in the former’s perspective and the formation of individual identity. “Monkey Mountain” could be an imagined place, which poses as a parallel to those Caribbean countries, where people are insecure about their identity, and they mimic or try their best to embrace/emulate the White European ways of life, like monkeys mimicking human beings or other animals. The image of the monkey stirs up its stereotypical association with people of the black-skinned African race. Even the protagonist’s name in the text – Makak – refers to a monkey (the word “macaque” in French). More than any other race, Walcott’s personal racial identity propels him to examine the complex Afro-Caribbean identity in the Caribbean space, in many of his texts, including this one. He shows how the black-skinned African origin Caribbean citizen of today needs to make peace with the past historical events and eventually, his/her identity. He/she should first accept historical

facts, then understand the presence of the “adulterated” European plus African knowledge-system prevalent in the contemporary Caribbean – from which the “pure”, “pre-contact” (with the White Western European knowledge-system) African knowledge cannot be extracted. The space called “Africa” (which often comes across as an exotic mental construct) would have to remain a far-off land – an ancestral memory – even if it is necessary to realize and respect where one’s community comes from. Amid the chaotic blend of varied knowledge-systems an essentially Caribbean identity needs to emerge – a West Indian identity that is harmonious, complex but unique. Where only a West Indian identity is tangible and real – where, the geographical spaces of Europe and Africa are accepted to be blurred, fuzzy and unreachable.

At the beginning of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in a prison, indicated by the following quote: “Mooma, mooma/Your son in de jail a’ready”¹⁹, we find Corporal Lestrade – who is an insecure biracial person and a bootlicker of the White European “Marble Law” and culture. The “jail” could refer to the (often psychological) imprisonment by the colonizer to the Caribbean people (Lestrade or Makak, in the text), prohibiting them from finding their identities. Lestrade in many ways tries to humiliate Makak and his fellow cell-mates:

Corporal: Animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers, stop turning this place to a stinking zoo!²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., 212.

²⁰ Ibid., 216.

Also,

... Some of the apes had straighten their backbone, and start walking up-right, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. Now if you apes will behave like gentlemen, who knows what could happen?²¹

[Here it is a delight to discover how, like Sircar, Walcott also recalls Charles Darwin.]

Then again,

[To Makak:] ... Listen, you corrupt, obscene, insufferable ape... The [European] law is your salvation and mine, you imbecile... This ain't the bush. This ain't Africa. This is not another easy-going nigger you talking to, but an officer! A servant and an officer of the law! Not the law of the jungle, but something the white man teach you to be thankful for.²²

Makak is an African origin black-skinned person who is, in his own way, insecure of his own looks and thinks of himself as ugly:

Corporal: Stand up! Sit down! Up on the bench! Sit down! Hands out! Hands in!
(Makak does all this...)²³

Again,

²¹ Ibid., 217.

²² Ibid., 280.

²³ Ibid., 223.

Makak: I am an old man... I suffer from madness. I does see things. Spirits does talk to me...

... I does catch fits. I fall in a frenzy every full-moon night. I does be possessed...

... I have live all my life

Like a wild beast in hiding...

Is thirty years now I have look in no mirror,

Not a pool of cool water, when I must drink,

I stir my hands first, to break up my image...²⁴

Makak escapes the prison with Tigre and Souris (his fellow jail-mates) to a “dark forest”, in the abode of nature – which probably would also symbolize the space for a postcolonial “recuperation”/“healing” of the banished/marginalized:

Makak: ... put me on that horse, for Makak will ride to the edge of the world, Makak will walk like he used to in Africa, when his name was lion.

[Again, to Moustique:] ... if we dead, little one, is not better to die, fighting like men, than to hide in this forest? ...²⁵

Moustique and Makak also encounter some peasants in the forest, one of whom was bitten by a snake and was in his deathbed. Makak ultimately taps and uses his indigenous knowledge (from the African indigenous community where he has descended) to heal the dying man and bring him back to life:

²⁴ Ibid., 226.

²⁵ Ibid., 240-242.

Makak: Like the cedars of Lebanon,
 like the plantations of Zion,
 the hand of God plant me
 on Monkey mountain...
 I see you all as trees...
 ... without names,
 a forest with no roots!...
 ... you are living coals,
 you are trees under pressure...²⁶

Moustique's description of Makak, at this juncture of the text calls for attention:

Moustique: ... I know an old man, he been living in the forest, he know all the herbs, plants and bush. He have this power and glory... he could cure this man.²⁷

Through Moustique, Walcott seems to critique the blind mimicry of Europe and Christianity by Afro-Caribbean people, when Makak's indigenous faith becomes the only element which brings life back to the dying man:

Moustique: Ain't white priest come and nothing happen?
 Ain't white doctor come and was agony still?

²⁶ Ibid., 248.

²⁷ Ibid., 246.

Ain't you take bush medicine, and no sweat break?

White medicine, bush medicine,

not one of them work!

White prayers, black prayers,

and still no deliverance!

And who heal the man?

Makak! Makak!²⁸

Meanwhile, Lestrade follows them, and it is here in the forest, that he gets transported to the (exotic) Africa of the ancient times and thinks of Makak as an African king. Contrasting his earlier self, Lestrade, now defends his native African culture and knowledge-system:

Corporal: ... Once I loved the [European] law. I thought the law was just, universal, a substitute for God, but the law is a whore, she will adjust her price. In some places the law does not allow you to be black, not even black, but tinged with black.²⁹

In the following section of the text, towards its end, we see how Lestrade becomes vulnerable in the forest, and starts his journey towards accepting his dark-skinned African side:

²⁸ Ibid., 251.

²⁹ Ibid., 279-280.

Corporal: ... Thrash that bush there! Build a fire for my safari. Set down the white man's burden. My back is breaking... Bwana Lestrade is tired. Once I knew this jungle like the black of my hand...

Who's that?

{In the moonlight, Basil [a carpenter and cabinet maker, who poses as a figure of death] comes out of the bushes}

Who are you? I'm going mad, goddammit... Who're you in that ridiculous gear?...

Basil: I am Basil... I do not exist. A figment of the imagination...

You have one minute to repent. To recant. To renounce.

Corporal: Repent? Renounce what?

Basil: You know, Lestrade. You know...

Corporal: My mind, my mind. What's happening to my mind?

Basil: It was never yours, Lestrade...

Confess your sins. Strip yourself naked. Look at your skin and confess your sins...

Corporal: ... Too late have I loved thee, Africa of my mind... I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart of the forest at the foot of Monkey Mountain... I kiss your foot... I return to this earth, my mother... now I am myself... Now I feel better. Now I see a new light. I sing the glories of Makak! The glories of my race! What race? I have no race!... Makak! forgive me old father...

Makak [as if representing the contemporary postcolonial Caribbean]: They reject half of you. We accept all. Rise... The forest claims us all, my son...³⁰

Makak (in the last scene of the text, just before the Epilogue) eventually kills the white goddess (representing the colonizer) as demanded by Lestrade and the dream ends. The goddess has a face (sometimes represented by a mask), white like the moon, with a jet-

³⁰ Ibid., 296-300.

black cascade of hair (Walcott unmistakably referring to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*³¹, as a tribute):

Corporal: She is the wife of the devil, the white witch. She is the mirror of the moon that this ape [the black-skinned African person] look into and find himself unbearable... She is lime, snow, marble... the mother of civilization, and the confounder of blackness. I too have longed for her... if you want peace, if you want to discover the beautiful depth of your blackness, nigger, chop off her head!... She is the white light that paralyzed your mind, that led you into this confusion...

Makak: I must, I must do it alone...

{He holds the curved sword in both hands and brings it down. The Woman is beheaded}³²

Makak gains the peace of his mind (“Now, O God, now I am free”³³) and at last establishes his Caribbean identity – an identity he is no longer ashamed of. Before that, he had grown “forgetful” and “tired” of his name and race, as he confesses to Lestrade³⁴.

The forest in the Monkey Mountain changes the characters' lives for the better, as they gain peace, pride and self-assurance about their unique identities, as Caribbeans, as West Indians. The local flora, fauna and the belief-system heal them, as they prepare themselves to write an essentially Caribbean history. From “below”, negating and getting rid of how the colonizers' historiography has defined them and their lands.

³¹ A very influential text by Frantz Fanon (Martinique born Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and philosopher). It was published in 1952. Fanon talks about how through various tools like language, the White Western European colonizer communities are constantly brainwashing the coloured/dark-skinned ones into thinking that the latter are inferior, relegating them into submissive roles, unlearning the latter's traditional knowledge and thrusting the former's knowledge/culture/world-views onto the latter. Fanon also seeks a restoration of dignity to the coloured/dark-skinned subject/s, when they come out of this dangerous loop created by the colonizers.

³² Walcott, *Dream*, 319-320.

³³ *Ibid.*, 320.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

The issue of a justified historiography of the contemporary landscape by its inhabitants follows in Walcott's *The Ghost Dance*³⁵ (1989), as well. Walcott seems to call for an alternative version of history – a history which challenges the earlier colonizer's version that erased/overlooked/negated indigenous communities, figures and their issues. Talking about the indigenous people's revolts “from below” also demands the foregrounding of their respective natural environments, as these people's lives are intrinsically connected to the former. They respect and preserve the land that they are born in, striking a harmonious relationship with the other non-human natural beings. Harm is done to the environment and the indigenous communities living close to it, by industrially enlightened urban communities. The urban residents sharply distinguish themselves from nature and the indigenous people – calling the latter “uncivilized”, “imbecile” and the like. *The Ghost Dance* depicts the conflict between the White European-origin Americans and the indigenous Lakota Indians at Dakota (the United States of America), in the nineteenth century. Here, the tussle of the land is between the Lakota community and the White Americans. The land happens to be precious and a defining factor for the Lakotas. Questions of the position of the land and its connection with the indigenous communities and the colonizers are raised by Walcott. The Lakota community expresses their existence in their local environmental terms. The non-human creatures are friends to them {we will find this in Walcott's *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*³⁶(1998), as well}:

³⁵ Derek Walcott, *Walker and The Ghost Dance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 118-246.

³⁶ Walcott, *Dream*, 81-166.

Kicking Bear: ... a lark sang to him from the ladder of the sun:

“Your own people will kill you.” So the lark sang.

He is very afraid of the Indian Agency.

of Major McLaughlin and his Indian police.³⁷

Also,

How can I eat? You know our starvation.

You know that McLaughlin cut down on our rations.

It is autumn now. As it is with those leaves,

so it will be with all the Indian nations...

The herds of buffalo will blow like black smoke.

The buffalo are already becoming ghosts...

if you say you love us, then suffer with us...³⁸

In his text, Walcott recreates the events which ended with the death of the Lakota chief, Sitting Bull. We also find an urban White American woman, Catherine Weldon, leaving her own class and community and taking part in this collective struggle of the indigenous community against the White oppressors. However, before Catherine takes up this humanitarian cause, we find that she is not altogether comfortable with this spatial displacement to Dakota from Boston. She expresses her present fractured local environmental familiarity as well, in the text:

³⁷ Walcott, *Walker*, 128.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

I should go back to Boston, to streetlights and carriages,
long white gloves and concerts...
I'm stuck out here on the farm, alone.³⁹

As it is the Lakotas have been driven away from most of the parts of their original land and put into reservations, with controlled ration and other amenities. The Whites further wish to usurp the remaining land allotted to the former, with Major McLaughlin (head of the Indian Agency of that reservation) working on a deal to cheat the Lakotas out of their land. For a long time the innocent and “ignorant” Lakotas continue to be actively and passively oppressed by the Whites. There is a section in the text, where the Army surgeon, Dr. Beddoes (representing the colonizer community) actually justifies their usurpation of the Lakota land and the extraction of natural resources through the usual stances of considering the indigenous people and their beliefs as imbecility and illiteracy, glorifying science as the necessary tool to human “progress” and how their own tasks are noble.⁴⁰ Side by side, the issue of conversion to Christianity of some of the Lakota people is also highlighted by Walcott. The Whites had thrust their religion to the indigenous people in order to “educate” them – very craftily convincing the latter how irrelevant their own community-knowledge was, that the latter had no agency, and how improved and advanced human beings they would become by unlearning their traditional beliefs, and embracing that of the Whites. The Whites think that they have every right to capture the “virgin”, “pristine” landscape before them – clubbing the indigenous people as part of

³⁹ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 143-144.

the “non-human”, non-threatening, “tame-able” inhabitants. In a particular juncture of the text, the reader witnesses the ironic situation – Who is calling whom “animal”, and who is acting like one!:

Donnelly: [A high-ranking White officer, towards the indigenous people]: Aye! Fought those naked, dog-eatin’ haythen, the Messy Breeches, the Look-Alike-As, the Sew-Your-Patches... On me own cross... like this from the lance of a Sioux at Little Big Horn.

We didn’t marry them either. We fought them.

Not fondle their squaws, smellin’ of buffalo grease.

Brandon [Engaged to Lucy, an indigenous woman converted to Christianity]: And, for that remark, Donnelly, you’re fightin’ me...

It’s a personal insult to my fiancée...⁴¹

However, not all the Lakota community members were convinced by the White “teachings”. They invoke the power of their own traditional knowledge-system and hope for a better future. The Ghost Dance ritual poses as a source of protection for the community – the belief that the Lakota people would be invisible and immune to the bullets of the Whites. Also, that the torture that they and their land have experienced in the hands of the Whites would go away. New flora and fauna will emerge, the land will be replenished again and the Whites would be driven away by the higher forces of the Lakota community-beliefs. In fact, there is a segment in the play, where the indigenous woman, Lucy, could not bear being converted to Christianity, felt like a traitor towards her own community and eventually commits suicide – as a salvation to her “sin”:

⁴¹ Ibid., 140.

Eagle [The Indian preacher]: ... My daughter hang herself... Lucy. You remember Lucy. Swift running Deer. My daughter, Major McLaughlin. She hang herself...⁴²

Catherine also talks about how it was amid a natural setting, by a creek, that she last saw Lucy, who “wanted to go back”⁴³. Does Lucy imply then, that by taking her own life, she went back to nature and to her community teachings? Does she imply that she finally found peace after truly mingling with her natural environment, à la Rabindranath’s Abhijit in *Muktadhara*⁴⁴? Even though the White Army and their Indian agents end up in conducting mass-killing of the indigenous people, the end of the play dwells on hope. That the Ghost Dance would resurrect them and the land would be restored to its pre-contact (with the White immigrants) state:

Catherine: And I can easily believe it...
 that they will come back galloping, quiet as clouds,
 to the Land That gives Back nothing, even to them.
 I believe they are always there, always approaching,
 like thunder without sound, on hooves of smoke,
 those whom the land that gave them life belonged to—

⁴² Ibid., 194.

⁴³ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁴ A 1922 play by Rabindranath Tagore. In the text, a dam was constructed to block and control a waterfall (which represents the human desire to tame/control nature). The character, Abhijit sacrifices his life in destroying that dam and releasing the waters. There was a deep parent-child like connection between Abhijit and the waterfall, because he was found by the king, Ranajit, below the falls. In the end, it was understood that through his sacrifice and objection towards constructing the dam, Abhijit went back to his original parent – the waterfall, and consequently nature – away from the cruel, industrialized human community, and found true peace.

Sitting Bull, Kicking Bear, and the leaves of the tribes,
the Blackfoot, the Sioux, the Ogalalas, the Cheyenne⁴⁵.

Now, a text mentioned earlier, will be discussed: *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*. Reading the text, it is important to first focus on the word, “brother” from the title. While Ti-Jean did have two biological older brothers (Gros Jean and Mi-Jean), in his quest the sibling-like concern and assistance is provided to him by other creatures, as well. The creatures happen to be non-human: for instance, the Cricket, the Frog or the Bird. Later, the unborn Bolom finally takes birth and Ti-Jean becomes a brother to him, as well. So, the word “brother” here is expanding its default social definition and becoming more universal. Employing local West Indian folkloric elements, Walcott is presenting before us a story about the different phases of struggle between the colonizer and the colonized (indigenous and coloured multi-racial communities) on the islands. Representing the colonizer in various forms, we have the trickster-like character of Old Man/Papa Bois/Planter/Devil, while the two elder brothers of Ti-Jean (who attempt to deal with and outwit this fiendish figure – all in vain) would represent those who challenged the colonizer at various points of time, with negative outcomes. We find in the text that the devilish figure gives a challenge to the concerned family (Ti-Jean, his mother and brothers) that he will harm all, except the one who, as the words of Bolom attests:

Anyone human
Can make him feel anger,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 246.

Rage, and human weakness,
He will reward them...⁴⁶

Gros Jean's primary focus on physical brawn and Mi-Jean's overconfidence with bookish knowledge prevent the both of them from reaching their goal and getting the better of the devil. Consequently, they are eaten up. Their poor fate is seemingly also linked with the fact that they disregard the non-human creatures of the forest, even after being advised by their mother not to:

Mother [to Gros Jean]: When you go down the tall forest, Gros Jean,
Praise God who make all things; ask direction
Of the bird, and the insects, imitate them...⁴⁷

Gros Jean insults the creatures, this way:

[Kicking the frog] Get out of my way, you slimy bastard! How God could make such things? Jump out under my foot, cricket, you know you have no bones!... Bird-o, bird-o, show me a good short-cut, be quick!

(Suddenly, the Bird, Cricket and the Frog all scurry shrieking, croaking...)⁴⁸

Mi-Jean's condescending attitude towards these creatures is brought out through these quotes:

Mi-Jean: Bird, you disturbing me!

⁴⁶ Walcott, *Dream*, 99-100.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

Too much whistling without sense,
Is animal you are, so please know your place.⁴⁹

Also,

[Talking about the Frog] Well, confusion on earth, frog could talk!
Gros Jean was one man, I is a next. Frog,
You ever study your face in
The mirror of a pool?⁵⁰

The forest animals sometimes pose as guides and witness the tragic fate of most of the characters, except that of Ti-Jean at the end:

Bird [to Mi-Jean]: Mi-Jean, Mi-Jean,
Your brother is a little heap
Of white under the bamboo leaves...
Come and bear a piece away
To build a chapel from his bones. Look, look!⁵¹

Again, to Ti-Jean:

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Frog: Beware of an old man whose name is worldly wisdom.

Firefly: With a pile of sticks on his back.

Cricket: ... and a foot cloven like a beast.⁵²

Refreshingly, Ti-Jean respects these creatures from the bottom of his heart and they help him to win at the end. When he starts his quest through the forest, after taking leave from his mother, Ti-Jean brilliantly restores the faith in human beings inside these creatures and makes them happy, this way:

Frog: Ti-Jean, like your brothers you're making fun of me.

Ti-Jean: Why should I laugh at the frog and his fine bass voice?

Frog: You wouldn't call me handsome, would you?

Ti-Jean: (Kneels among the Creatures) Oh, I don't know, you have your own beauty.

Like the castanet music of the cricket over there.

Cricket: Crak, crak. Now say something nice to the firefly.

Firefly: How can he? I don't look so hot in the daytime.

Ti-Jean: But I have often mistaken you at night for a star. (Rises)⁵³

Walcott exemplifies the local beliefs through the present character of this text, that every non-human creature – big or small, is part of the ecosystem. They need to be given their due respect and value. Also, the ecosystem runs by interdependence of these life forms.

⁵² Ibid., 136.

⁵³ Ibid., 135.

What is also striking in this text is the figure of the Bolom – the unborn. This should be mentioned. Ti-Jean’s mother remains very true to the modern-day brutal reality, when she comments that perhaps the Bolom is lucky enough not to be born to “the horror of this life” and wishes it peace.⁵⁴ One might feel that this figure could be connected to the unborn child of the Dead Woman of Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests* (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Perhaps, not being born yet to face today’s harsh, dystopic real-world is actually beneficial for these two figures.

Walcott’s *O Starry Starry Night*⁵⁵ (2014), is about two real world-renowned artists, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin spending their days under the same roof, in Arles, France, in the late twentieth century. Two main issues have been dealt with. Firstly, whether an artist needs to continue to hold onto his/her faith even if the rest of the world fails to understand his/her art. Secondly, Van Gogh’s denial of his failing mental health – much to the annoyance of Gauguin. Arles, France, with its warm and dry summers and architectural beauty gives the required environmental imagination to Van Gogh, to create his artful masterpieces and also to delve in his bouts of scepticism. Arles could be described as having an urban spirit, but can we call it a city? Apparently, no. Walcott, through the character of the Proprietor, makes this known:

Proprietor: Our city’s not a city but a fair-sized town...
 I believe it’s capable of breeding saints
 in spite of its brothels...⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁵ Derek Walcott, *O Starry Starry Night* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 2-106.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

Through generalized conceptions, Walcott might be pointing out that Arles shouldn't be called a city because of certain factors. Arles might not have the required population, it is more closed and does not expand into other areas as cities should, the absence of the centre of governing power, or the residents' immediate occupational shift from farming. Gauguin's character blends in the natural beauty and the not traditionally beautiful elements together, to sum up the town in a realistic manner:

... Everything is yellow here, or gold
 The yellow sunrise in the cornfields.
 A prostitute's pee, and that gangrenous
 yellow house.⁵⁷

By injecting the element of nostalgia, Walcott brings the French Caribbean island of Martinique into the text. Martinique also has influenced the environmental imagination of both the artists. The character of Vincent (Van Gogh) has words like this to appreciate that space:

... the sea was tropical, cerulean shot with emerald,
 and flecked with little mutinous white crests.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 31.

As someone growing up in the islands, Walcott's personal affinity towards the sea features very prominently here. In fact, his *The Sea at Dauphin*⁵⁹ (which will be discussed, shortly) is a text where everything begins and ends with the sea, with its all-pervasive presence. In an interview, Walcott had this to say about the sea:

... in St. Lucia the presence of the sea is bigger than the land in your own sight. There is a horizon; it could be totally empty – the waters of the bay could be empty of boats. Then you'd have an immensity between the sky and the sea. Obviously, there is the usual thing of creating a sense of insignificance compared to that immensity, but it has something stronger than that to say. Nothing can be put down in the sea. You can't plant on it, you can't live on it, you can't walk on it. Therefore, the strength of the sea gives you an idea of time that makes history absurd. Because history is an intrusion on that immensity. History is a very, very minor statement; it's not even an intrusion, it is an insignificant speck on the rim of that horizon. And by history I mean that is progressive and linear. With the sea, you can travel the horizon in any direction, you can go from left to right or from right to left... It is not a rational line. It's a circle, and that's what you feel. You feel that first of all, that if you weren't there you wouldn't be missed. If you are on land looking at the ruins, the ruins commemorate you. They more commemorate than lament the achievement of man. They may contain a moral lesson but underneath that there is still praise of the tyrant or hero. There is still awe at the immensity of the ruin. And that's what the ruins of any great cultures do. In a way they commemorate decay. That's the elegiac point. The sea is not elegiac in that way. The sea does not have anything on it that is a memento of man. Somehow the motion of the sea enters the motion of the mind. The mind itself tries to absorb part of that immensity, and realize that its own contributions to immensity of that thing are simply a bubble, one of many bubbles in an infinite area. There is a strength that is drawn from island peoples in that reality of scale in which they inhabit. There is a sense both of infinity and acceptance of the possibility of infinity, which is strong. And in a way that provides a kind of endurance. It provides a kind of settling of the mind that is equal to the level of the horizon. That is what I have learned from growing up on an island.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Walcott, *Dream*, 41-80.

⁶⁰ William Baer, ed., *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 158-159.

In *O Starry Starry Night*, regarding the nostalgic landscape of Martinique, Gauguin and Lotte (a sex-worker) have the following conversation highlighting the former's attitude towards the island and its residents:

Gauguin: This is Martinique. I have lived there once...

Well, it is like the happier verses of Baudelaire come true...

Lotte: Are there many wild beasts there?

Gauguin: Oh, yes! I've never shot any, though.

Lotte: What do they look like?

Gauguin: Like me.

Exactly like me. Two legs, two hands...

everything. They eat everything.

And they cannot be trusted. *Homo lupus*.

Man is a wolf. No; monkeys, snakes, some deer.⁶¹

Here, human beings have been brought in the same platform as that of other animals. Walcott, through Gauguin, is pointing out at something very striking. Lotte's attitude towards animals in general seems to match with that of the average urbanized individuals – a very condescending, an almost fearsome one – reminding one of that of the wife in Sircar's *Sararattir* and Anima's character in his *Solution X*. When it comes to Lotte specifically, we find that she wishes to move to Paris, if and when she finds the scope to do so. Her dislike to stay in Arles is expressed thus:

⁶¹ Walcott, *Starry Night*, 25-26.

I'd rather sell chestnuts on the streets of Paris
 than work in this bloody backwater Arles!⁶²

The concept of the city fuels her ambition for a better life. She finds Paris pulling her. The big city, she realizes, defines and personifies her:

Let me die in Paris with smoke passing the windows
 and flags flying from the chimneys and the swallows
 twittering my requiem, and the bats like acolytes
 saying goodbye to a sobbing concertina...⁶³

One more significant thing that should be noted is Gauguin's feminization of the landscape. In the text, there is a point where he compares landscapes in general (when Vincent and he talk about both Arles and Martinique) to that of the female anatomy. He even goes on to feign a sexual act while talking about it.⁶⁴ Could we then say that Gauguin reaffirms the popular patriarchal stance of placing nature and the female within the same bracket and exoticising/sexualizing both, as a subconscious form of a desire to dominate them?

As mentioned earlier, Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954) has the sea as the all-powerful force at the backdrop. The sea becomes a synecdoche for nature at large. The text is an obvious reworking of the Irish literary figure, J M Synge's *Riders to the Sea*

⁶² Ibid., 6.

⁶³ Ibid., 88. Lotte compares herself with that of a musical instrument perhaps to indicate what she felt. She might have felt that Vincent and Gauguin were using her (a sex-worker) like a musical instrument for their own selfish entertainment. They never cared for her voice and were simply playing out their expected patriarchal roles.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 31.

(1904), in the contemporary Caribbean space. It is felt that Walcott wishes to show us the relevance of the same universal situation that Synge wanted to show in his text: the equation between human beings and the natural environment at its hostility – in every geographic space across time. The main similarity between the two plays lies in the fact that the characters live in an isolated island where their main means of livelihood is dependent on the sea, plus the fact that the sea at regular intervals takes away their near and dear ones without discrimination – displaying its angry power (through winds and the waves) to the human beings and making the latter realize their powerlessness. In this context one is reminded of Sircar's *Sararattir*. Perhaps like Sircar, Walcott also wishes to present such a situation where the natural environment shows its fury – presumably to get back at the continuous anthropogenic destructive activities that are being done today. In the place of Maurya, we have Afa (the gender roles have been reversed by Walcott). Afa gives us the affirmation to the role of the sea in the text: “The sea do what it have to do, like wind, like birds. Like me...”⁶⁵ Augustin, another fisherman also echoes: “Why we going so far, and you can hear sea grinding his teeth in the making dark?...”⁶⁶

Losing his loved ones and the difficulty of getting food has practically drained Afa of his emotions and tenderness of feeling – as a product of his physical environment and its treatment towards him. He justifies it, along with a general commentary on the harsh and arid local landscape thus:

⁶⁵ Walcott, *Dream*, 47.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

I born and deading in this coast that have no compassion to grow food for children, no fish enough to buy new sail, no twine. Every day sweat, sun, and salt, and night is salt and sleep, and all the dead days pack away and stink, is Dauphin life. Not I who make it! So I must work the sea, that is my pasture... If is compassion you want talk to the sea, ask it where Bolo bones, and Rafael, and friends I did have before you ever born...⁶⁷

At a juncture of the text, it is found that the sea also stands for something else, as brought out in this statement by Afa:

God is a white man. The sky is his blue eye,
His spit on Dauphin people is the sea.⁶⁸

Apart from the obvious criticism of this furious natural element as part of the colonial conspiracy by marginalized voices from below, we also realize the effect of the colonizers' act of capturing and naming of natural elements of the geographical spaces that they had invaded – still lingering in the so-called postcolonial age. Emphasizing the importance of the local folk-belief, Afa also points out the importance of the supernatural as also an accepted part of the entire ecology, when he makes us aware that “some say this sea is dead fishermen laughing. Some say is noise of all the fisherman woman crying.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 57.

In one of Walcott's significant literary works, *The Haitian Trilogy*, he points out that the West Indian space has continuously been dominated, reconstructed and reshaped by different persons in power over four hundred years. The trilogy contains three plays, out of which, two focus on two historical figures caught in the whirlpool of power-play at their own times. The plays are: *Henri Christophe*⁷⁰ (2002), *Drums and Colours*⁷¹ (1961) and *The Haitian Earth*⁷² (2002). Could we say here that Walcott is attempting at a historiography of the West Indian space through these three plays? It certainly appears to be so. We also find that in this manner of history-writing, ecological concerns are constantly blending in. They are not being able to be kept separate. As history has witnessed, *Henri Christophe* concerns the times when the titular figure rises from humble beginnings (from being a slave) to a man of power, and develops a tyrannical streak in himself. Reflecting on the war and the then situation on the land, the character of General Sylla says to General Dessalines:

Then you appreciate the position
 That a long war, an internal cormorant war, has left
 Our treasury in?
 The peasants have identified liberty with idleness;
 The fallow fields cropless; the old plantations,
 Plaine du Nord, Morne Rouge, Quartier Morin,
 Are like grass windows, unweeded, growing thorns
 And bristles, dry seeds in a parching wind.

⁷⁰ Derek Walcott, *The Haitian Trilogy: Henri Christophe, Drums and Colours, The Haitian Earth* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 1-107.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 111-294.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 297-434.

We do not seem to be able to drive them back to work;
 They speak of slavery, murmur against measures,
 Strict, but satisfactory to the able administrator.⁷³

Walcott highlights the immediate relevant issues like these here, through his characters, starting with a critique of war in general. It is important here to mention the dual attitudes of characters with regard to animals, their non-human co-inhabitants of the land. At a point in the text, General Dessalines compares the European colonizers to animals, essentially viewing them on a negative light:

Who are the founders of our country – the Big Whites?
 Wild geese that, adopting to a finer climate, assume
 The white divinity of the swan; and all their brothers,
 A babble of shopkeepers, murderers, dispossessed.
 You say they founded the country. What did they found?...⁷⁴

Speaking of a positive attitude towards animals, we have the character, Vastey (Christophe's secretary) and the general mass of Haiti, looking at animals for inspiration after the colonizers have been driven away from the land. Vastey says, with the crowd echoing:

⁷³ Ibid., 12-13.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

... With a new government, cloaked in modesty
 In open sunlight; peace like blackbirds
 Shall settle on the season.⁷⁵

At another point, the characters of the First Murderer (of Dessalines) and the Second one realize that the greatest enemy of human beings are human beings, themselves, and not any other animal (making the reader/audience recall Darwin, as well). Their conversation, on a tone of sarcasm, goes thus:

First Murderer: ... This place is an arena, a human arena of lions and laughter; only the wicked and those who do not think can survive. What are you laughing at?

Second Murderer: Sorry sir. Now, sir, what would you say are the best hints to become a professional murderer?

First Murderer: First, be a vegetarian; second, be kind to animals; third, keep in practice...⁷⁶

One of the memorable speeches of Henri Christophe in this text is about critiquing tyrannical misuse of absolute power, in general. The readers/audience might feel that this speech could also be applicable to the wrongful and forced domination of nature in general/a certain landscape. More specifically, Haiti, in this case:

... Kings rule and grow corrupt,

⁷⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 52.

Absolute authority can only disrupt
 The church and state. Murmurs erupt
 To anarchy, the peasants will kill.⁷⁷

Elsewhere, Christophe also points out how the local flora, it seems, are actively reacting to the various forms of tyranny on the land, refusing to be subdued:

The grass overruns the aristocratic urns,
 The weeds grow between broken coachwheels
 That the wind spins in an empty season, the rich ruined...⁷⁸

Vastey also makes a poignant speech in the text, which makes Henri and the readers/audience realize how fragile human life is, and how baseless human discrimination is, as well:

In death, Henri, the bone is anonymous;
 Complexions only grin above the skeleton;
 Under the grass the dust is an anthology of creeds and skins...⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 101.

A similar strain of thought is found in Soyinka's play, *The Invention*, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

An important and dangerous thing that needs to be pointed out in this text, now, is Henri Christophe's attempt at reorganizing and "tailoring" the local environment - the flora and fauna to suit his sensibilities, which are based essentially on remnants of the European world-views. As a human being, he wishes to "tame" and "reconstruct" the local landscape. Before actually talking about what he does in the text, it is essential for us to recall Jill Didur's insight on the concept of the hill station, in the postcolonial Indian space. Didur says:

The Indian 'hill station' is a British creation partially fuelled by fantasies of virgin landscapes and the possible recovery of or retreat to the Garden of Eden. Nowhere is this association with the landscape more prominent than in the Darjeeling region of West Bengal... The Darjeeling area was viewed by the British as an ideal location for retreat from the heat of the plains... The other overwhelming attraction the hill stations had for colonial subjects was the way in which their landscapes could be assimilated to British notions of the picturesque, a trope that pervades travel writing of the nineteenth century when these areas were first settled by Europeans... A physical remaking of the landscape through the transplantation of plants and trees associated with the English countryside... Private gardens, government nurseries, botanical gardens, and artificial lakes were common additions to hill station environments, all of which contributed to an assimilation of the landscape to British aesthetics, topography, economic desires and botanical familiarity. By 'domesticat (ing) the disorderly'... 'overtime hill stations were drawn so tightly within the aesthetic confines of British landscape traditions that they became divorced from the surrounding environment...'⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Jill Didur, "Cultivating Community: Counterlandscaping in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*," in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and G. B. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 43-47.

Christophe, in the text, does something parallel to this. His psyche is made up of the stereotypical European tradition of depiction of the idyllic landscape. He wishes to project that onto his local environment (which is far removed from the European geography) and tailor it accordingly. The following speech by him in the text gives us an idea of the kind of image that is on his mind:

The air is thin there, the balding rocks
 Where the last yellow grass clutch whitening in the sun,
 And the steep pass below the sea, knocking
 Like a madman on the screaming sand,
 And the wind howling down the precipices like a lunatic
 Searching a letter he never wrote – against these rocks,
 Wind, sand, cold, where the sharp cry of gulls beats faintly on the ears,
 And in the green grove a milk of doves – what army
 Would bend its head against the wind to reach?
 We would, there, be safe.
 And strong, and pretty.
 The smell of roses which the sea wind dispels,
 Dispelling also the birds' voice, the weaker oleander –
 Let us build white-pointed citadels,
 Crusted with white perfections over
 This epilogue of Eden, a prosperous Haiti,
 My kingdom where I, a king, rule.
 Mine, mine, Vastey! Once a slave,
 Then after that Napoleon can envy,

With the Antilles mine, the whole archipelago overturning
 Cauldrons of history and violence on their masters' heads,
 The slaves, the kings, the blacks, the brave.⁸¹

Next, he shares his plans to reconstruct the local environment his way, which seems rather ominous to the readers/audience. He says:

I shall build châteaux
 That shall obstruct the strongest season,
 So high the hawk shall giddy in its gyre
 Before it settles on the carved turrets.
 My floors shall reflect the face that passes over them,
 And foreign trees spread out the shade of government
 On emerald lawns; I will hold councils.
 I'll pave a room with golden coins, so rich
 The old archbishop will smile indulgently at heaven from
 The authenticity of my châteaux.
 I will have Arabian horses, yellow haired serving boys,
 And in the night the châteaux will be lit
 With lanterns bewildering as fireflies,
 Over the lawns at night, like mobile candelabra.
 I who was a slave am now a king; after my strength
 Not England, Jamaica, or Napoleon
 Shall send ships to disgorge invasions, but search for

⁸¹ Walcott, *Haitian Trilogy*, 73-74.

Trade and quiet. Haiti will flourish,
When I am King.⁸²

What seems also visible here is Christophe's lust for wealth and his wish to accumulate it for his own luxury, rather than using it for the welfare of his people and the other inhabitants of his land.

The next play that will be discussed is *Drums and Colours*. Harold N. McDermott informs the reader/audience that:

[In 1958 the play was performed] as part of the West Indian Festival of the Arts, to inaugurate the [short-lived] West Indian Federation. It was a celebration in which all federated territories were supposed to participate. Although for various ideological and logistical reasons every territory did not enter a play, the desire for this to happen was inspired by the idea that in a regional political federation 'no element is of greater potential importance than a West Indian theatre, for the theatre is the meeting place and the nursery of the arts'. As a dramatic work commissioned by the University College of the West Indies, *Drums and Colours* was more than simply a celebration of nationalistic⁸³ pride and achievement of federal nationhood. In retrospect, the socio-political events that formed the backstory to its creation and Walcott's own orchestration of key thematic occupations such as the quarrel with history, racial and cultural syncretism, and the evolution of a distinctive West Indian theatre style position this play as a foundation on which Walcott's conceptual evolution may be mapped since he, in later works, will clarify, contest, and even contradict key tenets of his aesthetic philosophy... There is no doubt that the drama to inaugurate the Federation was intended to interrogate the impact of imperial history on the formation of Caribbean civilization and nationalism.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., 75.

⁸³ I presume that the phrase "nationalistic" here is being used by McDermott to connote something positive, and is free from the negative connotations of the concept of nationalism.

⁸⁴ Harold N. McDermott, "Towards 'that republic in which complexions do not matter': Derek Walcott's *Drums and Colours* Fifty Years On," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 11, no. 2 (December 2014): 1-2, <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1273&context=anthurium>.

Also,

To this end, dramatic and thematic continuity are effected through the coin motif, characters like Paco and Walter Raleigh who act as bridges between Old and New World episodes, and the playwright's unremitting humanist message of love, forgiveness and fellowship variously deployed throughout the pageant.⁸⁵

The text binds together four impactful leaders (from four different historical time-frames) in the West Indian space: Christopher Columbus, Walter Raleigh, Toussaint L'Ouverture and George W Gordon. While Columbus and Raleigh stand for imperialism and colonialism⁸⁶, L'Ouverture and Gordon represent resistance and revolt. We mainly see here in many of the scenes, the domination of the indigenous Indians by the Spanish. The playwright, through the character of Gordon, a Jamaican elite, sets the main (social and environmental) historical background quite effectively:

... The history of these islands has been tragic from birth,
 Their soils have been scoured, their peoples forgotten,
 While the powers of Europe struggled for possession.
 And when that wealth has been drained, we have been abandoned.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁶ Imperialism is to be understood as the concept/idea/plan behind colonization, while colonialism is the direct and actual practice/execution of that plan.

⁸⁷ Walcott, *Haitian Trilogy*, 259-260.

As the indigenous ethnic group in the text is exploited, forcefully Christened and gradually being wiped out, we hear its cries. At one point we have a chorus which says:

Each sphere within the other leaves its mark,
As one man's dying represents the race.⁸⁸

Then again,

Fernando [a Spanish sailor]: For every Arawak converted to a Christian
Thousands of them have perished in the mines.⁸⁹

Garcia, another Spanish sailor, expresses the cruelty of forceful Christianization, when he utters, "Kneel before Lieutenant Fernando and be christened."⁹⁰ Also, the position of the slaves in the eyes of the oppressor is clearly expressed by the character of a plantation owner, Calixte-Breda: "Slaves are not people, they are intelligent animals."⁹¹

The image of harvesting is used in an ominous sense in the text. The Spanish sailor, Bartolome says, "Come... let us harvest illuminations."⁹² The word "illuminations" that he uses might point out to the dominating community's manufactured knowledge with which they brainwash and subdue the dominated one. The character of Quadrado,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁹¹ Ibid., 218.

⁹² Ibid., 131.

who is a conquistador, places side-by-side the concepts of harvesting crops and that of gold:

Quadrado: This barbarious metal...
 Induced our country, merceneries, and gentlemen
 To sell their souls, for this pus-coloured metal,
 Spanish gold.⁹³

Again,

We gather this...
 As peaceful Indians harvest yellow maize;
 It makes our markets and controls the state...⁹⁴

Regarding the gold, Garcia appears to be right in his comment: “Gold is the lamp that leads us all to hell...”⁹⁵ In this context, one cannot help but draw a parallel with Rabindranath’s *Raktakarabi*, where the oppressive king exploits the workers to mine for gold, treating them like mere machines. In the text, characters like Quadrado, can’t help

⁹³ Ibid., 134.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 136.

but realize how the supernatural is also a part of the local environment. At a point, he says, “... ghosts creep from the deep slime of the sea.”⁹⁶ Also,

Quadrado: ... I hear the spectres of these slaughtered men
Wail in the wind, the autumn of their race.⁹⁷

The issue of getting uprooted from one's own land and environment and not being able to deal with it is also highlighted by the playwright. There is a character, the Jew, who is an emigrant to the New World, in the playwright's words. The Jew expresses his discomfort:

Because they have wrenched my people from the roots,
I am like a shattered timber cast adrift...⁹⁸

The character of the Woman Slave, who is also uprooted from her native place in Africa, dives into nostalgia:

Woman Slave: Africa, the white birds by the river's edge at sunrise,
The clear waters over white stones, the children
Splashing in mud.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 171.

Characters like the Male Slave, appreciate animals as helping humankind:

Male Slave: Day will break soon, and we are nearing islands,
I can hear the creaking of seabirds this morning.¹⁰⁰

The Woman Slave's comment is impactful, as it points out another facet of their current reality, "Yes, bring children into the world, to bury them."¹⁰¹ One will immediately recall Walcott's *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* at this point, for the playwright's pointing out of the importance of appreciating animals. As mentioned earlier, the thought that the current world is not suitable for newborn children and that it is better not to bring children in it is echoed in *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* and Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*.

One also recalls Soyinka's *The Invention*, when one finds in the text that at a point the race of a person cannot be determined, due to darkness.

[Spanish] Sailor: ... aren't you a nigger?
I can't hardly make out complexions in this obscurity.¹⁰²

Like Soyinka, Walcott is seemingly making us realize the uselessness of racial (and other ways of) human discrimination, and the importance due for the love of humanity as a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 165.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 169.

¹⁰² Ibid., 211.

whole. In the end, the playwright does express some hope, as the character of General Dessalines expresses: "... It is a new age, the black man's turn to kill."¹⁰³

The Haitian Earth (sometimes spelt as *The Haytian Earth*) basically concerns Toussaint's revolution from the point of view of the general mass. That is why a large space is created by the playwright in the text for the voices of the average Haitian residents – characters like a Student, Pompey (a slave who later inherits the Breda plantation) and biracial mulattos like Anton (whose father is Calixte-Breda) and Yette. "Part One extends from the execution of Ogé¹⁰⁴ in March 1791 to July 1800 and Dessalines' defeat of the mulattos under Rigaud¹⁰⁵ at Les Cayes; Part Two opens in about July 1802 and closes in 1820 just before Christophe's suicide."¹⁰⁶ The mulatto, Anton, the self-proclaimed "man without rights",¹⁰⁷ expresses his disillusionment with history and science:

Perhaps I'm very tired of Western culture
 And its privilege of ideas, perhaps,
 Except for art, I see the whole technological
 Experience as failure...¹⁰⁸

A similar thought echoes in Vastey, as well:

¹⁰³ Ibid., 240.

¹⁰⁴ A mulatto delegate to the French Assembly.

¹⁰⁵ The leading mulatto military leader.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon Collier, "The 'Noble Ruins' of Art and the Haitian Revolution: Carpentier, Césaire, Glissant, James, O'Neill, Walcott and Others," in *Fusion of Cultures? (ASNEL Papers 2)*, ed. P. O. Stummer and C. Balme (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 312-313.

¹⁰⁷ Walcott, *Haitian Trilogy*, 306.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 306.

Vastey [to the Student]: You taught us the art of atrocity, civilisation.
 The science of massacre. There were once in this place
 A million Indians. Today there are six hundred.
 Their slaughter was in the interest of science?¹⁰⁹

The Student points out the multilayered power-struggles present in nature and within its different creations:

Student: ... in nature,
 We see the evolutions of power and servitude,
 How one system sharks into another's maw,
 How everything is gloved in appetite
 To feed the major beasts, how there is a difference
 Even in the affects of nature, in cities,
 Blizzards; in jungles: dark rain, it follows
 That there is size, and scale, and service,
 And that at the bottom of the pyramid,
 The apex, of every sane society, the peasant,
 And lower than the peasant, the slave;
 The slave, who even in his own family,
 No less than the obscurest beetle,
 Gives orders as the father to his spawn...¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 315.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 316.

Some characters in the text talk of the landscape (its transformation from the rural to the urban), traditionally associating it with the female and reconfirming the dominant patriarchal stance.

Man [with a luggage]: This city was like a woman that start off good,
Then money corrupt her and change her looks.
Once cities get too proud, God will do that.

(He crosses himself.)

Today now, look at you, dirt on your cheeks,
Your laces straggling in mud? So with cities,
So with women. This city, on a Sunday morning,
With its lace balconies, its mansard bonnets,
Its church bells ringing like earrings,
And next thing, it was a whore...¹¹¹

At a point, General Leclerc (Napoleon's commander in Haiti) himself points this out, saying:

Why do we call countries women?

We see them as wives and whores. It is a piece of earth...¹¹²

¹¹¹ Ibid., 333.

¹¹² Ibid., 392.

Just the way looking down upon the land's transformation has been likened to looking down upon immoral women, human beings who do not behave according to the then elite society-norms have been likened to wild animals. Also, the slaves are not considered "human" enough:

Tooussaint: ... They aren't Africans but slaves. Pets of your empire. Swine, not panthers!

Leclerc: ... Wolves drinking the wind, tearing one another with your teeth.

Tooussaint: We have no wolves here. Wild boars, yes. Illiterate. Both of them.

Leclerc: ... Then why be wolfish, why bite the hand that fed you? That taught you to add and write?¹¹³

In another scene, Christophe answers Dessalines for the latter's cruelty, associating the latter with an animal:

Dessalines: You know when peace will be?

When every yellow skin in Haiti goes dry as corn.

When we bury all the treacherous mulattos...

These people will not plant.

They must go back to planting.

You hear me, Minister of Agriculture?

Now bring in the one who refused to work.

Christophe: No more whipping. They have been beaten enough...

¹¹³ Ibid., 393.

Dessalines: ... What are you staring at, Minister of Agriculture?

Christophe: An animal.¹¹⁴

Along with the image of animals, we again find the image of harvesting used in an ominous sense in this text (like in the previous one). That is present in the previous quote. Also in the following:

Dessalines: ... Look at these hills,

This earth, how dry it is. I sprinkled it.

I sprinkled it with an emperor's golden dew.

Kings will grow out of this soil; my seed

Will grow more emperors.

Christophe: Kings. Yes.

And the peasants cut them down.¹¹⁵

Pompey and Yette are two earth-centred characters in the text. They express Walcott's ecological sensitivity the best possible way. Pompey's comment on the then ecological crisis on the land, at that time-frame calls for attention:

Pompey: This earth getting too dry.

We need some rain.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 420-421.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 419.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 406.

Even the mulatto girl Yette appreciates his concern for the earth:

Yette [to Pompey]: I see you in the field there, you alone, planting, you and the damn mule, and I know how much you love the earth. And I wish I could love you like you love the earth...¹¹⁷

Yette is seen in the text as someone who is all set to tend to her inherited little piece of land:

Yette: I have a little piece of land
My auntie left for me. I'll learn to plant.¹¹⁸

She is supported by the Chorus, who say:

So Yette find a piece of land
Where she teach herself how to plant,
Her skin the same shade as the ground,
And you'll see why I sing this chant...¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 400.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 333.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 334.

At a point in the text, Yette tries to find solace and a new beginning from her tumultuous past in agriculture:

Yette (To the sky): ... Papa ... if I could write you, you would laugh now to see your daughter, who you say would be nothing, bending down on the earth ... Not in a bed but in the earth, trying to plant something. After Le Cap burn down, where I was doing well—money, I mean—after the French people burn down the hotel where I was working, a man here give me a small parcel of land and I am trying ...¹²⁰

Pompey remarks on her connectivity with the earth and respects that even after her death, making us recall Lucy of *The Ghost Dance*:

Pompey [speaking to Yette's dead body]: ... I took your body down
 To give enterrement in the Haitian earth.
 You will turn into grass in a high wind...
 You will be a country woman with a basket
 Walking down a red road in the high mountains.¹²¹

It could be concluded from above that the character of Yette (more than that of Pompey), is visibly practising the Gilliganian 'ethics of care' – just as Gilligan has said about the importance of a female presence in that activity. Such is Walcott's vision, which he is projecting through her.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 335.

¹²¹ Ibid., 434.

Walcott's *The Joker of Seville*¹²² (1978) is a reworking of Tirso de Molina's original text¹²³, where the titular character, more famous as Don Juan, comes to the new emerging society in the Caribbean space. As in the original text, similar intertwining themes are seen to be replicated in the new setting and time-frame, like free-will, the notion of good and bad or the challenge to the established authority. The concept of displacement or dislocation from one's own land and its ill impact on one's psyche is talked about in the play. At one point in the text, when a group of captured slaves on a Spanish ship sing, "Hey, hey, hey! Is the U. S. A. Once we get dere, we gonna be O. K.!"¹²⁴, the readers/audience members immediately realize the sarcasm and the false assurance that is actually being indicated by the playwright. We become aware that the physical, emotional and psychological lives of these slaves would never be the same, when they are forcefully transported from one place to another – from the familiar environment to a foreign one. In fact, the kind of anxiety that Don Juan's character might be facing, about being constantly on the move – often circumstantially, is subtly expressed in this particular scene:

[The character of Rafael is that of an old actor, with his own troupe. The character of Jack is one of Rafael's troupe members and in this scene, he is disguised as a girl]

Don Juan [to Rafael urging Jack (as a girl) to sing]: Let her sing anything you choose, but nothing with carnality in it. I'm getting tired of that. Something that you feel would suit that soiled face and unbroken heart.

¹²² Derek Walcott, *The Joker of Seville* (Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2005), 2-110.

¹²³ Referring to *El burlador de Sevilla (The Trickster of Seville)*, c. 1618-1630), regarded as the source-text of the Don Juan myth.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Rafael: She knows about a sea bird that never finds a resting place...¹²⁵

Perhaps, Don Juan is that sea bird. We also see some anxiety in him when he speaks. When he speaks of Seville at another point in the text, he rehashes pleasant and unpleasant images together to grasp its complicated beauty as a contemporary urban space. This reminds one of how an urban town is described in *O Starry Starry Night*, as we have seen earlier:

Don Juan: Hypocrisy and gold: Seville! She stinks of pride. Nothing changes her pious smile, neither the smell of corpses nor of oranges. Christ! How she hardens my anger! Her witch-hunting Inquisitors, and her divine architecture that was built by barbarous Moors. It's Sunday. Lovers stroll in pairs for the paseo, beautiful! Meanwhile, the dying sun, with spears irradiating from its skull, vomits in sand...¹²⁶

The character of the knight, Octavio plunges into nostalgia when he remembers the natural environment his life in the past has found solace in, presumably, in order to retain his sanity in the present time. He sings thus:

Octavio: ... O sea-green hills the crossing gull called Santa Cruz: lemon orchards sailed from her wing, and a chapel: La Divina Pastora. Woods and a heard river soothed me there... I see that valley still in terms of stress, seas of bright grass where, like a pearl, my soul sleeps in its shell of grace... I am a driven gull, seeking those seas past restlessness, where every rolling hill is like a wave which stays stilled by the hand of grace...¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 86.

Critiquing the present society which curbs individual freedom, the character of Juan's Moor servant, Catalinion, remarks, "... this new world... is nothing but the old one, as long as men are beasts, and beasts still bear their master's burden."¹²⁸ Additionally the character of Isabella, the duchess of Naples, seemingly supporting the earlier view concludes that as a woman, "that was my wrong, born to this privilege of debasement..."¹²⁹ We realize here that Catalinion (as a Moor and a servant) and Isabella (as a woman) have marginal positions in the then society. We also realize how in the world of the text, the image of domination is not only inflicting a shadow on individuals, but also geographic spaces and natural landscapes and environments. Isabella seems to be close to the natural environment. It is as if to highlight her oneness with nature, that the playwright makes her admit to the character of Ana¹³⁰: "I go barefoot from habit..."¹³¹ Later again in front of Ana, she speaks fondly of Juan's unconventional ways, expressing gratitude to him and commenting of "the new freedom that was ours as women. He [Juan] taught us choice..."¹³²

*Walker*¹³³ (1993) centres around David Walker (1796-1830), who fought hard to end slavery in the United States of America of the nineteenth century. The text demonstrates his passion towards his cause and ends with his murder by a mysterious "Figure". This character of the Figure is a Southern White Caucasian American who is an

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23. The idea is that often the dominated group carries out the actions of the dominating one and dominates some other group, after the first dominating group has left. Any dominated group on being liberated has the choice to break this cycle, but unfortunately that does not happen so easily.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁰ In the text, the character of Ana de Ulloa is the daughter of the character of Commander Don Gonzalo de Ulloa.

¹³¹ Ibid., 79.

¹³² Ibid., 80.

¹³³ Walcott, *Walker*, 1-114.

intolerant racist person, and remains mysteriously unidentified throughout the text. He has great hatred towards Walker due to racial prejudice and Walcott might have let this character represent the majority of the then White European Americans who were intolerant against activists (especially who were non-White European) seeking equality and ending racial discrimination. Towards the beginning of the text, an unpleasant exchange occurs between the Figure and the character of William Lloyd Garrison (based on the real-life abolitionist of Irish descent; 1805-1879). The highlights of the interaction are thus:

Figure: Sir, I stand here swaying with hunger

because of my brotherhood's vow.

I won't eat until I see that nigger

spread-eagled in the snow.

I'm as starved as a crow in winter

cawing on a field-fence...

Garrison: ... Don't stand there like a raven

in the afternoon snow,

or a black crow in the cotton.

Come into his house, now.

Figure: I am as white as snow, sir...¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Ibid., 8-12.

We see a stereotypical association of the image of a crow or a raven and blackness/darkness in general, with that of the fearful 'unknown'. In the following speech of Eliza, Walker's wife, we find a similar association:

Eliza: ... am I seeing things? I don't know
 I thought I saw something just now,
 like a raven walking in the snow.
 Like a black crow hopping in the cotton;
 but it goes every time I turn.
 I can't see his colour, his face,
 but it been walking round and round
 like a buzzard, circling this place...¹³⁵

In the dark, it is not possible to determine if a White person or a person of colour is standing. The Figure assures Garrison that he is of the former category, assuming that the shared Whiteness of their skins would enable them to form a common bond and plot against the dark-skinned Walker. Of course, that does not happen in the text.

Like what we have seen in *The Joker of Seville*, the nostalgia about one's place of belonging, after getting displaced from there, finds expression in this text too. Walker and his wife, Eliza have a conversation like this:

Eliza: ... I never thought I'd say this:

¹³⁵ Ibid., 16.

I miss the land.

Walker: Where, what land, Africa?

Because, Liza, that is our true land.

Eliza: Which Africa? Whose Africa?

I don't know no Africa.

I ain't going and I never been there...

Walker: Which land? I'm sorry, Eliza.

Eliza: I miss it, deep, and it hurt.

Not Beulah Land, but red dirt.

Walker: Come on, North Carolina?

Eliza: Yes.

Walker: You going crazy, you hear?

Eliza: The tall green pines. And blood-red dirt.

Maybe I'm just tired of the snow,
 maybe I'll never get used to winter,
 but I wish, this Thanksgiving,
 with the bells muffled in cotton,
 I wish I was back there now.¹³⁶

Then again:

Eliza: I know
 that the past should be forgotten,
 but that's the earth where I was born...

¹³⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

... back in Carolina,
 As illiterate as we was,
 we smelt the pines and the earth,
 we know exacterly,
 without their books and promises,
 exacterly what we was worth...¹³⁷

The nostalgia for the exact landscape creates a problematic here. It seems that Walcott is making us think – which landscape should African Americans refer to, when it comes to their lost “home”s? The place in the African continent from where they have descended? Or the American South – where they have consciously been brought up? This “space” is quite muddled here, with layers that cannot be unpacked so easily.

Eliza’s longing for her “home” is noticed by Garrison too. Also, in the same conversation, Eliza associates danger in Walker’s life with the image of hunting ducks for pleasure – where human beings take away agency from the animals, doing whatever they want with the latter:

Garrison: I understand how you must miss the South.

But if David left Boston to follow the sun,
 you do not have to guess the consequences.

Eliza: He’d be shot down in his flight like a wild duck.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 30.

Speaking of image-associations with natural elements, the character of Barbados (described by the playwright as “black, ex-slave, thirties”¹³⁹) associates freedom with a natural element (the sea). At a point in the text, he sings:

I have smelled freedom
And it smells of the sea...¹⁴⁰

Elsewhere, he says:

The sea loosed my ball and chain,
On the sea’s the only freedom...¹⁴¹

The image of the snail has been compared to two different things. The first comparison is quite jarring to the readers/audience, as evident in the following speech by Walker:

Walker: Not progress, but self-deceit,
the illusion of progress,
no more crawlin’, our own two feet.
Would you spend an entire day
watching a horned, crawlin’ snail

¹³⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 77.

moving inches by labourin' inches
towards its dim destination?

Well, that's how this whole nation
studies our African progress.¹⁴²

At this point, one recalls how Sircar dealt with the concept of history. We have talked about it in the previous chapter. The second comparison of the snail is with the dark-skinned African American slave who does not know how to read and write. This is shown when Walker and Garrison have a bitter argument and Walker says goodbye to him:

Garrison: ... Has the snail forgotten,
when it got here it couldn't read,
its horns were blind as fingers
tracing words on a page:

and do you think a blizzard cares
for what is only a snail's rage?

Walker: The snail taught itself to read
by crawlin', feelerin' out each word,
but it owes you no gratitude.

The snail read about hatred
when inside the snail there was none;
all that the poor snail remembered
was the North Carolina sun.

Well, the snail's turned to a man now,

¹⁴² Ibid., 43.

the mule's turned loose from the plough.

Goodbye, Bill Garrison.¹⁴³

In the text, the forest or the wilderness has been non-traditionally associated with certain ideas, as well. Walcott makes us realize how the image of the forest could be extended to compare things we haven't yet compared it with. This happens in the scene when Walker has an argument with the character called Catherine. Catherine is an Irish cleaning-girl in her twenties. She is shown to be a religious and submissive character, who is illiterate and does not question the various forms of power-structures. After Walker's scathing criticism and questioning of the Bible¹⁴⁴ when he sees her still unfazed, he says:

You are beaten by a Bible

Back to an ignorant wilderness.¹⁴⁵

So here, wilderness represents a secluded space where innocent, naive and stupid beings reside. Side-by-side, during the same interaction, Walker uses the image of the forest to associate something different – as brought out in the following speech:

Walker: I was walking alone through a forest
of black trees whose leaves were like print,

¹⁴³ Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 48-53.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 55.

but their language was different
 and the leaves were letters I had learnt
 but forgotten, from the African kingdoms,
 and I was both lost and not lost.
 And all of the leaves were talking,
 in tongues I almost understood...¹⁴⁶

Also,

Walker: Catherine, all it takes is determination.
 When I began I saw the thick page as a forest
 with no track to go through, excepting my own will,
 and the determination in my fear.
 The white page was black with trees; what I did first
 was study each tree, its shape, syllable by syllable,
 letter by letter, leaf by leaf, and I learnt by myself
 what the leaf symbols were; I said the sound for each leaf,
 till I could comprehend each tree,
 then the whole tree, till the tree was one sound,
 over leaves that fell onto the ground,
 and as I went deeper in the page, in the rhythm
 of my walking, passing under sentences,
 ducking my head under them,
 I could see a light far ahead...¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.

The forest here becomes the traditional nurturer with a difference. It is compared to a textbook which nurtures a being by equipping it with the power of education.

Walcott's *Remembrance*¹⁴⁸ (1977) presents to us two time-frames and characters, running parallel to each other – connected by the protagonist: Albert Perez Jordan. Presently, Jordan is a sixty-five year old retired schoolteacher. The events of the first time frame happen in the present postcolonial reality of Trinidad, while that of the second one is the unpacking of a chunk of Jordan's memory, during the Second World War. In the text, the events of the present day actually happens on Remembrance Day¹⁴⁹. Two major ideas that the text seems to centre around are firstly, Jordan's emotional and psychological turmoil as a witness and survivor of the war, and secondly, the anxiety that characters in the text face due to the fact that presently the USA has become a sole superpower, possibly colonizing them once more after the British left. Jordan and his family are dark-skinned and of African (and presumably Latin American) origin, yet Jordan has a conflicting and confusing relationship with the White Western European colonizer's knowledge-system. The readers/audience witness times when he is all for the latter and other times when he is against it. In fact, his character could remind one of Lestrade in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Off-stage voices jeer at Jordan saying, "Jordan

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴⁸ Derek Walcott, *Remembrance* (Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2005), 2-73.

¹⁴⁹ November 11, in most countries. Since the end of the First World War (1914-1918) this day is observed to remember the members of the armed forces who sacrificed their lives in the war.

is a honky-donkey white nigger man!”¹⁵⁰ Jordan assures others that they “are in Trinidad”¹⁵¹, yet his wife, Mabel shares this memory of him:

Mabel: ... I give up hoping long ago that fool would change. When we was courting, he used to stroll with me by a place where a old coolie named Suraj used to keep ducks. The damn place splattered with duck shit, but he would hold his nose high, and as he throw crumbs to the ducks in that stinking canal, he would say, “We are feeding the swans of Avon.” British from the first to the last crumb. Drunken fool. He thinks is only he who could talk English? I was a teacher too...

Frederick [Jordan and Mabel’s son, who is an artist]: Dad’s got to stop dreaming.¹⁵²

Mabel, presumably frustrated with the kind of tussle happening in Jordan’s head and in people like him, expresses to Frederick that in the present day, “the whole of Port of Spain could do with a second coat [of painting].”¹⁵³ She might mean that all the remnants of colonialism (that the landscape of Trinidad has gone through) could just be buried and put out of sight from their city, so that they could forget the past. Later, we will find Jordan saying things which are similar to this.

There are times in the text where we see Jordan’s wishful thinking that he were a “colonial”¹⁵⁴, and during the war in his younger days, we see him romantically worshipping a lady called Esther Hope and expressing that through a letter.¹⁵⁵ Esther was

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 5. Note the association of the non-White person with animals like donkeys, which are used to carry burden and are traditionally viewed as stupid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵² Ibid., 15. We could again think of the concept of ‘tailoring’ one’s local space to suit one’s imaginary vision of another space/landscape – as discussed earlier in the concept of Hill Station and in *Henri Christophe*.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.

a White British woman who was Jordan's "immediate superior at the Information Office"¹⁵⁶. In the text we find that after the war a conflict happens between Jordan and Esther. Esther expresses how she got annoyed by his unnecessary attention. She goes back to England and Jordan expresses his state of being then, as "a mind without a country"¹⁵⁷. His confused attitude towards the colonial knowledge-system after those events find expression in this speech:

Jordan [Frederick]: God, if there's one thing I rue, my boy, is the day I taught my children diction. I think I did it to defy your mother's earthly vulgarity. Diction has made you a misfit, Frederick, an anachronism in these days of independence. I miss colonialism...¹⁵⁸

Jordan even admits his "colonial inferiority"¹⁵⁹ at a later point in the text. He acknowledges to feeling like a misfit in Trinidad and goes on to say that he would continue to be one even in England or in the USA, if he ever chooses to move in either of the two countries in the future.¹⁶⁰ As mentioned earlier, just like his pro-colonial stance, there are displays of him lashing out against it as well in the text – which confirms his confused psyche. In the present day reality the new colonizer and threat, according to him, is the USA. At a point in the text, Frederick paints the American flag on the roof of their house. Jordan has an unpleasant reaction towards it:

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 37-39.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 71.

Jordan [to Mabel]: ... Know what our boy has done, mistress? He has, following the ripples of the galvanized roof, painted what appears to me to be a large American flag... It's a tribute to Uncle Sam... Boy! You had nothing better to do than to spend the whole damned day on top the blasted house making me a laughing stock again?...¹⁶¹

Then again,

Jordan [to Frederick]: ... I know what you painted. A symbol of distress. Help us, America! A cry from the Third World...

Frederick: You want me to make it the Union Jack?¹⁶²

Frederick might be mocking his father at this moment, but Jordan makes the readers/audience realize the politics of the construction of the Third Worlds by the White Western European dominant discourse. The fact that this discourse wants certain countries (in the West, obviously) to be sites of power and the rest of the world to kneel before them and seek their mercy. There is also another sequence in the text where an American tourist, Barrley, becomes fascinated with Frederick's painting of the flag and wishes to buy the roof of Jordan's house. Jordan, naturally, reacts negatively to this:

Jordan [to Barrley]: Buy my roof? The thing over my head? You Americans think you can buy any blasted thing...¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶² Ibid., 14.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 18.

His sarcasm towards Barrley escalates during their interaction as we see in the following dialogue. We also need to note Barrley's hilarious assumption of what is natural:

Barrley: I don't collect art, sir, I collect life, and once I've acquired life, it becomes art. I like the unspoilt, the natural, and that roof's a natural. I'd have to buy the whole house, I suppose?

Jordan: I dare say. Why not the island?¹⁶⁴

Jordan laments at the whole situation as well, saying, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but to lose his own roof?"¹⁶⁵ His lament is a universal lament, out of the fear and anxiety that a new kind of colonialism is creeping in, towards the so-called "marked" Third World spaces. This unrealistic assumption and then relegation of Third World spaces by the European discourse is also pointed out, subtly, by the playwright over here in this dialogue:

Mabel [to Jordan]: Why you let this girl in, Albert? How could she confuse you so?

Jordan: I told you. She used her last cent to come out here with the child, to get out the farthest point that she could, to the end of the world.

Mabel: Belmont¹⁶⁶ is the end of the world?¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶⁶ The place in Port of Spain, Trinidad, where the Jordan family reside.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 59-60.

The girl in question is a White American hippie dancer called Anna, who seeks refuge in the Jordan household. The insensitive American, Barrley, also makes another mistaken assumption of a word in Mabel's poem, titled "Thy Will Be Done, Hi-lo". Barrley assumes that Hi-lo is an African deity, and Jordan is quick to clarify that it was a supermarket.¹⁶⁸ The situation brings humour out, but paints Barrley as a pathetic individual. There is an emotional conversation that takes place in the text, between Jordan and his friend, Mr. Pilgrim, a newspaper editor in his sixties. During the conversation, Jordan recites a poem of his and Pilgrim gets preoccupied with the line, "Sons die."¹⁶⁹ There could be dual interpretations of it. Firstly, it could point out to Jordan's elder son's death during the Black Power Riots¹⁷⁰, as told to us by Mabel, earlier.¹⁷¹ On a broader level, it could indicate that in the present dire socio-political reality, an entire generation is coming to a halt, with no scope of evolution of living beings, including humans. Speaking of Jordan's dead elder son, it is at his present age that Jordan realizes something significant and expresses it in the text. Jordan talks about the son's rebelliousness, the latter's "wildness", how the latter once called him a Fascist¹⁷². Jordan might implicitly indicate that his elder son was right at that time. The

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁷⁰ Jerome Teelucksingh, "The Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago," *Black Diaspora Review* 4, no.1 (Winter, 2014): 157-180. This is a great article that gives a detailed introduction to the historical event. The Black Power Riots of the 70s, at Trinidad and Tobago began as a reaction to racism in Canada and was inspired by the Black Power Movement in the USA. At a Montreal university, charges of racism were filed against a Biology faculty member, towards West Indian students. Eventually, the police got involved and there was violence. Young Trinidadians felt that there were ongoing racial discrimination and inequality by the government in their location, itself. There were dissatisfaction on the government regarding other issues like unemployment, as well. On February, 1970 at a Cathedral in Port of Spain, a march took place where the protestors destroyed statues and painted some of them black. Prominent activists (like Basil Davis) were shot by the police and sugar workers went on strike. Ultimately, political elites like Eric Williams failed to prove their leadership qualities. Also, it was seen that East Indians and people of African origin failed to unite.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷² Ibid., 46.

latter explicitly expressed his stance against the then power-structure. He realized that domination and forceful authority is unnatural.

Towards the end of the text, during Anna's stay at the Jordan household, she warms up to them. Anna's perspective of them takes a non-traditional turn. She, being a White person begins calling Jordan a saint.¹⁷³ She also admits that compared to them (who are non-White), she herself feels like a "coarse person."¹⁷⁴ This episode holds some sort of an anthropological spirit. It shows how a White privileged person goes on to live with another community and gets rid of her erstwhile prejudices. She even starts having a fellow-feeling with them. Jordan's rigid attitude undergoes a change, as well, as the text draws to a close. With a pessimistic view of the current reality, he urges Frederick to go along with Anna and leave the country, as he will have a better life outside their immediate local space.¹⁷⁵ His suggestion to Frederick becomes a suggestion to the contemporary Caribbean citizens, urging them to shake off the burden of history in order to get on with their lives:

... Since you love the girl [Anna], erase history from your mind and make your own. Don't ask her questions and don't let her ask you; take her as she is with what she has, and teach her to accept you the same way. But history, gossip, rumour, and what people go to say? Blank it out!...¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 63.

*Pantomime*¹⁷⁷ (1978) is an interesting dramatic work by Walcott where the towering theme happens to be the relevance of colonialism in the contemporary world. Walcott very interestingly challenges the “Robinson Crusoe”¹⁷⁸ narrative of the European colonial discourse and twists it. The text takes us to the island of Tobago of the contemporary postcolonial times, where we meet two characters: Harry Trewe and Jackson Phillip. Harry has been described by the playwright as “English, mid-forties, owner of the Castaways Guest House, retired actor”¹⁷⁹, while Jackson is supposed to be “Trinidadian, forty, his [Harry’s] factotum, retired calypsonian”¹⁸⁰. Although the text begins by presenting Harry and Jackson in their stereotypical roles of that of the “master” and the “slave”, things and situations change gradually. When we first read the text we mentally assume that Harry is in Crusoe’s position, as he is in the island, miles away from his original home. We also mentally assume Jackson in Friday’s position, as he is a local in the island. The assumptions topple and situations become more complex and layered when Harry thinks of a plan to make his guests enjoy their stay. Harry’s idea is to stage a pantomime version of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. As mentioned earlier, at this point for Harry and the readers/audience, it would be quite usual to assume that Harry would play the role of Crusoe and Jackson, that of Friday’s. This is because visually Harry and Jackson “look” their parts which they are “supposed” to play, and the majority of the world will assume that, going by the colonial dominant perspective. However in the text, there is a sudden jolt in the events that follow, when Jackson asks Harry to see the Crusoe story and their contemporary life-situations in general, from Friday’s

¹⁷⁷ Derek Walcott, *Pantomime* (Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2005), 2-68.

¹⁷⁸ The idea is contained in Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2. Note the sarcastic humour Walcott creates in naming the guest house.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

perspective. Jackson at this point, then, becomes the once-colonized who is recovering in today's times and is ready to answer back. The one who refuses to be the unconditional server of the colonizer, the one who is seeking to form his/her identity that is not defined and dictated by the colonizer anymore. After this stand is taken by Jackson, the master-slave identities¹⁸¹ of both the characters get suspended and in flux. Both of them oscillate between these two identities throughout the text, problematizing Defoe's original work, even threatening to rewrite it.

Jackson's postcolonial identity as someone belonging to the once-colonized group is a problematic identity. It yearns to get the answers of questions like what his authentic Caribbean identity is; and whether following the European colonizer's ways of life and language is the right thing to do. This suspended identity shows immediately at the beginning of the text, when he comes to serve Harry's breakfast – through his usage of language and switching from one to the other, he displays that:

Jackson: (English accent) Mr. Trewe, your scramble eggs is here! are here!

(Creole accent) You hear, Mr. Trewe? I here wid your eggs!

(English accent) Are you in there?

(To himself) And when his eggs get cold, is I to catch...¹⁸²

The emotional and mental states of Harry and Jackson are sometimes described in terms of natural states in parallel, as witnessed from the dialogue below:

¹⁸¹ It should be mentioned here that in the colonial discourse, these identities are socio-cultural constructs based on binary opposites.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

Harry (sings and dances): Is this the footprint of a naked man, or is it the naked footprint of a man, that startles me this morning on this bright and golden sand.

(to audience) There's no one here but I, just the sea and lonely sky...

So how're you this morning, Jackson?

Jackson: Oh, fair to fine, with seas moderate, with waves three to four feet in open water, and you, sir?

Harry: Overcast with sunny periods, with the possibility of heavy showers by mid-afternoon, I'd say, Jackson.

Jackson: Heavy showers, Mr. Trewe?

Harry: Heavy showers. I'm so bloody bored I could burst into tears.¹⁸³

Soon, Jackson, through various ways, makes it clear that following the years of colonialism, Harry cannot dominate him. Times have changed and Jackson and his people will "answer back".

Harry (Gesturing): Friday, you, bring Crusoe, me, breakfast now. Crusoe hungry.

Jackson: Mr. Trewe, you come back with that same rake again? I tell you, I ain't no actor, and I ain't walking in front a set of tourists naked playing cannibal. Carnival, but not canni-bal.¹⁸⁴

While Harry might be in his Crusoe mood, Jackson is not. We should also note how in the above speech, Jackson highlights the importance of the Carnival to the Caribbeans – something Walcott himself has spoken about, and we have talked about it earlier in this

¹⁸³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 5.

chapter. Continuing this strain, Jackson says a similar thing to Harry elsewhere in the text as well:

Jackson: I ain't know what it is eating you this Sunday morning, you hear, Mr. Trewe, but I don't feel you have any right to mama-guy me, because I is a big man with three children, all outside...¹⁸⁵

Jackson realizes that during the rehearsal of the play about Crusoe, Harry could be in a light, cheerful mood, but even if he tries to do the same thing, he cannot. Harry tells him, "It's pantomime, Jackson, keep it light."¹⁸⁶ History continuously pokes Jackson with pain, for the kind of position his people were at one point of time, and that is not something that would make somebody cheer up:

... (Giggling) For three hundred years I served you... breakfast in ... my white jacket on a white veranda, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib ... in that sun that never set on your empire I was your shadow, I did what what you did, boss... that was my pantomime. Every movement you made, your shadow copied ...

(Stops giggling) and you smiled at me as a child does smile at his shadow's helpless obedience, boss...¹⁸⁷

Also,

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 18.

Jackson: ... It's your people who introduced us to this culture: Shakespeare, *Robinson Crusoe*, the classics, and so on, and when we start getting as good as them, you can't leave halfway. So, I will continue?...

... This is the story ... this is history. This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism; it's nothing less than that... I could play Columbus, I could play Sir Francis Drake, I could play anybody discovering anywhere, but I don't want you to tell me when and where to draw the line!¹⁸⁸

Jackson realistically makes Harry realize that in the present times, going back to the pre-contact state for his people and reinstating their original knowledge-system is not at all possible¹⁸⁹. Harry and his people have always been in the privileged position, hence they could afford to be careless and insensitive to such things.

In another instance in the text, we find the positions and identities of Harry and Jackson getting muddled. Jackson here “disciplines” Harry, whom he finds rehearsing for the play, getting into the characters of both *Crusoe* and *Friday*:

Harry: “Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide wide sea ... I bit my arm, I sucked the blood, And cried, A sail, a sail!”

(He removes the hat, then his shirt, rolls up his trousers, removes them, puts them back on, removes them again) Mastah ... Mastah ... Friday sorry. Friday never do it again. Master.¹⁹⁰

The coloured person, Jackson, does the “disciplining” now:

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.

Jackson (exploding): Put on your blasted pants, man! You like a blasted child, you know!

(Silence. Harry puts on his pants)

Harry: Shirt too?

(Jackson sucks his teeth) There.

(Harry puts on his shirt) You people are such prudes, you know that? What's it in you, Jackson, that gets so Victorian about a man in his own hotel deciding to have breakfast in his own underwear, on a totally deserted Sunday morning?

Jackson: Manners, sir. Manners...¹⁹¹

The readers/audience are yet again indirectly reminded of the politics of construction of the Third World by the European dominant discourse and their prejudice towards it, when they come across certain lines from Harry. In this section, Jackson is worried that Harry would hurt or even kill himself. Harry responds like this:

Harry: Attempted suicide in a Third World country. You can't leave a note because the pencils break, you can't cut your wrist with the local blades ...

Jackson: We trying we best, sir, since you gone.

Harry: Doesn't matter if we're a minority group. Suicides are taxpayers, too, you know, Jackson.¹⁹²

The exchange between the two above, is funny, but we can't help noticing two major things. In the Tobago of postcolonial times, Harry and people of European-origin like him are "minorities". The other thing to note is what Jackson says. "Since you gone"

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹² Ibid., 6.

would imply the British colonizers physically leaving Tobago in 1962, after its independence and “we trying we best” might point out to the postcolonial rebuilding of the land and the people of Tobago, where local knowledge is given importance, without any Western administrative intervention.

Like we have seen in the case of Don Juan’s character, Harry also suffers from a sense of displacement. He likes to put himself in Crusoe’s position and feel that he is at an alien tropical island, far away from his local familiar environment. He is aware that he needs to engage in a new process of botanic familiarity with the new space. He expresses his emotional condition to Jackson, at one point:

Harry: I’m rotting from insomnia, Jackson, I’ve been up since three, hearing imaginary guests arriving in the rooms, and I haven’t slept since. I nearly came around the back to have a little talk...¹⁹³

Again, in a speech we find him writing things like these:

“O silent sea, O wondrous sunset that I’ve gazed on ten thousand times, who will rescue me from this complete desolation? ...”¹⁹⁴

Also,

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 45.

“The ferns, the palms like silent sentinels, the wide and silent lagoons that briefly hold my passing, solitary reflection. The volcano ...”¹⁹⁵

We could possibly observe Harry’s attempt to get familiar with the flora and fauna of his new environment, here. He thinks of himself as Adam in paradise, missing “the voice of every one consoling creature, the touch of a hand” or even “the look of kind eyes.”¹⁹⁶ The local environment affects his psyche, moulds his thoughts and personality, and extends/adds to his environmental imagination. He talks about how the sea or the palm trees induce crazy thoughts in him, then how he is unable to sleep. He fears the heat and gets bored by the clouds. He wishes to resume acting because of his fear of “emptiness”. Still, he expresses his desire to “make this place work.”¹⁹⁷

The last important point that the ecocritic notes in this text, is how colonization not only executed the process of “capturing and naming”¹⁹⁸ of the flora and fauna of the colonized space, but also drew the latter into the former’s complex politics – obviously, without the latter’s consent. Towards the initial portion of the text, Harry and Jackson talk about which characters to include in their play on Crusoe. Harry suggests that apart from Crusoe and Friday, they could include Crusoe’s parrot. Then, they go on to determining the parrot’s identity – whether it is a pre-colonial or a postcolonial one, whether it is a creole parrot or not¹⁹⁹. Next, Jackson and Harry argue about whether Harry

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁹⁸ G. B. Handley, “The Argument of the Outboard Motor: An Interview with Derek Walcott,” in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, R. K. Gosson, and G. B. Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 134-135.

¹⁹⁹ Walcott, *Pantomime*, 7-8.

should play the role of a white sea bird, while Jackson plays a non-White explorer²⁰⁰. Harry initially does not want to do that but later gives in, also adding “how many animals I’m supposed to play.”²⁰¹ Immediately after that he asks Jackson again sarcastically, “Am I supposed to play the beach? Because that’s white...”²⁰², to which Jackson responds by pointing out Crusoe’s selfish anthropocentric actions upon arriving on the island. Jackson says (which would actually be the voice of Walcott):

Then he sees a lot of goats. And, because he is naked and he needs clothes, he kills a goat, he takes off the skin, and he makes this parasol here and this hat, so he doesn’t go around naked for everybody to see.²⁰³

Jackson even explicitly addresses this very point which we are discussing right now, when he asks Jackson, “Are you ... going to extend ... the limits of prejudice to include ... the flora and fauna of this island?...”²⁰⁴

Overall, the play has a positive outlook, as it ends on a note that Jackson and Harry will strive for equality and work together harmoniously, as Jackson sings these lines:

Jackson: ... Well, a Limey name Trewe come to Tobago. He was in show business but he had no show, so in desperation he turn to me and said: “Mr. Philip” is the two o’ we, one classical actor and one Creole, let we act together with we heart

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 23-25.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 25.

²⁰² Ibid., 26.

²⁰³ Ibid., 26.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 27.

and soul. It go be man to man, and we go do it fine, and we go give it the title of pantomime...²⁰⁵

The land is central to *O Babylon!*²⁰⁶ (1976), which we are going to look at, now. The text deals with the issue of certain non-privileged communities getting uprooted from their familiar and accustomed environments by privileged and wealthier communities, and the former's difficulty of grappling with it. We are presented with a group of squatters on a certain land, which includes some Rastafari²⁰⁷, who are being evicted. In that site, a luxury hotel will be built. This situation will make one recall Soyinka's play, *The Beatification of Area Boy* (discussed in more detail in the next chapter), where a similar thing happens. The present situation in the text is described by Virgie²⁰⁸ thus:

Virgie [to Priscilla²⁰⁹]: Child, there is wars and rumours of wars! We have no legal right to squat 'pon this beach, for, as Sufferer²¹⁰ say: "Where the Brethern

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 68.

²⁰⁶ Derek Walcott, *O Babylon!* (Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2005), 2-89.

²⁰⁷ Horace Campbell, "Rastafari as Pan Africanism in the Caribbean and Africa," *Michigan State University: The African e-Journals Project*, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://pdfproc.lib.msu.edu/?file=/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/Journal%20of%20Political%20Economy/ajpev2n1/ajpe002001005.pdf>. Rastafarianism originated in Jamaica in the 1930s. It is often called a religious movement (Judeo-Christian influence) which believes the Ethiopian emperor (from 1930 to 1974), Haile Selassie I, to be the earthly manifestation of their God (Jah). It was believed that Selassie would liberate the black race, all over the world. Ethiopia is believed to be the Promised Land (Zion) and the ultimate destination of the Rastas. Laws of the Old Testament, such as not cutting one's hair and not eating pork and shellfish are followed. Many aspects of the White Western European society (called by the term, Babylon) are rejected, deeming them unjust and dominating. Food with artificial colours, flavouring and added preservatives are rejected. The act of smoking ganja is connected to make the body pure and clear the mind. The dreadlocks in their hair symbolize multiple things such as being natural and rejecting the Babylonian ways of grooming oneself (using razors, scissors or combs, hair-products); or resembling the mane of the Lion of Judah (Selassie).

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 2. The character of Virginia Small. The character is described by the playwright as a fruit vender and Sufferer's common-law wife.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. The character of Priscilla Johnson. The character is described by the playwright as an ex-waitress and Aaron's common-law wife.

²¹⁰ Ibid. The character of Percival Jones. The character is described by the playwright as a bottle vender and "Abyssinian veteran."

settle, that ground is Zion.” Well, Armageddon reach! For the Reverend Deacon Doxy and foreign investors called the New Zion Construction Company acquire this tender for a luxury hotel. Yesterday was another eviction notice, stating if we don’t move in the next three days, excavations will begin. Doxy is their puppet, me hear them investors have him balls in a grip even a lickle tighter than your friend, Miss D.²¹¹

The character of Aaron²¹² adds to this and expresses his anger:

Aaron: And as for that John Crow, the Reverend Doxy, tell him me say “Fly!” We not squatters, Virgie. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.”²¹³

Also,

Arnold: ... The New Zion Construction Company would prefer these squatters to move on their own; they’re foreign-based, they don’t want a bad press, but you know damned well, for the last six months bulldozers have been poised to demolish this place.²¹⁴

What is interesting to note here is the name of the construction company that is driving out people from a piece of land, possessing it by force and transforming it to a hotel. In the Rastafarian belief, Zion is the peaceful “promised land”, while the company is doing

²¹¹ Ibid., 14.

²¹² Ibid., 2. The character of Rufus Johnson. The character is described by the playwright as an ex-criminal turned woodcarver.

²¹³ Ibid., 14.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

activities that are heavily Babylonian – quite the opposite. Dolly, the friend of Deacon Doxy, the dominating politician creates subtle pressures to the squatters:

Dolly: ... All Rufus must do, since he has seen the error of his ways, is sign this lickle paper confessing that this place deal in ganja and so on. And promise Deacon and the New Zion Construction Company that you all won't make trouble, and move somewhere else...²¹⁵

Later on, Deacon Doxy comes heavily into the picture and in different tones, asks the squatter community to move away:

Deacon Doxy [to Sufferer]: You're costing the company thousands of dollars, don't stand in the way of your country's progress... (Sings) We little nations, we live in the shadow of the towers of the Babylon, we have no power, we're a flower in the shadow of a mighty banyan tree, we who were pastoral are ruled by machines...²¹⁶

Here, we see Deacon worshipping and being a slave of the colonial discourse which, in turn, considers embracing scientific technology as “progress” and does not care for the underprivileged and the negative effects of technology (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Again,

²¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

Deacon Doxy: ... I beg you, before this happens [direct attack by a mechanized army], pick up your belongings now and move out quietly. Move up to the mountains, there's a better view of Ethiopia from up there anyway.²¹⁷

Deacon mocks the Rastafarian beliefs. He introduces external force, in a cunning and subtle manner, to push the less-powerful squatters away. At another point, he says:

Deacon Doxy: Don't tell me about Eden, I've got work to do. Don't tell me about some drug-induced heaven. The heaven I'm building is three meals a day, a roof over their heads -²¹⁸

He again mocks the Rastafarian belief, and proves to the readers/audience that he has lost all spiritual awareness. He becomes ruthless with his pursuit of the construction of the hotel. He expresses thus:

Deacon Doxy [to Rudolph Dawson²¹⁹]: There's no choice, Mr. Dawson. It's you or them. If there's going to be a lounge, there's got to be a hot. If there's going to be a hotel, they'll have to go...²²⁰

The Rastafarian community in the text has been painted by the playwright as being close to nature. They often express their feelings in terms of nature and natural

²¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 80.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 2. Rudolph Dawson is a character in this play who is described by the playwright as a peanut vender and later an entertainer.

²²⁰ Ibid., 81.

elements. Their individual identities cannot be separated from the natural environment.

We have the self-aware Four Horsemen (Dancers) chanting:

Four Horsemen: (Chant softly) Jah is I-and-I salvation, Jah shall gather all the nations, wide as ocean is his patience and deep with wisdom like the sea, the secret sea, the shining sea of Jah love and peace...²²¹

At one point, three characters call upon the natural elements to express themselves, sometimes pointing out to the healing power of those:

Aaron: Is traffic that? Or the sound of the sea?

Priscilla: Is the sea, Rufus.

Sufferer: And the salt from that sea has closed up like eyelids your gaping wounds, and caused you to dream.²²²

Then again,

Aaron: I lie and cooled my wrath in the pasture and the brook. I turned to a man of peace, my head stay cool as stone, my fingers like palm trees, my life was a temple, my nerves like flowering leaves ...²²³

Also,

²²¹ Ibid., 6.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 23.

Samuel: (Sings) Come with me to the mountains, me have looked in the dusk 'pon the cities of the plains, I have seen the blue valleys from Caymanas to Moneymusk, and I shall never, ever come down again... Me a' catch mountain fever, that cool mountain fever in my blood like a river, in the white-bearded waterfalls. I have heard the old sages, every rock calls to me, like the rock of ages, come with me to the mountains.²²⁴

Priscilla calls upon the Bible and the pristine landscape of Eden to express herself:

Priscilla: I feel like Eve, so take me where you will, when she look back the last time on that hill to where Eden was lying green and still.²²⁵

Lastly, throughout the text, the playwright reminds the readers/audience, how the Rastafari philosophy is rooted in nature using lines like:

Rastafari: (Sing) My locks are holy, they were anointed in the everlasting name of Ras, strong as the lowly vines, like the pointed spears of the armies of the grass...²²⁶

Also,

²²⁴ Ibid., 36.

²²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²²⁶ Ibid., 10.

Rastafari: Green for the pastures of Africa, yellow for the gold of that country, red for the church triumphant...²²⁷

*A Branch of the Blue Nile*²²⁸ (1983), as Helen Gilbert puts it rightly, is a play where “a Trinidadian actress attempting to play Cleopatra feels that she will never be taken seriously in the part because of the colour of her skin.”²²⁹ We have the process of colonial domination being played out in a different manner at the present time, in the text. The character of Harvey St. Just is a director (a figure of authority, as understood) who wishes to stage Anthony and Cleopatra’s Shakespearean story, with a mostly non-White cast. The play-within-a-play narrative that goes on here is reminiscent of *Pantomime*. In the contemporary West Indian space, Harvey becomes the new colonizing figure who plays out certain things that were once executed by his ancestors. Gavin, the American coloured man puts it well:

Gavin: You’re a hard taskmaster, Mistuh Harvey sur, you’re going make this po’ nigger tote your arse across the desert, you’re pitiless as that burning sun, Mistuh Harvey. Why? Why?²³⁰

In addition to this, at a later part of the text, Harvey is all set to go to London. The character of Marylin, an actress of colour asks him about his next play, to which he

²²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²²⁸ Derek Walcott, *Three Plays, The Last Carnival; Beef, No Chicken; and A Branch of the Blue Nile* (New York: Macmillan, 2014), 100-285.

²²⁹ Helen Gilbert, ed., *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 130.

²³⁰ Walcott, *Three Plays*, 202.

casually responds with “Who cares?”²³¹ On asking if Marilyn could play a role in it, he snubs her by saying:

Is a white-people play, girl. I could put in a nurse, or a maid. Six seven lines. And you right there on stage with real actors, white actors, white actors, real professionals...²³²

When Chris, a Trinidadian actor of colour has a falling out with Harvey, and also arguments with the other cast members²³³, Harvey utilizes stereotypical animal images to insult Chris in front of the other cast members. Harvey asks Gavin not to mind “that ape.”²³⁴ He also asks Gavin, “Did you buy him a banana?”²³⁵, when the latter tells him that Chris was in the supermarket. Additionally, Harvey calls him, “Darwin’s delight, the gourmet gorilla.”²³⁶

The West Indian cast members of colour express their sensitivity to the natural environment as they call upon natural elements, while speaking about everyday things, as Gavin does at a point in the text:

Gavin: Float down the jewelled river of Manhattan traffic,

²³¹ Ibid., 278.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 224-230.

²³⁴ Ibid., 244.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

while the fans scream till their throats are hoarse as sirens...²³⁷

Also, there is Sheila, another actress, who displays her spiritual connection to a natural element, a certain river:

Sheila: ... this old African woman... she saw implicit in my palm
a river with seven branches tracing it
That my past was connected with that river...²³⁸

*Beef, No Chicken*²³⁹ (1981), the next text to be discussed, takes into account a local folklore. The central character (Otto Hogan) uses this folk belief in his attempt to create a social awareness in their area (the town of Couva, Trinidad). The text presents the reader/audience with characters of different ethnicities, to give them a feel of the contemporary social fabric of the West Indies. "... Pride and Prejudice is showing at the Taj Mahal Cinema this afternoon..."²⁴⁰ is a funny line that occurs in the text to illustrate this. It is set in Otto's restaurant-cum-garage. The situation is such that a six-lane highway is set to be built and encroach upon the centre of their town. It is revealed right at the beginning of the text that Otto is dressing up as the figure of the Spirit of the Road or the Mysterious Stranger at night, and scaring away the highway workers who believe in it and fear it²⁴¹. The local papers say that the figure is "a woman apparently, said to be

²³⁷ Ibid., 201.

²³⁸ Ibid., 220.

²³⁹ Ibid., 100-191.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 116-117.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 104.

the spirit of a silk cotton tree”²⁴² and the characters talk about it being “their own African grandmother”²⁴³, often joking that “the next time that woman appear[s], they [would] go blast her backside back to that kingdom she come from.”²⁴⁴ By donning this garb, the rebellious Otto’s intention is to stop the construction of the highway, fighting alone against what he thinks is wrong. As we look into this text more deeply, we would be reminded of similar sequences and reflections of characters in other texts like Sircar’s *Bhoma* (discussed in the previous chapter) and Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* (discussed in the next chapter). Coming back to the text, this is what Sumintra, Otto’s restaurant-chef of Indian origin says about the sequence:

Sumintra (Coming around the counter): Because is you who harassing them workmen expanding the highway! The Spirit of the Road. So is you, Mr. Otto!²⁴⁵

This sequence immediately makes us understand the usage of local folklore by the rebellious Otto, to create a rupture in the techno-scientific obsession of modernity. Like many of us, he predicts the harmful effects on the natural environment the construction of the highway might cause. Sumintra expresses the possible results of the opening of the highway, as well:

²⁴² Ibid., 113.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 104.

Sumintra: ... Because this is the dawn of a new technology. Because when that highway open next Saturday is every man for she-self. I resign. Hey! Look your key!...²⁴⁶

We have some of Otto's insight to the situation, from where we learn more about it. The highway, it seems, isn't the only harm that the local government will cause. Things have happened in the past, too:

Otto (explodes): When? When the Couva Borough Council move that mountain of municipal sand from in front of my parlour. When they fill in that Panama Canal of trench they dig right out there to lay pipe.²⁴⁷

Otto also talks about how "the bank blank me [him] for a loan"²⁴⁸ and fears that it would not be long "before the bulldozer mash up or the damn bank manager repossess this shop."²⁴⁹ He also states an important fact:

Otto: ... by ordinance the government shouldn't legally build the highway without the approval of the Couva Borough Council, but they went ahead. Mongroo cousin get the contract, of course. Time come to vote, we reach a deadlock, and I have the casting vote. I didn't like the setup. The highway still not legal. So they harassing me. They piling dirt in from here, they digging this damn trench.²⁵⁰

He is disappointed how his tactic of rebellion is failing gradually:

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 105.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 108.

Otto: ... The first few times the men working on the highway drop pick and shovel and run, because they was country people. They believed in spirits. Now they bring up men from town to work on the road, and people from town don't believe in nothing. And all I have to do is sign a piece of paper saying the highway is legal...²⁵¹

Otto also realizes that "People ain't want these little country shops no more... Couva been changing right on the edge of the cane fields."²⁵² At another point in the text, he also talks about how he went to the bank manager for an extension of his final mortgage payments and the corrupt person refused to grant him that. Otto says that he felt "like a Third World country."²⁵³ Like we have seen in texts like *Pantomime*, Walcott highlights the image of the constructed concept of the Third World once again, to point out to some raucous realities in today's world. Otto and Cardiff Joe's²⁵⁴ conversation loaded with both ecological concerns and sarcasm, at a juncture of the text, is worth paying attention to:

Otto: Is the Mongroo Construction Company. We blast for the future. Like the H-bomb. A racket, a rip-off. Money passing underneath tables. Third World machinery. Third-rate equipment. Telephones, housing, water mains.

Cardiff Joe: Done a fair bit travelling in my time.

Seen deserts, volcanoes, icebergs, the lot,

but never seen anything more boring than cement.

Otto: How the place look to you after ten years away?

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., 119.

²⁵³ Ibid., 118-119.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. The character is described by the playwright as an ex-merchant and seaman, also called Alwyn Davies.

The old sawmill dismantled, where we used to swim.

They drained the river where we used to fish.²⁵⁵

Towards the end of the text, when Otto learns that the next day “the wrecker [is] coming to bulldoze this shop”²⁵⁶, he makes a helpless but significant comment: “They go bury the past here and pave it over, the hole where the cotton tree was.”²⁵⁷ The character of Franco, the schoolmaster, also comments on the destruction of trees in that area. He says that he relocated to Couva because “the leaves of its forest were my dictionary. They cut it down... They are pulping our forests to print editorials which our commentators mispronounce... Bulldozing the forest and the English language.”²⁵⁸ It is interesting to see how trees and forests are once again juxtaposed with books or learning in general by Walcott, just like in the case of *Walker*. The character of the Limer, an idler, says things to Otto like, “... You can’t stop the highway. You can’t stop progress”²⁵⁹, and “... they bring up a task force from Port of Spain to finish the highway by next week”²⁶⁰, but makes quite a philosophical observation on the topic of cutting trees down and the latter’s relationship with history. In this very speech below, He implies that trees represent history, apart from being givers of solace:

Have them [a group of schoolchildren] parked on one side of the road. Where the silk cotton tree was. He have the whole class looking down in the hole, teaching

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 167.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 188.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 117.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 110. Again, the notion of “progress” here is primarily that of the European colonizer, as discussed earlier.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 109.

them about the past. Well, history is a deep hole... Last week that big tree gave them shade and strength. Today, them poor schoolchildren standing there in the blazing sun with all their roots gone.²⁶¹

Franco also hints Cardiff Joe's mental tussle due to prolonged displacement from the latter's local environment, from Couva, at one point.²⁶² Another important reflection in the text by Euphony, Otto's sister, is about science versus local beliefs. She says:

The trouble with Science is that it does prove everything. But what you are doing now is only proving your love. If you take away mystery from Couva, aren't you taking away its spirit? Its magic, its belief?"²⁶³

In connection to this, the character of a vagabond preacher, Deacon also has a pessimistic view of the future of the town and the world:

Pretty soon there'll be no country left. Nowhere to walk, nowhere to sit in the shade, whole place one big concrete suburb. Oh! Yes! It's about McDonaldizing everything, it's Kentucky Frying everything, it's about going modern with a vengeance and televising everything, it's hamming up everything, traffic-jamming up everything, it's about neon lighting up everything, urban-blighting everything. I'm warning you. I seen it with my own two feet.²⁶⁴

There is a meeting towards the middle of the text, where the readers/audience get to know the awareness of the authorities that constructing the highway might be illegal:

²⁶¹ Ibid., 114.

²⁶² Ibid., 163.

²⁶³ Ibid., 135.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 188.

Mayor: ... Mr. Hogan has claimed that there is a loophole, and that the highway is illegal because we need his signature. At this late stage.

Mongroo²⁶⁵: The highway is legal. Loophole, my arse! The people want it; it was legally tendered.

Otto: I know all about them tenders from reliable sources.²⁶⁶

Besides all this, prevalent hierarchies between humans and animals are shown in the text, where characters use images of animals like monkeys, crocodiles and cockroaches to denote “illiterate” and unaware children and people the former dislikes.²⁶⁷ The text closes with the news of a major accident on the newly-built highway, with a water-buffalo cart.²⁶⁸ Perhaps Walcott here, urges his readers/audience to judge whether it was a good idea to disregard the folk belief and allow scientific technology to trample it – all in the name of “progress”. Perhaps Walcott’s ecological sensitivity is making us realize that there are other unexplainable forces at work, that would get back at the anthropogenic harming of any natural environment.

*The Last Carnival*²⁶⁹ (1982) begins with the Trinidad of the 1948, at the aftermath of the Second World War. The space has not yet gained independence from Britain. The text eventually travels to the 1970s and finds the Black Power Riots of Trinidad at its backdrop, and presents the complications that happen when a pro-colonial French Creole family (the de la Fontaines) encounters it. Among the characters, we have the members of

²⁶⁵ Borough Council member.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-99.

this Creole family, along with their dark-skinned African associates. Agatha, the English governess is the only White person among them. In fact, at a later part of the text, she does remind the rest that she is of a minority group in the island.²⁷⁰ The text starts with Agatha arriving at Port of Spain, with the Creole painter Victor de la Fontaine. Agatha is displaced from her familiar, local environment of England to Port of Spain, but she does not show much discomfort. Cocoa could be part of that reason. As soon as she arrives on the island, she catches the smell of cocoa and is delighted, with Victor adding that they grow the world's best one. She begins to associate the local cocoa with her days of consuming it in Wales, during the War.²⁷¹ This means that she is comfortable that a natural element found here is the same one that has given her pleasure and security in her native place. She is holding on to it and feeling more at-home. Looking at the landscape, she remarks that she feels “as if the world were making a fresh start.”²⁷² Now, at that time it could be implied that under colonization, the colonizer is rearranging/tailoring the landscape, defining and naming the people and the local flora and fauna, and to Agatha that would be about making a new start by so-called “cleaning up.” Victor at a later portion of the text remarks about the local landscape, saying that it is “some colourful backwater of the Empire.”²⁷³

We meet the de la Fontaines and find that even if they are of half African heritage, their attitude is very much pro-colonial. The characters of Oswald and George²⁷⁴ illustrate this quite clearly in front of the readers/audience. Oswald shows that he follows the stereotypical and inferior view of the European colonizer about Africa, when he says

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 9-10.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁴ Oswald de la Fontaine is a planter and the brother of Victor. George is his dark-skinned African servant.

that they are no longer in an “African outpost”²⁷⁵ (Trinidad of that time) and that as a British colony, they “have some manners left.”²⁷⁶ In addition to this, George requests Oswald to show respect to “that white lady”²⁷⁷ (Agatha) and behave, as (being half European), Oswald hails “from a high-class family.”²⁷⁸ In one of his other speeches again, he brings out his colonial mentality:

Oswald: ... Children, they all little savages. You can buy them
with a few trinkets...²⁷⁹

So, children and “savages” who have not yet received the colonial “education” do not fall into the category of human beings – according to Oswald. He also shows a hostile attitude towards the local flora and fauna consciously separating himself from them. It is as if, he views them as “the unknown Other”. At a point in the text, he has an argument with Agatha, where he says:

Oswald: ... Bajacs, fire-ants, termites!
I’ve asked you not to bring plants in the house.
Some of them ain’t domesticated, know what I mean?...
Next thing the whole house is a skeleton...²⁸⁰

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

During another conversation with Oswald, Agatha presents an image of her understanding of colonization:

I'd spin the globe at school, in geography;
 there was red for the empire – the whole universe
 looked like it had scarlet fever – red for the colonies,
 orange for the Dominions, one-seventh of the world.²⁸¹

On requesting Oswald to offer his labourers a share in his estate and speaking for equality in property, she gets this answer from him:

Oswald: A welfare state in the bush?
 Besides, what would they offer me as capital?
 Agatha: Their labour...²⁸²

Eventually, we do see Oswald supporting human equality in a conversation with Jean, a dark-skinned African maid servant.²⁸³ Also interestingly, during the time when the Trinidadian Black Riots take place, we see some of the characters of the text participating in a carnival, where race and social positions go topsy-turvy, like in *Pantomime*. While George plays a stereotyped African person in the upcoming carnival²⁸⁴, Jean plays a

²⁸¹ Ibid., 28-30.

²⁸² Ibid., 30.

²⁸³ Ibid., 24-26.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 35.

White woman²⁸⁵, while Agatha plays a Trinidadian, mouthing dialogues in that language.²⁸⁶ A topsy-turvy situation is also seen, where the White European woman becomes an exotic object of desire to a half-African Creole Trinidadian, in the scene where Victor paints Agatha.²⁸⁷ During their interaction, Agatha assures Victor that she likes the landscape in Port of Spain and would not leave.²⁸⁸

As mentioned earlier, the text eventually takes the readers/audience to the riots of 1970s. The character of Sydney becomes important here, because it is found that he becomes a black revolutionist in that movement. Sydney is first mentioned by George when he was just a boy of ten. His rebellious streak has already made its presence felt and George complains:

George: Sometimes I feel that boy want to leave the island.

Once he come in town, he always watching boats.²⁸⁹

This might create an idea of Sydney as someone wanting to leave his mundane comfort zone to deal with greater issues in the larger world. George tells us a bit about his background, how he was a neglected child. His mother worked in a Chinese nightclub and his father was never around.²⁹⁰ During the riots when Sydney is injured, George, like a spineless coward, shockingly justifies the injury, saying that their race has been used to

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 39.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 42.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 16-18.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 38.

beating across time and shows no opinion of resisting that.²⁹¹ He casually and irresponsibly calls the riots the “Black Power business” and describes Sydney as “idle” and “stupid.”²⁹² During the riots, Agatha has a conversation with Oswald and a journalist of black African origin named Brown, where she says this very interesting and thought-provoking line, “When I came it was the New World, now it’s the Third.”²⁹³ They describe the riots and the indiscriminate killing. The concept of “carnival” is also examined, as they feel that the riots are another form of carnival – at least that is what it is turning out to be:

Brown: They’re roadblocks coming in and out of the city.

Some of the rebel army officers are in the hills.

but their brigadier offered them amnesty.

That’s mainly why the helicopters are up there.

Not so much for the guerrillas. The Brigadier

loves his officers. He wants them back.

Agatha: ... How much it’s all changed from fifteen years ago!

The roads are blocked with soldiers, army trucks.

All the police have arms. I don’t understand.

If they’re allowing Carnival to continue,

How can they tell the guerrillas from the soldiers?

Oswald: Black people don’t know what ... they want!

Country is a black country, the government black!...

Agatha: Well, Marx said ...

²⁹¹ Ibid., 39.

²⁹² Ibid., 54.

²⁹³ Ibid., 58.

Oswald: I don't give a ... what Marx said.

Marx wasn't a Trinidadian...

Brown: I don't think their anger's aimed at the estates.

It's mainly an urban anger. They use the word "ghettos" for what we called "lanes" or "alleys." The rhetoric is as imported as their revenge; it lacks direction, despite the vehemence. I don't say you aren't threatened, but what should have been an economic protest, a march of the shirtless against urban injustice, has turned into a Black Power demonstration... another Carnival.

And those poor young people shot in the hills.

Oswald: Power to the people! But they are the people!

So what they screaming for? My head in a basket?...²⁹⁴

Elsewhere, Jean also presents her perspective on the event:

Jean: My attitude to them so-called guerrillas simple.

They shoot, we shoot. They stop shooting we stop.

Till then, we have every right to hunt them down...²⁹⁵

Tony's (Victor's son) critique of British and French Colonization, during this time, is also worth paying attention to. He expresses its shallowness and meaninglessness. He

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 67.

also points out how entire landscapes and local cultures are manipulated and tailored by the colonizers to fit their own ideas of how their landscape should be – something based on idealist and nostalgic thoughts (as we have discussed earlier in this chapter). “I despise the British... I hate the French. I detest anything French that shows in me,”²⁹⁶ he says. Expressing his dual feelings of love and detest towards his father, he continues his speech:

He [Victor, his father] made us cherish taste, and it was the wrong taste for this country, and that makes us useless. The French... create this longing for the metropole in their colonials. But what’s worse is that they also create this longing for paradise in their metropole... [they destroyed] Indochina, Algeria, Tahiti, Martinique, Africa... they never called it an empire like the British; they called it simply an extension of the metropole, which was a lie.²⁹⁷

Victor’s daughter, Clodia, commands a significant presence in the text. Being Creole, she is sometimes looked at as a privileged White person. This happens in a scene after Sydney’s death, when she tries to empathise with the former and Brown gets offended:

Clodia: I had my orders just like Sydney has his.

They told me to be nice to you. Write that!

Brown: Don’t identify with Sydney. You’re white.

You aren’t Sydney. You can never be.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 72.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 82.

However, she is realistic enough to embrace her coloured African side:

Clodia: I think she's [Agatha] wonderful. I think she's terrific.

She's the real aristocracy. Not us.

We just a bunch of rich, dumb, stupid people...²⁹⁹

Clodia has a deep observation on the uselessness of titles and the cruelty of social status in the contemporary times. This makes her an activist for human equality:

This castle [their home]... was built on cocoa. My great-grandfather brought it stone by imported stone, all the way from France.

He had delusions about aristocracy. Bought the title.

We're a faint, bastard branch of some damned duke...³⁰⁰

About Agatha, she makes some hard-hitting observations, as well:

Clodia: ... she [Agatha] lost her accent teaching us to talk

like little horseback-riding ladies and gents,

and so the teacher became what she taught.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 74.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 56.

So first the accent, then the aggression went,
 and with the aggression gone, the politics.
 And the class struggle that was in herself.
 She just couldn't resist the comforts of the estate
 Once Uncle Ozzie offered them to her. Maybe
 that's what she'd really wanted, not her equals,
 but friendlier servants...³⁰¹

Here is yet another reversal of situation that occurs in the text, with respect to the White/Black position in mainstream colonial narrative.

Agatha tries to persuade Clodia to leave Port of Spain to be safer, warning that during the riots, "You'll be dancing with the savages who burnt it [their house]."³⁰² She reflects more on the current situation, implying that Clodia has a false sense of security and wishful thinking that everything will become alright:

Agatha: If you had stood up over that crumpled body,
 looking faintly ridiculous in that Carnival costume,
 and heard that record going round and round and round,
 playing "O Paradis," you would have changed, too, child.
 Savages, Savages!³⁰³

³⁰¹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰² Ibid., 86.

³⁰³ Ibid.

Agatha is herself upset by her own helplessness to do something in the situation. As a member of the Trinidadian elite, all she and her family could do is observing silently in their comfort zone. One might recall Sircar, who urges the average privileged urban human being to get out of his/her comfort zone and actually do something about the wrongs that are happening in the larger world:

Agatha: Grinding Time. Slow... merciless Time.

He is the tyrant...

These things creep up on you little by little:

someone adjusts your coat and you say, "Thanks,"

then you say nothing. A black maid brings you tea.

You stir it and watch the flowers in the garden.

The silence of the white flowers and the maid's silence

become the same thing, become identical...³⁰⁴

We recall Sircar again, as through Clodia's character, Walcott problematizes mainstream colonial historiography, yet again, in this speech by Clodia:

Small island. Small war. Small men. Who'll remember? Who'll bleed in Washington, or London, or Paris if they all die? What is Trinidad? A speck... on a map of the world. People like Sydney come and go like grass. And grass go cover their dreams up in the bush, and things go on like nothing ever happened. Sydney was here...³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 96.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 88.

Sydney, as a black activist who got killed for protesting against the power-structure has the possibility of the fate of being wiped out in the fabricated mainstream history.

Images of animals like the ape and the pelican feature in the text. Agatha hits out at the de la Fontaine family's obsession with European lineage, saying, "What's a good family? One with ancestors?"³⁰⁶, and that "even a bloody ape's got lineage."³⁰⁷ The text closes with Agatha's death and the cry of pelicans³⁰⁸. Now, Why pelicans? The possible answer to this might lie in a popular myth in the West, which predates Christianity. The myth goes that once during a famine a mother pelican wounded herself to feed her blood to her chicks, so that they continue to live. Sometimes, Jesus Christ is also compared to one, for his sacrifice. Could we then, think of Agatha as the mother pelican and the de la Fontaine children as equivalent to her own children?

*Malcochon, or The Six in the Rain*³⁰⁹ (1959) comes last in our analysis. Reminding us of Sircar's *Sararattir* (discussed in the previous chapter), we find nature creating a situation (torrential rain) and bringing six strangers under on roof, as they seek shelter from that rain. The fury of nature has been described by the Conteur thus:

The Conteur: The rain coming with a sound like sand on dusty leaves,
 The leaves rushing in the wind like the hair of a woman,
 The wind is sweating water, and the river moving faster,
 Bamboos bending in the wind and groaning like the posts

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 30.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 99.

³⁰⁹ Walcott, *Dream*, 167-206.

That holding up the sky, the sicrier cries through the rain-darkness,
The hawk shifts on the branch, shaking knives from its wings.³¹⁰

Also, the character of the Husband describes his suffering due to it this way:

Husband: Laugh at me, thunder! Point your hand on me, lightning!
Let the sea show its white teeth and mock me if it want...³¹¹

There are points where the text becomes conscious of itself as a story is being told by the Conteur (the mysterious storyteller figure), and the characters merely re-enacting the events in that story.³¹² Multiple perspectives are presented in front of the reader/audience through the characters, where the text reclaims itself as been heavily influenced by Kurosawa's *Rashomon*³¹³. The Conteur describes the local folktale of a notorious figure, Chantal, who is accused of having committed heinous crimes such as stealing and even murder. We also get to know that in the area, the tale is used to scare children.³¹⁴:

Conteur: They say, "Sing how Chantal the brute

³¹⁰ Ibid., 173-174.

³¹¹ Ibid., 175.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Laurence A. Breiner, "The Impact of Japan on Derek Walcott's Early Plays," *Comparative Theater Review* 13, no. 1 (March 2014): 27-30, https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/ctr/13/1/13_2/_pdf. Briefly, *Rashomon* (1950) is a Japanese film by Akira Kurosawa, where the events of a murder and a rape have multiple perspectives through the different characters, and they are open to question.

³¹⁴ Walcott, *Dream*, 181.

Took the White planter Regis' life.³¹⁵

We get to see that the characters except Chantal and the (deaf and dumb) Moumou, consciously separate themselves from animals and the forest, fearing them as “unknown Others.” Chantal is comfortable to call himself a tiger and referring to the Moumou, his accomplice, as a mongoose. The Conteur gives an instance of Chantal, who often hides himself in the forest, as being sensitive to cutting trees down for his own survival:

Conteur: And up there Chantal chopping wood,
Up in the wet heights by Boissiere
At the crop-over of the year,
Hacking the trees like they had blood.³¹⁶

Speaking of fear of animals and treating them as Others, the character of the Old Man utters lines like these:

Old Man [to his nephew]: Walk fast! Walk fast! You can't hear that roaring noise like is an animal self crashing in the trees?³¹⁷

Then again,

³¹⁵ Ibid., 171.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 172.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 173.

Old Man: ... I see what look like a nestful of young snakes...
 ... the bull-frog croaking with a note like death, and
 The angle of a chicken hawk turning on the wind.
 Listen, they have something on this place. They have many beast
 A man cannot see that hiding in a forest. They have bats here,
 And in this copra trash they could well have snakes...³¹⁸

When the character of the Husband comments that human beings could act like beasts sometimes, and that God has put both beast and spirit in humans (showing how he consciously separates the two elements), the Old Man adds that humans are not “tigers” or “serpents”, they don’t murder and curse, and that they are not “savages.”³¹⁹ Channelling their fear of the unknown Other, the Husband and the Wife are terrified when an old Saman tree is struck by lightning – the very tree which they thought they would stand under, to escape the rain.³²⁰ Their negative attitude towards animals is also seen when they call each other “dog” and “bitch”, when they quarrel.³²¹

Now we focus on Chantal’s character. He is actually misunderstood and is made into an alleged murderer and thief by his local society. They have created a notorious and fabricated narrative about him and have circulated it to create fear among others. While reading/watching the play, one would be reminded of Makak’s character from *Dream on*

³¹⁸ Ibid., 179.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 190-192.

³²⁰ Ibid., 186-187.

³²¹ Ibid., 188-189.

Monkey Mountain. Hiding away in the forest gives Chantal the necessary solace and peace:

Chantal: ... Look how it wet and green with the wind blowing. Three years I working there, and sometimes in the morning when the sun coming up, I did only feel to roar like a mad tiger... look at the sun making diamond on the wet leaves. That's all the money I ever had in this life. A man should not leave that forest, eh?³²²

Also,

Chantal: In the forest there in the rainy mountain where no man was, I was a happy old man, just me and old God. But man have a time to come down. Lift me higher, old man, and I will show you something. You see that place there, a little clearing there in the side of the mountain, that Chantal cut out of the forest? There where a chicken hawk shaking in the rain from its wing and flying over the valley to the other side of the clouds ...³²³

As mentioned earlier, Chantal feels sorry to harm the natural elements in the forest for his own means, but he understands that in order to survive, he must do so:

Chantal: Chantal hungry. He hungry after spending three weeks in the forest, eating bird, small animal and green plantain and sleeping in a trash house in the mountain before the rain come...³²⁴

³²² Ibid., 205.

³²³ Ibid., 205-206.

³²⁴ Ibid., 175-176.

When it comes to Chantal and the overall ecological concerns in the play, it is important to mention a speech by him. This occurs after the Moumou kills their cruel White master, Regis and the both of them run to a waterfall. Chantal says:

... Is now I should wash my hands in the cold water... Is trees they make you cut friend. Not the tree that is a man... The rain cold. I should wash my hands quick before the poison get down in the bone... To wash hands is nothing. That is to put poison in this water where beast drink and man drink... A child that drink this water with a dead man blood in it... is like putting poison in the source itself, for this clear spring bringing water to the villages...³²⁵

Chantal has a philosophical realization at this point related to his life which he expresses, but the reader/audience could also see this speech as subtly referring to a way water pollution occurs. Lastly, the Conteur concludes the play with a philosophical statement, urging human beings to be more sensitive to other non human creatures around them and treat them as equal cohabiters of the planet:

The rage of the beast is taken for granted,
 Man's beauty is sharing his brother's pain;
 God sends the wound where a wound is wanted,
 This is the story of six in the rain.³²⁶

³²⁵ Ibid., 178.

³²⁶ Ibid., 206.

So we see how Derek Walcott expresses his ecological sensitivity in various ways through his play-texts. The land-history and the transformation of the landscape accordingly, are of primary consideration to him. However, he does not expect history to be a dominating force in our present times. Rather, he asks us to respect it but make a new kind of history, to stop being continually defined by the colonial knowledge system. To mark a new beginning in identity-formation within the postcolonial hodge-podge. To celebrate this process, even if there would be difficulties and mistakes. However, he seems optimistic that in this process, the human community and the natural world would help each other out and work together as a team.

WOLE SOYINKA'S DRAMA: ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The contemporary literary figure, Wole Soyinka (Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka; b. 1934) has been heavily influenced by his indigenous or folk (here, African Yoruba) traditions, and includes that in a great way in his works – especially drama. The influence of folk traditions automatically makes the artist sensitive about the natural environment, the natural cycles and the non-human forms of life. Overall, the indigenous Yoruba tradition makes one aware that beyond the more tangible realm of human beings and the earth (the “Aye”), lies a supernatural world full of powerful spiritual entities (the “Orun”). Human and non-human beings of the earth are also domains where powerful spirits reside. Indigenous rituals become extremely important in the daily lived experience of the characters in Soyinka’s works. As Biodun Jeyifo (in his edited book¹) makes us aware, the contemporary Africa is a knowledge-system, which is an ‘adulterated’ one. It is no longer in the state that it used to be, before the contact with the White Western European colonizers in its ‘pure’ form. During colonization, the colonizer thrust his own (cultural, political, economic, religious and so on) model/s on the indigenous African communities to follow. The former refused to believe that the latter had any tradition, any education, any relevance, any voice.

The African artist of today needs to come to terms with this historical situation, accept it, forego the useless attempt to go back to that ‘pure’ African knowledge-system, and emerge, carrying the ‘adulterated’ but essentially unique identity. Being a

¹ Biodun Jeyifo, ed., *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 3-26.

postcolonial literary artist, Soyinka shares this perspective with that of Derek Walcott and Badal Sircar. In this context, Abiola Irele observes:

What gives a special character to literary creation in Africa today is the movement to establish and to maintain the sense of tradition... towards the definition in and through literature, of a distinctive mode of thought and feeling, towards an imaginative apprehension and embodiment of an African spirit... The endeavor of the African writers to work out a new spiritual coherence out of the historical disconnection between their African heritage and their modern experience.²

She also points out that:

The vast folk literature, alive and vigorously contemporary, remains available to provide a constant support for new forms... [Soyinka's Yoruba knowledge-system was able to] afford a stable institutional and spiritual groundwork for the transformation of collective life and feeling for the individual within this culture, at the critical moment when Western civilization introduced an element of tension into African societies.³

These societies have gone through what could be called, the process of “adaptation, the adjustment of the native culture with the foreign, the harmonization of two ways of life into a new entity.”⁴ In Soyinka's works, “elements of the traditional system are integrated into the writer's vision through the mediation of a highly conscious art.”⁵ The work and “the communal spirit passes through a process of personal rediscovery of traditional

² Ibid., 4.

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jeyifo, *Perspectives*, 18.

values and the progressive approximation of the individual artistic personality to the determinations of the collective consciousness⁶.”⁷ Again,

The great fortune of African writers is that the world-views which shape the experience of the individual in traditional society are still very much alive and continue to provide a comprehensive frame of reference for communal life. The African gods continue to function within the realm of the inner consciousness of the majority of our societies, and the symbols attached to them continue to inform in an active way the communal sensibility. It has thus been possible for our [African] poets in particular to evoke them as a proper, and indeed integral element of their individual imaginings.⁸

Stanley Macebuh very rightly states that:

The legend of the gods provides for him [Soyinka] a means for illuminating the complexities of contemporary life in Africa. According to him, the Yoruba... are a people perpetually bound to the parallel (and sometimes complementary) impulses of two gods, Ogun and Obatala... Obatala is the god of ‘spiritual complacency’, Ogun the god of ‘tragic dare’.⁹

Just as the gods of his belief-system might have indicated, when we foreground ecological themes in Soyinka’s plays, we get to see the importance he places to a fact.

⁶ Anna Piepmeyer, “Collective consciousness,” The University of Chicago, accessed Jun 2, 2012, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/collectiveconsciousness.htm>. The concept of collective consciousness was used by Durkheim, Althusser, and Jung to explicate how an autonomous individual comes to identify with a larger group/structure. The term points out to the condition of one subject within the whole of society. How any given individual comes to view himself/herself as a part of any larger given group. The term also makes us aware that there is an internal 'knowing' known by all, or a consciousness shared by a plurality of persons.

⁷ Jeyifo, *Perspectives*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

This fact that if the environment (including the spiritual forces in there) is not preserved or protected, it would soon be the end of humankind as well. Coexistence and reconciliation between these entities are of utmost importance. Like Walcott and Sircar (in their own respective spaces), as a responsible postcolonial artist, he also attempts to shift the earlier White Western European colonizer's perspectives/conceptions/definitions of the land (of his own people) and its human and non-human beings, to that of an essentially contemporary African one. On the topic of theatre being essentially ritualistic, Soyinka has himself commented that:

Ritual theatre establishes the spatial medium not merely as physical area for simulated events but as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelope within which man --- no matter how deeply buried such a consciousness has latterly become --- fearfully exists.¹⁰

Farming occupies a central space in Yorubaland and its belief system. According to J. S. Eades:

... It is impossible to isolate completely the 'rural' from the 'urban' or the 'agricultural' from the 'non-agricultural' sectors of the economy among the Yoruba. The settlement pattern and the relationship between the towns and the farm villages mean that many farmers see themselves as town residents, and many have dual occupations.¹¹

¹⁰ Wole Soyinka, "Drama and the African world-view," in *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*, ed. R. Smith (New York: Africana, 1976), 176. In a nutshell, ritual theatre involves acting out of a certain myth or folktale, so that it brings about some sort of a "healing process" for the entire community. The community might be dealing with a difficult issue/experience or undergoing some form of socio-cultural transition and in need of motivation. Participation in the enactment is open and the space of the performance is immaterial.

¹¹ J. S. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 65.

Keeping other occupations (fishing, trading, crafts and so on) aside, it seems that farming impacts the flow of the Yoruban lives the most. Just as a good harvest of crops (yam, cocoa, palm oil and so on)¹² would predict a happy future the reverse situation, that is failure of crops would mean a forthcoming catastrophe in their lives. Crops like palm (wine) and yam appear prominently in Soyinka's texts depicting the Yoruba life.

The first Soyinkan play that comes to mind, having an ecological concern is *A Dance of the Forests*¹³ (1963). The key observations that Soyinka helps us to make in this text are as follows. Firstly, the two worlds (the town and the forest) where the events in the text are taking place, are joined through the spirits and the human rituals – even if time separates them. Secondly, the spirit world of the past and the human one of the present are also united in their similar ongoing sequence of endeavour, cruelty, pain and achievement. Instead of passing credible knowledge and wisdom to the mortals of contemporary (now independent from colonization) Nigeria, the different spirits are caught up in their own personal rifts. In the text, the Crier, with the permission of the Forest Head, calls out to the beings of the forest to the Dance of Welcome – which is, in actuality, a platform for judging human beings for their various calamitous activities, particularly for the lack of concern for the environment:

Crier: To all such as dwell in these Forests; Rock devils,

¹² Olatunji Ojo, "Yoruba Women, Cash Crop Production and the Colonial State, c.1920-1957" (paper presented at the conference on "Atlantic Crossings: Women's Voices, Women's Stories from the Caribbean and the Nigerian Hinterland", Hanover, New Hampshire, May 18-20, 2001).

¹³ Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3-77.

Earth imps, Tree demons, ghommids, dewilds, genie
 Incubi, succubi, windhorls, bits and halves and such
 Sons and subjects of Forest Father, and all
 That dwell in his domain, take note, this night
 Is the welcome of the dead...¹⁴

The lines above emphasize how the so-called supernatural entities, that the modern human being overlooks, dismissively, are very much part of the ecosystem. The forest is a space where they are preserved, ancestral wisdom is preserved – a space from where a postcolonial ‘healing’/‘renewal’ of the contemporary African human being could be achieved to begin his/her life again. No longer should the forest be treated as an unknown place of fear, like the White Western European colonizer has been treating it, till now. The figure of the Dead Man and the pregnant Dead Woman are significant, as products of the destructive and cruel influences of the contemporary humankind. They are summoned by Aroni (the one-legged spirit who serves the Forest Head) and appear this way:

An empty clearing in the forest. Suddenly the soil appears to be breaking and the head of the Dead Woman pushes its way up. Some distance from her, another head begins to appear, that of a man... The man is fat and bloated, wears a dated warrior’s outfit, now mouldy. The woman is pregnant...¹⁵

Eshuoro, the ‘wayward cult-spirit’ (as Soyinka describes it himself) is a significant character in the text. It constantly points out to the various ways the human community is

¹⁴ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

affecting the forest. It poses as someone protecting the forest, having the latter's best interests at heart. It has now become the enemy of humankind, due to this reason. As part of the ongoing festivities, the character Demoke (representing the human community) carves a totem on a particular tree. It is found out by the readers/audience that that particular tree belongs to Oro (the god of terror who punishes offenders) and is, therefore, sacred. Eshuoro rebels, facing loss of his dignity:

Eshuoro [feeling a sort of oneness with trees that are being destroyed by humans]:
I have asked that he [Forest Head] pass judgement for my limbs that were hacked off piece by piece. For my eyes that were gouged and my roots disrespectfully made naked to the world. For the desecration of my forest body...¹⁶

Again:

The totem, my final insult. The final taunt from the human pigs. The tree that is marked down for Oro... my body was stripped by the impious hands of Demoke... my head was hacked off by his axe. Trampled, sweated on, bled on, my body's shame pointed at the sky by the adze of Demoke, will I let this day pass without vengeance claimed blood for sap?¹⁷

Also:

Have you seen how they [the human community of the town] celebrate the gathering of the tribes? In our own destruction. Today they even dared to chase

¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁷ Ibid., 43.

out the forest spirits by poisoning the air with petrol fumes. Have you seen how much of the forest has been torn down for their petty decorations?... The whole forest stinks. Stinks of human obscenities...¹⁸

The tree-imp Murete, here, assures that the human community will get its payback in due course:

We have claimed our own victims – for every tree that is felled, or for every beast that is slaughtered, there is recompense, given or forced.¹⁹

Demoke himself becomes disillusioned and leaves, rejecting his work, when he finds out how other trees have been cut down to build a modern motor road through the forest, not to mention, there is also this increasing guilt of losing his apprentice to death for his own selfishness:

Demoke: When I finished it [the totem], the grove was cleared of all the other trees, the bush was razed and a motor road built right up to it. It looked different. It was no longer my work. I fled from it.²⁰

In the meeting of all the forest-dwellers (creatures and spirits), the Ant Leader, following Eshuoro's statement of "four hundred million [of ants] callously smoked to death"²¹, has this to say:

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Ibid., 42.

²⁰ Ibid., 11.

We take our colour from the loam
 And blindness hits them, and they tread us
 Underfoot...
 And terror blinds them. They know
 We are the children of earth. They
 Break our skin upon the ground, fearful
 That we guard the wisdom of Earth,
 Our Mother.²²

Other ants also join him, to voice their horrible state of life:

Ant Leader: We are the ones remembered
 When nations build...
 Another: ... with tombstones
 Another: We are the dried leaves, impaled
 On one-eyed brooms.
 Another: We are the headless bodies when
 The spade of progress delves.
 Another: The ones that never looked up when
 The wind turned suddenly, erupting
 In our heads.²³

²¹ Ibid., 42.

²² Ibid., 67.

²³ Ibid., 68.

The Spirit of the Palm, angry with the ‘blackened’ hearted human beings, decides that its life-giving sap will turn into blood. It indicates that human beings have contaminated the source/s of nourishment for life:

White skeins wove me, I, Spirit of the Palm
 Now course I red.
 I who suckle blackened hearts, know
 Heads will fall down,
 Crimson in their red!²⁴

Due to the increase in water pollution the spirit of the waters are also angry at the human community, all set to seek revenge. Why? Because, the human beings are themselves becoming responsible for turning water unfit to use and poisonous:

Chorus of the Waters: Let no man then lave his feet
 In any stream, in any lake
 In rapids or in cataracts
 Let no woman think to bake
 Her cornmeal wrapped in leaves
 With water gathered of the rain
 He’ll think his eye deceives
 Who treads the ripples where I run
 In shallows. The stones shall seem

²⁴ Ibid., 64.

As kernels, his the presser's feet
 Standing in the rich, and red, and cloying stream...
 Let the Camel mend his leaking hump
 Let the squirrel guard the hollows in the Stump.²⁵

The following speech by the Spirit of the Sun is important. It talks about how human technoscientific gadgets like the Chimney of Ereko brings about disasters, in the name of scientific progress of life. The chimney has been brought to the forest to smoke away the forest spirits. It is also emitting carbonic gases, which are directly affecting the ozone layer, as evident in the speech:

Spirit of the Sun: ... shadows veil the eye
 That pierces with the thorn. I know the stole
 That warms the shoulders of the moon.
 But this is not its shadow. And I trace
 No course that leaves a cloud. The sun cries Noon
 Whose hand is it that covers up his face!²⁶

The very pertinent notion of “home” has been raised and commented on by the Dead Man (who seems to suffer from a feeling of displacement), in the text. Even if the modern human being tries to deny that the natural environment (here, the forest) does not shape

²⁵ Ibid., 66.

²⁶ Ibid., 66-67.

up his/her identity, it actually does to a very large extent. Perhaps, this point has been raised by Soyinka through these words:

Dead Man: I always did want to come back here. This is my home. I have always yearned to come back. Over there [presumably, the world where the dead travel to], nothing held me. I owned nothing, had no desire to. But the dark trees and the thick earth drew me. When I died, I fell into the understreams, and the great summons found me ready...²⁷

Soyinka also seems to make us think about the concept of history, rather historiography – a history that was carved out by the colonizer versus one which needs to be constructed by the present inhabitants of the African landscape. The problematics of history and historiography of the postcolonial African land and its people, and the difficulty of undertaking such a project is presumably displayed by this bit of a dialogue:

Adenebi²⁸ [to Obaneji²⁹]: You say you fled. I don't believe it... Have you sense of history?

Rola³⁰: What history? Or doesn't it matter?³¹

Before moving on to the next text to be analyzed, a skit composed by Soyinka as part of his stance against the corruptive government under President Shehu Shagari³²

²⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁸ The town-dweller and the Council Orator.

²⁹ A town-member.

³⁰ A courtesan. Adenebi, Obaneji and Rola are human beings at the present time. However, Rola and Adenebi have past lives, which is shown in the text.

³¹ Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 11.

must be mentioned. It is called *Rice Unlimited* (1981; text currently unavailable). The skit brings forth the issue of making profits through corrupt means through the import and dispersal of rice.

*The Invention*³³ (1959) deals with the ecological issue of harming the earth or a large part of its landscape through man-made scientific technology, the obsession with science as necessary “progress”. Also, the hatred among human beings stemming out of it, fuelling the end of humanity itself. One recalls Sircar’s constant preoccupation with the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings and making his readers/audience aware of it, if *The Invention* is read/placed together with his texts. This is because in this text, a parallel and similar event (even though it is fictitious) has been talked about by Soyinka. Zodwa Motsa very beautifully summarizes and brings out the main essence of play:

The Invention depicts calamitous race-instigated events that were taking place in... 1976... in Johannesburg... an aptly prophetic comic satire that exposes the devastating effects of racial discrimination. The story features three major proponents of racism in the 1950s: the British, white South Africans and the Americans of the Deep South... In the play America sends an isoto-nuclear bomb to Jupiter to be exploded. The rocket goes astray and, in its unguarded course, shoots from Massachusetts to Madagascar, and from there to the icebergs of the Antarctic Ocean. Entering the earth through the icebergs, it then passes twice beneath the North Pole until every compass on the earth is distorted. It finally disappears from sight and from detection by radar for two days and nights, only to resurface three days later, hovering over the Cape of Good Hope. The rocket eventually lands in a disused mine in Johannesburg. It explodes, killing humans and distorting their racial composition to such an extent that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish blacks from whites as a result of the black population’s loss of pigment. Consequently, all South Africans are obliged to submit themselves to racial testing in a laboratory where a few handpicked scientists are set to work. This is when one of the scientists invents a machine – the invention

³² From 1979 to 1983, he was democratically elected as the first (and eventually the only) President of Nigeria's Second Republic.

³³ Zodwa Motsa, ed., *Wole Soyinka: The Invention & The Detainee* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2005), 19-61.

of the play's title – that shows within seconds to which race each 'specimen' belongs.³⁴

As we read the text, the following dialogue between Bishop Kalinga and the Public Prosecutor proves to be quite hard-hitting:

Kalinga: ... it was not very long before this abomination of man's handiwork [referring to the rocket] hit us and twisted us till no man can say today whether he is flesh or vegetable...

Public Prosecutor: (Comes forward) One moment, you. Are you a white bishop or a black bishop?

Kalinga: (turns slowly to face him) Is this a game of chess?³⁵

In the era of man-made catastrophes which affect all the inhabitants of the earth, some people are still preoccupied with discrimination and hierarchies between human beings (that gradually extends to non-human beings as well). Racial supremacy among the higher authorities in this text could be exemplified in the following section. Do note the necessary goriness included by the playwright:

Briklemaine [an envoy]: We have progressed since then, and we are now able to boast that we [the Southern States have broken away from the rest of the USA] are the only country in the world which has learnt to condition the negro from birth, no sir, from his very conception, so that he grows up respecting the white man, and keeping himself in his place...

³⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁵ Ibid., 21.

Director [of the laboratories]: His method [to invent a special soap that would determine skin colour] is to grind together anything he can lay his hands on – bones, skull – kidneys – unborn babies, spine, anything in fact that is part of the human body... the theory is that by pounding together these members, applying to it a tincture of iodine, and then bombarding it all with electro rays, he will discover the soap of truth... on its application to the human body, the user will regain his original colour for twenty-four hours at least... This gentleman here, Mr. Bytron [one of the Researchers at the South African Restoration Vaults], is examining the clothing of the suspects. He believes that the secret lies in the sweat of the human body...

Bytron: ... By sniffing these pieces of clothing – note by the way, that I carefully select the portions underneath the armpits, the back of the neck and the genitals. You'd be surprised what you can learn from such a simple system.

Director: You will please observe that Mr. Bytron, like Fremuler of the grinding mortar, is applying his civilian experiences. He used to be a manufacturer of perfumes.³⁶

At another juncture of the text, the character Cruger (another researcher like Bytron) very rightly questions the idea behind the machine and the machine itself:

Cruger: Ridiculous idea! How can any machine tell at a glance who is white and who is black?³⁷

He also reads out an equally ridiculous report from the racial supremacy obsessed higher authorities, condemning a coloured person:

Cruger: 'On the abundant evidence of a careful analysis of the nasal hairs of the suspect, I find him guilty of treason in the highest degree, to wit, attempting to take illegal advantage of the mutation caused by the isoto-nuclear catastrophe, and posing as a white man. I therefore sentence him to commit suicide within twenty-four hours of this judgement, on pain of instant death.'³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 53-55.

³⁷ Ibid., 29.

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

An interesting concept is brought forth in the text: that of racial pollution – the act of polluting the races – especially the “pure”, White race. The invented machine (through an automated voice) resonates what its maker, the White colonizer has fed it with – a glorification of the latter’s race:

If you are white, then you have nothing to fear. Rejoice in the great invention. Rejoice all true sons of South Africa. Rejoice all lovers of the purity of races ...³⁹

Bytron and his fellow researcher Destus discuss racial pollution while talking about babies which might be biracial or multiracial, albeit in a condescending manner:

Bytron: ... Obviously the babies must be born normal. So that takes care of a small section of the population. All we have to do is wait until the baby is born, and that should establish the race of the mother.

Destus: ... Suppose she has been having an affair with a black man?

In Unison: She might as well be dead!...

Bytron: ... What after all, is sacrifice for humanity without the risk of pollution, Eh? ...⁴⁰

The overwhelming presence of White racial supremacy and its brainwashing of non-White people into thinking that they are inferior, makes one think of Walcott’s *Dream On Monkey Mountain* (discussed in the previous chapter) very much.

³⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41.

*The Detainee*⁴¹ (a radio-play broadcast in 1965) presents the main character Konu locked up in solitary confinement. He has a political activist past and is imprisoned under the Preventive Detention act. The present government is being run by Haruzai, who used to be Konu's friend, but turned out to be a corrupt dictatorial leader. Zimole, who has come to see Konu, used to be another friend who has turned corrupt and is also behind the latter's imprisonment. Towards the beginning of the text, Konu very rightly describes the present socio-political situation in Nigeria. He states:

The police cannot cope up with everything. They are muscle-bound by what they cannot do under the old colonial laws. The judiciary is choked by all sorts of habeas corpus nonsense, which lets loose men whom they know are dedicated to obstructing the nation's progress. Progress! Progress, not hair-splitting and verbal trickeries and pseudo-idealists jargon. Just Progress! To decide on a policy and be confident that the end is the thing and it must justify the means ...⁴²

Konu, it seems, doesn't trust animals much. He compares his one-time friend now corrupt leader, Haruzai to a rat – even naming the rat after him. He emphasizes on the unreliability of rat, like the human Haruzai, this way:

Konu: I was telling you about my friend Haruzai, the little rat. Well, maybe mouse or rat, I've never learnt the difference. But either African rats are simply stupid, or African prisoners are even stupider. But I've never been able to make a friend of that creature. He eats my food and runs away...⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 65-84.

⁴² Ibid., 69.

⁴³ Ibid., 74.

Soyinka has also been able to make us aware in this text how, like a contagious infection, corruption and destructive political agenda are fast spreading throughout the landscape, making it unhealthy. This is represented by the mildew that Konu watches and records how far it spreads in an hour:

Konu: Time, I can measure time with my eyes closed. Not any time, mind you. Just the hour. That's what that guard has done for me. That's a kind of trade, I suppose. I could set clocks and watches, now. You know, once, just for practice, I decided to time the mildew in that corner ... have you seen it? ... I thought I'd see how fast it spread by the hour. Difficult task you know, but I did it. Watched it for eight weeks ...⁴⁴

The above lines also highlight the development of Konu's special senses while being in solitary confinement for years – cut-off from the rest of the world. One might remember the first phase of Darwin's concept of adaptation here, as some of Konu's senses develop to suit his present "habitat". The following section in the text (during a conversation between Zimole and Konu) tells us about his sharpened sense of hearing:

(Sound of boots coming up corridor: distant)

Zimole: I told you the time was nearly up. That must be your ...

Konu: Never. I know the hour, I tell you, and it isn't one yet.

(The tramp-tramp moves nearer. Obviously several boots)

Zimole: That's quite a number of them.

Konu: Six to be exact.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75.

Zimole: Why are you so sure?

Konu: You should ask ‘how’. ‘How am I so sure?’ Then I could answer, by experience. Anyway, that is not my guard, but six pairs of boots marching in strict precision. Plus one civil pair of shoes, shuffling without character, in between them. In short, a new detainee for the camp... No, I was wrong. I don’t hear the seventh man...

(Boots come to a military halt: but no vocal orders.)

Zimole: They’ve stopped.

Konu: By the guard’s room. I can tell exactly where they stopped, you see? ...⁴⁵

Konu also reasserts the White racial supremacy and domination in his land by stating that “it was a white hand that signed the order to confine me in this hell-hole”.⁴⁶ Placing images of certain living creatures that are considered of the lowest rank by the human society, he describes the state of people like him under the regime of the current government:

Rats, cockroaches, running drainages ... I was going to say, I can hear an open drainage from at least two hundred yards, you know that? And when I hear it, I ask, whose blood is flowing in the gutter? Whose weak, criminally impotent tears? Whose black colour has washed into that universal filth, and shown him up in the white complexion we so easily called bestial?⁴⁷

*The Road*⁴⁸ (1965) continues to emphasize on the idea that human beings run after scientific technology and confuse that with the notion of “progress”. Such technology could affect the environment in a negative fashion. Construction of roads, building of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 76-77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 147-232.

modern housing, digging on the ground for resources and similar activities often lead to encroachment of forests and exploiting it, thereby wrecking the natural habitat of the several forms of supernatural entities. In the text there is a character called Say Tokyo Kid, who is a driver and a captain of thugs (of transporting timber). He is aware of spirits residing inside trees:

Say T.: Timber is ma line. You show me the wood and I'll tell you what kinda insects gonna attack it, and I'll tell you how you take the skin off. And I'll tell you what kinda what kinda spirit is gonna be chasing you when you cut it down. If you ain't gorra strong head kid, you can't drive no guy of timber.⁴⁹

When trees are cut, the spirits residing in them get angry and take their revenge, usually resulting in the death of the truck drivers in the highways:

... A madness where a motor-car throws itself against a tree – Gbram! And showers of crystal flying on the broken souls.⁵⁰

Also,

Kotonu [a driver]: ... he died... of a lorry in his back. It beat his spine against a load of stockfish⁵¹. It was what he carried mostly – stockfish. That day the truck was piled high with it...

⁴⁹ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 158-159.

Samson [Kotonu's friend and a passenger]: We were both there. Pulling the truck in front while he pushed behind... We were thrown forward ...

Kotonu: Buried in stockfish. It was all I remembered for a long time, the smell of stockfish. Torn bodies on the road all smell of stockfish have you noticed?...⁵²

Through this action, the spirits seem to remind human beings that if the latter damage the ecosystem for their selfish gains, it wouldn't be long before they face its disastrous consequences. The character of the Professor (described by the playwright as "proprietor etc of the drivers' haven. Formerly Sunday-school teacher and lay-reader") seems to be doing Ogun's bidding and is instrumental in the deaths on the road by removing road signs from dangerous points⁵³. Death, which is the dominant subject-matter in this text, is conceived of using agricultural metaphors, as emphasized by the Professor⁵⁴.

*The Swamp Dwellers*⁵⁵ (1964), as hinted by the title itself, presents a rural community of people who live in the swamps. The setting, in the words of the playwright himself, "is a hut on stilts, built on one of the scattered semi-firm islands in the swamps."⁵⁶ The eco-consciousness of the community comes out primarily in more than one way, in the text. The concern of the community is centred on their crops, as they are agro-based. At one point in the text, Makuri, an older resident of the place, tells his wife

⁵¹ Earlier in the play (p. 176), we get to know that the character of the Professor has stated that the smell of stockfish disturbs "his spirits". It is not clear if the playwright is referring to the spirits of the Professor himself or the fact that the Professor has so much of fellow-feeling with the spirits of the forest that he calls them "his spirits". The doomed fate of the truck carrying large amounts of stockfish gives the readers/audience an impression that displeased supernatural forces were behind it.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 156-157. In p. 176, Samson and Salubi talk amongst themselves about the Professor with regard to this aspect, as well.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-112.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

that the only reason that their son would have returned to their village would have been a good harvest. Since that were not the case, he might not return:

Makuri: He came for his crops. Now that he knows they've been ruined by the floods, he'll be running back to the city.⁵⁷

We also find a blind beggar coming to the area and looking for “land here which a man can till... any land to spare for a man who is willing to give his soul to the soil...”⁵⁸ His back-story is such that he and his village used to be very successful, with plenty of rain and harvest. However, locusts came out of nowhere and destroyed all the crops, and he had been begging since:⁵⁹

We even forgot to beg, and lived on the marvel of this new birth of the land, and the rich smell of its goodness ... But it turned out to have been an act of spite. The feast was not meant to for us – but for the locusts.⁶⁰

The swamp dwellers have high regard for a serpent that lives in their area, attaching a sort of divine angle to it:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 98-99.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 99.

Alu [an old female resident, the wife of Makuri]: No one knows [where her son is]. Only the Serpent can tell. Only the Serpent of the swamps, the Snake that lurks beneath the slough.⁶¹

Then again,

Beggar [looking for some land to till]: But if a man is willing to take a piece of the ground redeem it from the swamp – will they let him? ...

Makuri: You wish to rob the Serpent of the Swamps? You wish to take the food out of his mouth? ... The land that we till and live on has been ours from the beginning of time. The bounds are marked by ageless iroko trees that have lived since the birth of the Serpent, since the birth of the world, since the start of time itself. What is ours is ours. But what belongs to the Serpent may never be taken away from him.⁶²

We also find another theme that runs in the text, that of the contrast between the city and the village, which, on a macro level, reflects on the theme of indigenous tradition and modernity. The theme immediately reminds one of *Bhoma*, one of Sircar's prominent plays which has been discussed earlier. Speaking of the city, Makuri says that the youth of the swamps go there "to try their hand at making money ... only some of them remember their folk and send word once in a while."⁶³ Emphasizing its coldness, he further comments that "the city is a large place. You could live there all your life and never meet half the people in it."⁶⁴ This statement is particularly disturbing:

⁶¹ Ibid., 84.

⁶² Ibid., 92-93.

⁶³ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Makuri: It ruins them. The city ruins them. What do they seek there, except money? They talk to the traders, and then they cannot sit still ... There was Gonushi's son for one ... left his wife and children ... not a word to anyone.⁶⁵

At another point in the text, during an argument with his wife, Makuri makes us aware of the “shifty-eyed traders who came to hunt for crocodile skins ...”⁶⁶ So here we get to know about the crocodile skin trade in the area, how traders from the city come to hunt the poor animals for their business. In addition to this, we get to know that one of the twin sons of Makuri, Awuchike has died. During a heated conversation between Makuri, his wife and his remaining twin son⁶⁷, it is implied that Awuchike paid for his sins. Awuchike seemingly had tried to cause his twin brother some harm. He dealt “in timber. He felled it [one of the countless trees of their area] and floated it over the seas ... He is wealthy, and he is big.”⁶⁸ We understand here that Awuchike had an illegal business in the city which ran by exploiting the trees in the swamps. He had grown wealthy and corrupt enough to harm his own brother.

*Camwood on the Leaves*⁶⁹ (1973) has the two forbidden lovers, Isola and Morounke making it clear how snails are a part of their regular diet and they love it (“She gets a good price for my snails”⁷⁰), along with mushrooms:

Isola: ... Shall we pick mushrooms too? ...

⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 104-105.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁹ Wole Soyinka, *Plays: I* (London: Methuen Drama, 1998), 87-141.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 95.

Morounke: ... morning is the time to do it. First thing in the morning. That is when they are really big because they have been drinking dew all night.⁷¹

In the text, the incorrect prejudice that human beings belong to a higher order than animals is expressed by a character – the minister. We get to know of it from Isola, who says that he “used to follow the minister when he went hunting. Birds, mostly. He never would shoot anything on the ground.”⁷² On being asked the reason why, by Morounke, he replies by saying that the minister “was afraid it might turn out to be a human being.”⁷³

Isola displays a dual attitude towards animals, in the text. He is more hostile and intolerant (of course, with reasons) towards animals that are higher in the food chain. He fails to realize the natural order of things. The animals concerned here are a big snake and a tortoise family. Along with Morounke, Isola conserves tortoises:

Isola: ... Do you remember now? It was this bamboo clump ... That was where we found the eggs of the tortoise ...

Morounke: Yes, I remember. And we came back and watched them until they were all hatched...

Isola: ... here she comes ...

Morounke (excitedly): She’s still here! The mother...⁷⁴

We get to see Isola’s nurturing attitude towards weaker animals. However, he cannot tolerate a certain snake – a natural enemy of those tortoises. Isola describes it as “a

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 100.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 99.

monster of a snake... It's a boa, I think. Really big... I'll have to kill it. I cannot live unless it's dead."⁷⁵ He anger soon soars further, at a later point, where he declares that he "can't sleep with that thing crawling around"⁷⁶ him. He reports that there "was another broken shell on the other side of the stream, and that snake did it ... smashed against the rocks like the others."⁷⁷

Soyinka's exploration of the conflict between tradition and modernity⁷⁸ continues in his *The Lion and the Jewel*⁷⁹ (1963), our next text in focus. Baroka is the head (Bale) of the Ilujinle village where the play takes place. Baroka represents traditional indigenous knowledge and opposite to him is the character of Lakunle. Lakunle represents those members of the current generation who are ready to abandon their traditional beliefs and mimic the colonizer's culture and religion. The attention of the two men is centred on a young girl named Sidi, who is hesitant to choose between the former. Sidi could be said to represent contemporary Africa (the geographic space and the people), which is in a dilemma whether to blindly embrace the colonizer's knowledge system or make efforts to hold-on to its traditions. Baroka, as an upholder of his village's traditions is shown to view the concept of "progress" in a negative light. He is aware of the building of roads and railways through villages, but doesn't allow the effect of all that in his own village. In fact, he drives away people from his village, who come from the city to construct such things. As a guardian of the village, Baroka is also concerned about preserving its local

⁷⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Here in the context of this text, the term would refer to knowledge, ideas or other tools that has been handed down from the White Western European colonizer.

⁷⁹ Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 2-58.

environment, free from any industrial activity. A stage direction from the text demonstrates how he drives out one such person by bribing him. We find here that:

Baroka enters a few minutes later accompanied by some attendants and preceded by a young girl bearing a calabash bowl. The surveyor, angry and threatening, is prevailed upon to open his gift. From it he reveals a wad of pound notes and kola nuts. Mutual understanding is established. The surveyor frowns heavily, rubs his chin, and consults his map. Re-examines the contents of the bowl, shakes his head. Baroka adds more money, and a coop of hens. A goat follows, and more money. This time 'truth' dawns on him at last, he has made a mistake. The track really should go the other way. What an unfortunate error, discovered just in time! No, no, no possibility of a mistake this time, the track should be much further away. In fact (scooping up the soil) the earth is most unsuitable, couldn't possibly support the weight of a railway engine. A gourd of palm wine is brought to seal the agreement and a cola-nut [sic.] is broken. Baroka's men help the surveyor pack and they leave with their arms around each other followed by the surveyor's booty.⁸⁰

Regarding how he views progress, he explains this to Sidi:

I do not hate progress, only its nature
 Which makes all roofs and faces look the same.
 And the wish of one old man is
 That here and there, ...
 Among the bridges and the murderous roads,
 Below the humming birds which
 Smoke the face of Sango, dispenser of
 The snake-tongued lightning; between this moment
 And the reckless broom that will be wielded

⁸⁰ Ibid., 24.

In these years to come, we must leave
 Virgin plots of lives, rich decay
 And the tang of vapour rising from
 Forgotten heaps of compost, lying
 Undisturbed ... But the skin of progress
 Masks, unknown, the spotted wolf of sameness ...⁸¹

Baroka predicts the possible destruction (technoscientific) progress would do to their village in the future. Even the language that he uses in the above speech contains terms used to describe natural processes and used by natural scientists. It is not hard to realize that Soyinka speaks through him.

*The Beatification of Area Boy*⁸² (1995) is set in Lagos and ecological concerns of the playwright are shown through the principal situation in the text. Two wealthy political families are getting their son and daughter married to each other, and for the wedding to take place a large space of the town is being cleared. "I'm cleaning the place for the wedding"⁸³, as the character of the Military Officer says. This is a very selfish and irresponsible act from the side of these wealthy families, as inhabitants of that area are being pushed out. The irony in the text lies in the fact that even though the area boys are seen by the system as rogues and thugs due to prejudice⁸⁴, they actually help the residents of that area. The bigger rogues turn out to be the military men, who are sent by the

⁸¹ Ibid., 48.

⁸² Wole Soyinka, *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999), 227-332.

⁸³ Ibid., 311.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 328. Towards the end of the text, the character of Miseyi actually uses some negative adjectives and phrases to describe area boys – giving an idea as to how they are popularly perceived by the upper-classes. She uses words like "bullies", "enforcers", "extortionists", "cocaine-pushers" or "thugs". She says that they are daylight robbers who snatch jewellery from women and are drug-addicts.

system to get rid of those area boys, because of their violent and selfish actions. The displacement of the inhabitants of the concerned area reminds us of Walcott's *O Babylon!*, which is discussed in the previous chapter. The character of Sanda, in the text, is a university dropout and a prominent area boy. To express the current pulse of the town, he has this to say:

... What was it now? Oh yes, something terrible had happened to Lagos. You woke up one day and there wasn't any Lagos anywhere... Disappeared into thin air...⁸⁵

Through the Military Officer we get to know some of the plan of the insensitive higher authorities:

Military Officer: This section of Broad Street is to be blocked in an hour. I come here to supervise the arrangements and what do I meet? A bunch of Maroko⁸⁶ refugees and their filthy loads clogging up the place. So I order them to move on. They are stretched out all the way to the Marina – they must have come up the Marina through Victoria island – it would take at least an hour at the slow pace they're moving, and some of them are already thinking of camping under the flyway. Under the flyway. Under the flyway! The party here is supposed to spill over to the flyover and down to Ita Balogun ...⁸⁷

On a positive note, Sanda manages to make the character of Miseyi realise some of the concerns about the lesser-privileged people. Miseyi used to be his university mate, in the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 246.

⁸⁶ Originally they were a community in the low income area, Eti-Osa in the Lagos State.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 304.

text. She is the bride-to-be at the concerned wedding, who comes from a privileged, elite background – as usual unaware of the problems of the underprivileged:

Miseyi: Getting married. That's why I came here. To check the arrangements in the plaza.

Sanda: Oh. You mean it's you? The booking. I hadn't linked ...

Miseyi: For tonight? Yes. Everything is tonight – the asking ceremony, the formal engagement and the traditional wedding. I didn't want an elaborate affair.

Sanda: You didn't want an elaborate ... that street is being closed from seven. And you say that is not an elaborate affair?⁸⁸

Sanda and the Military Officer's interaction in the text is crucial. We get to know of the cruelty towards the less-powerful so-called squatters, and how humanity is gradually fading from the power-structure. The power-structure and its agents also have false logic to defend themselves, as they go on to blame natural elements like the sea, showing no concern for the environment:

Sanda [after hearing from the Military Officer how a Maroko squatter aggressively misbehaved with him, refusing to follow orders]: I would put it all out of my mind, officer. Madmen or vagrants or Maroko squatters – all they need is a dose of strong action. So you finally sorted out Maroko?

Military Officer (instantly recovered): Oh they surely got what was coming to them. They had to go. I mean, even in their own interest. That place was unhealthy for human habitation. The government promised to relocate them but no, their leaders went to see new locations only to return and incite their people to reject them. Said they were too swampy, too isolated, no infrastructures, too this and not enough that. What did they expect? Four-star hotels? That's when we

⁸⁸ Ibid., 283.

ordered the police to stand aside and leave the job to professionals. That place should have been sanitized ages ago, but the bloody civilian government kept pussyfooting and allowing technical and pseudo-legal delays to obstruct development plans... We didn't merely bulldoze it, we dynamited every stubborn wall, then set fire to the rubble. That place was disease ridden! No point developing it for decent citizens only to have them die of some lingering viruses from way back. Those squatters might be immune to anything but we have to think of the future residents. We took them by surprise. They woke up as usual but found themselves staring into the muzzles of guns. Few of them had any time to pick up their belongings... They've had masses of warning under the civilian regime, even some feeble, half-hearted eviction attempts. But the law courts always interfered. So, as the good book says, the fire next time!...

Sanda: ... the island was sitting on oil.

Military Officer: ... But it's prime residential area, right on the lagoon. Oh yes, and that was something else – the sea could have risen any time and overwhelmed those stupid residents in their tin and wooden shacks. Think of the scale of the disaster! I mean, they're human beings after all. And some families have lived there over three generations. They deserve something better than a watery grave.⁸⁹

Next, we look at the radio play, *A Scourge of Hyacinths*⁹⁰ (1992) [and its stage-version, *From Zia, With Love*⁹¹ (1992), simultaneously]. Both the texts talk about the Nigerian society in the early eighties, when the State was ruled by despotic military Generals, Buhari and Idiagbon. The first text will primarily be analysed here. “This regime wants to put a scare in people...”⁹² is the statement used in *A Scourge of Hyacinths* to describe its socio-political situation. The main setting of the text is a prison. The water hyacinths surrounding this prison have generally been seen as villainous and crafty by more than one character. Miguel, a prisoner, comments on the rapid and uncontrollable spreading of the plants. “So the water hyacinths have spread also to this

⁸⁹ Ibid., 305-307.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 181-225.

⁹¹ Ibid., 83-179.

⁹² Ibid., 183.

part of the lagoon,”⁹³ he remarks at one point. He also points out the possibility of the plants to “take over that [nearby] coastline.”⁹⁴ Soyinka could be making human beings realize their futility to try to control nature and its elements. He also shows how nature creates positive and negative situations in the lives of human being indiscriminately:

Miguel: ... The hyacinths must have stopped the motor-boats...

Detiba [another prisoner]: They’ve made life miserable for everyone. You can’t imagine how it has affected prison life, Mr. [Miguel] Domingo. Before, the canoes with outboard motors would come right up to the walls and attend to business. Every morning, very early. Prisoners would lower messages and money, then haul up their own mail, or whatever they’d ordered. The prison officials knew about it but they turned a blind eye. It made life easier – something to look forward to. Those facing the canal acted as go-betweens for the others. But, during the ten months we’ve been here, the weeds finally gained the upper hand. First, they fouled up the propellers, so the boats took to paddles. Then even the paddles couldn’t fight the weeds. For over three months now, not one canoe has been able to find its way anywhere close to the wall.⁹⁵

Yet, human beings try to destroy natural elements so that they could have their ways, as Miguel once sees “a canoe trying to break through the hyacinths.”⁹⁶ However, he is also in the know that they “are in this damned canoe with futile paddles battling a malicious tangle of weeds. For all we [they] know these roots may reach right down to seabed...”⁹⁷

Miguel hallucinates about his mother coming to the prison to see him. It is a slice of his memory. The mother holds strong her indigenous beliefs and confesses that nature

⁹³ Ibid., 184.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 203.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 186-187.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 218.

is unimaginably stronger than humankind. She asks nature and its divine beings to forgive humankind and their wrong-doings:

The Mother (soft intoning): Oh Yemanja, sister of the clear waters, fill me with wisdom. Find me the path. Cut through the unseen weeds which enfold my house in a fulsome embrace. Save us from this shame hanging over our heads, protectress of the innocent. Let your luminous waters unroll a carpet of light in the direction I must take. Show me a sign. Point your spangled fins in the direction I must proceed. Unveil yourself before me tonight. Let your eyes be the twin stars locked one on each foot. Rescue this house from shame, from the deep shame ... Tell me, Miguel, why do you think they gave such a lovely name to this infliction? Seaweed is all it appears to be. Parasite. Unless to humans. It chokes the ports. Imperils navigation. Creates hardship for the fishermen...⁹⁸

When she speaks to her son, she uses images of natural elements. She emphasizes the above realizations about nature:

The Mother: They [the military personnel] choke us. Their embrace suffocates the nation. But they are mere mortals, that's the difference. They think they are gods but they are mere men... Hasn't it struck you sometimes as you watch them massed on the parade ground? In those olive green fatigues starched and ironed a deadly gloss. That's when they most resemble a field of crisped lettuce. A kind of mutation but still – lettuce.⁹⁹

The mother also reflects about roots of one's culture and on generations. She says that a part of Miguel was like his grandfather. When Miguel reminds her that his grandfather is known for gambling away everything, she shifts that perspective, talking about him as

⁹⁸ Ibid., 190.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 193.

someone forgetful and careless. He was “forgetful of his roots,”¹⁰⁰ who lost his money and things including their ancestral home. He failed in businesses as was not hard-hearted like the others. The mother goes on to talk about all those people from Lagos who became rootless and were pushed out of their homes and lands. “They took only their gods with them as they ran from one island in the Caribbean to another. San Domingo, Haiti, Cuba.”¹⁰¹ In another part of the text, Miguel talks about how the power-structure is damaging the environment, without care. He says, “... You should see their factories – plastic and other synthetic products. Their other line is refining natural oils for export...”¹⁰² Miguel comes across as ecologically sensitive, in this way.

The title of the play, *From Zia, With Love*, comes from a letter¹⁰³ in the text. The letter calls for friendly peaceful coexistence written to the Wing Commander of Laos by the then Pakistani President, Zia-ul-Haq¹⁰⁴. This text mentions a few additional concerns which were not explicitly found in *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (its radio play form), that comes up through an ecocritical analysis. Towards the beginning of the text, there is a conversation¹⁰⁵ between the characters of the Director, the Commandant and the Cabinet members (represented by a chorus), about foot shortage in the area. The foot shortage is because “the hyacinths are still a hazard to navigation.”¹⁰⁶ The Director warns that “soon, there’ll be a serious protein shortage...”¹⁰⁷ and that if they “lose the fishing it means

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 195-196.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰² Ibid., 203.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁴ A fellow military dictator in Pakistan (1924-1988).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 88-89.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 88.

there'll be a shortage from that food resource.¹⁰⁸” We also get the information about “what the Kwela birds have done to the grain crops [that] year.¹⁰⁹” They fear that very soon there would be food riots, as well. Then, at a point in the text, the inmates sing a sarcastic song to salute the Commandant and the Sergeant-Major. Filled with images of the natural and the supernatural, some of the lyrics of that song is worth paying attention to. Sparks of Soyinka’s genius in social critique and caustic sarcasm of the social and the political could be found here:

Behold the lilies of the field
 They do not toil, or sow or build...
 Ours are the lilies of murky waters
 Unsinkable flotsam of rancid gutters...
 Oh what a paradox they pose
 Rootless, yet they’ve spread huge toes...
 Monster from the sea, was another verdict
 Feeds on pollution like a heroin addict...
 They split like the Red Sea, immune to fear
 Of napalm, conqueror of the ozonosphere...
 Saddam¹¹⁰ was contacted – prime your chemical fuse
 The Green Berets are here, masquerading as lettuce¹¹¹ ...
 No way, said the terror of mighty petroleum
 Wait till I’ve perfected my bomb plutonium...
 Oh hail sweet lilies of our murky grey waters

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Well-known Tyrant of Iraq (1937-2006).

¹¹¹ Just like The Mother’s character uses this image in *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (discussed later).

Midnight guests, eternal squatters
 Homely as the gecko, slippery as the eel
 Cool as the salamander, tempered as steel¹¹²

Prisoners Emuke and Detiba have an exchange of words, where they talk about natural resources of Africa that the colonizers (and their allies in the continent) have exploited, leading to its current state of poverty:

Detiba: ... You remember what Cocoa meant to Ghana? What he¹¹³ did was like sucking all the blood from an infant.

Emuke: I know. We dey carry cocoa go Sweden, London, Turkey, even Russia self.

Detiba: Ghana didn't have much else. No petrol, no minerals.

Emuke: They get small gold... I dey smuggle am commot for some businesswoman one time.¹¹⁴

*Death and the King's Horseman*¹¹⁵ (1975) focuses on a Yoruba ritual that once a king expires, it is the duty of his horseman to accompany him to the afterlife through a ritual suicide. In the text, this responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of the character of Elesin. On the other hand, there is a character who is an agent of the colonizer's community, the District Officer, Simon Pilkings. Pilkings, along with his wife Jane, is insensitive to the Yoruba belief system and views rituals like this as barbaric and

¹¹² Ibid., 103.

¹¹³ Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), the first prime minister and president of Ghana, is being referred to.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 140.

¹¹⁵ Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 1-63.

revolting, seeking to stop it. Towards the beginning of the text, the character of the Praise-singer says something that might be applicable as a comment on how colonization has affected their local landscape:

Priase-singer: In their [their ancestors'] time the great wars came and went, the little wars came and went; the white slavers came and went, they took away the heart of our race, they bore away the mind and muscle of our race. The city fell and was rebuilt; the city fell and our people trudged through mountain and forest to found a new home...¹¹⁶

Similarly, when Pilkings tries to stop the death ritual, Elesin's revolt indirectly becomes a revolt of a greater magnitude – the indigenous standing up against the colonizer:

Elesin (an animal bellow from off): Leave me alone! Is it not enough that you have covered me in shame! White man, take your hand from my body!

(Olunde stands frozen to the spot...)

...

Pilkings (off): Carry him.

Elesin: Give me back the name you have taken away from me you ghost from the land of the nameless!¹¹⁷

Here, it might seem that the animal has a fellow-feeling with Elesin, as it bellows along with the distressed Elesin. Elesin has a more complex view about animals, though. During the ritual taking place, he seems to place animals in a lower position than humans:

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

Elesin: A dog does not outrun the hand
 That feeds it meat. A horse that throws its rider
 Slows down to a stop. Elesin Alafin
 Trusts no beasts with messages between
 A king and his companion.¹¹⁸

However, most of the time he and his fellow villagers express their life experiences in terms of images of animals. At the beginning of the text, when he meets the market-women, he says:

Elesin: Come then. This market is my roost. When I come among the women I am a chicken with a hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose palace is built with tenderness and beauty.¹¹⁹

As the day of his ritual suicide approaches, he expresses his anxiety in the same way, as well:

Elesin: There was fear in the forest too.
 Not-I [a kind of bird] was lately heard even in the lair
 Of beasts. The hyena cackled loud Not-I,
 The civet twitched his fiery tail and gared:

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

Not-I. Not-I became the answering-name
 Of the restless bird, that little one
 Whom Death found nesting in the leaves
 When whisper of his coming ran
 Before him on the wind. Not-I
 Has long abandoned home. This same dawn
 I heard him twitter in the gods' abode.
 Ah, companions of this living world
 What a thing this is, that even those
 We call immortal
 Should fear to die.¹²⁰

He also implies that that time of the year would be perfect for the ritual, as:

... this is the season of quick rains, the harvest
 Is this moment due for gathering.¹²¹

In addition to this, he remarks at one point, about the traditional belief of the deep connection between the members of their community and the earth, like that of a child with its mother:

Elesin: ... No man beholds his mother's womb –

¹²⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹²¹ Ibid., 34.

Yet who denies it's there? Coiled
 To the navel of this world is that
 Endless cord that links us all
 To the great origin. If I lose my way
 The trailing cord will bring me to the roots.¹²²

The character of the Praise-singer also uses images of animals to express community beliefs:

Praise-singer: There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world give us shelter?¹²³

Regarding the importance and sacredness of the land, we are told that “the eldest son is not supposed to travel away from the land.”¹²⁴, and we also find Olunde (Elesin’s son) expressing how much importance he gives to the community beliefs, despite going for his higher studies abroad.¹²⁵ We also find that in the area, the elite or someone who is held in high regard wears boa-skin slippers.¹²⁶

Eventually it so happens that Olunde is the one who goes through the sacrificial ritual in the place of his father, Elesin. Elesin undergoes certain situations and is unable

¹²² Ibid., 13.

¹²³ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 12.

to finally do his communal duty. He is arrested and prevented from performing the ritual by Pilkings' people. Elesin also comes across as a person who is too concerned about his earthly and materialistic ties to take part in such a ritual. The Praise-singer and the 'mother' of the market, Iyaloja taunt him for this. They all use the image of a plantain tree to express their points of view. The old shoot of that tree indicates Elesin, while the young one indicates Olunde. Iyaloja is in a dilemma whether Elesin is "one who eats and leaves nothing on his plate for children."¹²⁷ When it was first thought that Elesin would go through with the ritual, he says:

Elesin: ... The sap of the plantain never dries.
 You have seen the young shoot swelling
 Even as the parent stalk begins to wither.
 Women, let my going be likened to
 The twilight hour of the plantain.¹²⁸

Iyaloja has this to say:

Not we, but the very earth says No. The sap in the plantain does not dry. Let grain that will not feed the voyager at his passage drop here and take root as he steps beyond this earth and us. Oh you who fill the home from hearth to threshold with the voices of children, you who now bestride the hidden gulf and pause to draw the right foot across and into the resting-home of the great forebearers, it is good

¹²⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 16.

that your loins be drained into the earth we know, that your last strength be ploughed back into the womb that gave you being.¹²⁹

Elsewhere, she also illustrates a community belief using images of natural elements. She talks about how everyone should help each other unconditionally, without discrimination:

Iyaloja: No one knows when the ants desert their home; they leave the mound intact. The swallow is never seen to peck holes in its nest when it is time to move with the season. There are always throngs of humanity behind the leave-taker. The rain should not come through the roof for them, the wind must not blow through the walls at night.¹³⁰

She ridicules Elesin when they get the news of Olunde going through the ritual by sacrificing his life in place of him, by referring to ‘unnatural’ processes. She questions him:

Iyaloja: ... Whose trunk withers to give sap to the other? The parent shoot or the younger?

Elesin: The parent.¹³¹

Then again,

¹²⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

¹³¹ Ibid., 57.

Iyaloja: ... There lies the honour of your household and of our race. Because he [Olunde] could not bear to let honour fly out of the doors, he stopped it with his life...

Praise-singer [adding to what Iyaloja said]: ... this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk...¹³²

The indigenous community is always attached to the natural world and its elements, and never thinks of itself as separate from the latter. The natural world provides the community members with expression and life-lessons, as well. Soyinka shows this once again, in this text.

Next, we move on to *Kongi's Harvest*¹³³ (1965). This play looks at two kinds of forces seeking to claim their authorities on the Ismaland (Soyinka does not indicate any specific African State). On the one hand there is the traditional king Oba Danlola (imprisoned at that moment in the text), while on the other President Kongi, the dictator. An event that occupies the central position in the text is the Nigerian New Yam Festival. This festival takes place after harvesting crops and the gods of agriculture are thanked and requested for their blessings. The cunning Kongi attaches himself to festivals like this with full pomp and show, digressing from the deeper issues of the people. He even declares himself as a divine figure associated with this festival.¹³⁴ People are not happy with his dictatorship and it is expressed with an ominous spirit at the beginning of the text, under the section called, "Hemlock" – possibly alluding to the poisonous European plant:

¹³² Ibid., 61-62.

¹³³ Soyinka, *Collected Plays 2*, 59-138.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 129-130.

... Of isms and isms on absolute-ism
 To demonstrate the tree of life
 Is sprung from broken peat
 And we the rotted bark, spurned
 When the tree swells its pot
 The mucus that is snorted out
 When Kongi's new race blows
 And more, oh there's harvest of words
 In a penny newspaper...¹³⁵

Images of natural elements and processes are brought in to express the above situation. The character of a drummer makes us aware that even if human being tamper with natural elements or creations, the natural world and the supernatural world would always tower them:

Drummer: ... The tunnel passes through
 The hill's belly
 But we cry no defilement.
 A new-dug path may lead
 To the secret heart of being.
 Ogun is still a god
 Even without his navel.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Ibid., 61.

The characters of Ogbo Aweri (Head of Danlola's then defunct Conclave of Elders) and Sarumi (a junior Oba/king) talk about natural processes where sometimes in order to be the fittest to survive, organisms do become selfish enough to hurt or consume their near and dear ones:

Ogbo Aweri: Observe, when the monster child
 Was born, Opele taught us to
 Abandon him beneath the buttress tree
 But the mother said, oh no,
 A child is still a child
 The mother in us said, a child
 Is still the handiwork of Olukori.
 Sarumi: Soon the head swelled
 Too big for pillow
 And it swelled too big
 For the mother's back
 And soon the mother's head
 Was nowhere to be seen
 And the child's slight belly
 Was strangely distended.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 68-69.

Speaking of using animal images to prove a point or deliver a lesson we see characters viewing the former as belonging to an inferior category, yet learning from them to become wiser themselves:

Danlola: ... The royal python may be good
 At hissing, but it seems
 The scorpion's tail is fire.¹³⁸

This is to indicate that one (Kongi, in this case) should not underestimate someone visibly small or unassuming (Danlola and his crew) as weak. In another instance, Danlola again says:

The ostrich also sports plumes but
 I've yet to see that wise bird
 Leave the ground.
 ...
 When the dog hides a bone does he not
 Throw up sand? A little dust in the eye
 Of his Immortality will not deceive
 His clever Organizing Secretary. We need to
 Bury him in shovelfuls...¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 101.

Danlola also mentions in another part of the text that they use snakeskin and toads as means for their survival in the forest.¹⁴⁰ He also uses images of plants to illustrate the philosophy of changing oneself to move with the times and how foolish it is to resist that:

Danlola: If the young sapling bends, the old twig
If it resists the wind, can only break.¹⁴¹

The Secretary who would organize the festival under Kongi, discusses his plans in a meeting:

Secretary: Gentlemen, please. All we want is some way of persuading King Danlola to bring the New Yam to Kongi with his own hands. I have organized the rest – the agricultural show to select the prize-winning yam, the feast, the bazaar, the music, the dance. Only one thing is missing – Oba Danlola. And gentlemen, that problem is yours. Kongi desires that the king perform all his customary spiritual functions, only this time, that he perform them to him, our leader. Kongi must preside as the Spirit of Harvest, in pursuance of the Five-Year Development Plan.¹⁴²

Through this act of presenting the Yam, the previous king, Danlola would symbolize his defeat against Kongi. Also, it would be a representation of the old order ending, and the beginning of Kongi's order in the State. The Secretary also discourages one of Daodu's¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴² Ibid., 77.

¹⁴³ He is Sarumi's son and an heir to Danlola's throne.

efforts regarding a sort of independent form of agriculture under Kongi's rule. This could be seen as a form of protest against Kongi's rule:

Secretary: ... we already had farm co-operatives but you had to start a farmer's community of your own!

Daodu: But it worked.¹⁴⁴

There is an interesting conversation in the text between the Secretary and one of Kongi's high-ranking supporters (the Fifth member of the Reformed Aweri Fraternity) where Soyinka exposes the hypocrisy in taking part in rituals of fasting or protests through fasting:

Fifth: ... Food man, food. A bit of Harvest before the banquet. I've had enough of this starvation act. Smuggle in some food tonight.

Secretary: Is that all?

Fifth: But do it carefully. Their noses are so pinched from hunger, they will smell out any food within a two-mile radius.

Secretary: Well. Well. Any particular preference?

Fifth: Yes, food. Just food.¹⁴⁵

The text ends with Kongi's ex-mistress, the courtesan Segi presenting him with a chopped head of her father as the "new harvest"¹⁴⁶, as situations starkly deviate from her

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 131-132.

original plan (with Daodu and Danlola) to assassinate him. As Danlola's life is under threat, he flees the border.¹⁴⁷ Nobody could sway Kongi from his position of power.

*King Baabu*¹⁴⁸ (2001) presents to us the despotic rule of General Basha Bash, who later becomes the self-proclaimed titular king. Rather than hinting at a real-life figure (Sani Abacha¹⁴⁹), the text could be taken as a critique of despotic rulers of Africa across time, in general – as we have seen Soyinka dealing with this issue in his other play-texts. The first thing that we need to note is the title of the text. It has an interesting impact:

Soyinka's "King Baabu" is the semantic meaning of "baabu"- meaning 'none' or 'nothing' in Hausa, a northern Nigerian language, which ranks with Yoruba and Igbo languages in terms of geographical spread. This frame of meaning indicates that all you hear from Nigeria's maximum leader, King Baabu is 'baabu money' - no salary, no jobs, no pipe-borne water, no electricity, no good roads, no fund for education, health, etc. It's always "baabu" even in the face of apparent wealth and abundant resources of the Nigerian nation. The fourth level of deductible meaning is drawn from Soyinka's own Yoruba mother tongue. Viewed from the Yoruba syntactic and semantic possibilities, "King Baabu" is a mock-heroic sentence in Yoruba language which means the 'king who meets the nation's coffers full and empties it, steals it or takes all'. (trans. Oba baa koo buu).

This analysis is rooted in the linguistic reality that both Yoruba and Igbo names are often loaded with cultural and illustrative meanings and codes for understanding the historical or circumstantial realities that surround the birth, lineage or ancestral pedigrees of a person, family, society or age. 'Oba' is a noun meaning king; 'baa' is an emphatic verb meaning meet it; 'buu' is quantitative verb which has inherent reference to fetching part of an uncountable quantity of goods or items. The verb 'buu' can only be a transitive verb whose complement must be a [non-count]noun. So in Yoruba language 'King Baabu' can possibly be a mock-name for the 'greedy king' who takes or steals much from the abundant resources

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 133-138.

¹⁴⁸ Wole Soyinka, *King Baabu* (London: Methuen, 2002), 1-107.

¹⁴⁹ Sani Abacha was originally an officer of the Nigerian Army who acted as the President of Nigeria from 1993 to 1998. Allegations of corruption and abuse of human rights were made against him.

in the nation's coffers. Thus, this play is a mimetic representation of the maladies and aberrations of leaders in contemporary Nigeria.¹⁵⁰

The characters of Basha and his wife Maariya are presented to us as corrupt beings with no regrets or remorse for their cruelties, right from the onset of the text. The conversation below, happens as Basha gains power to rule the State and enters the mansion of his predecessor with his wife. His wife, not to be outdone, has a habit of mocking him throughout the text and does not spare him in this conversation, as well:

Basha: If I hearing you right, you say we going to die paupers. Now how that possible when this very moment we moving into all this new and sumptuous bordello, and with blood of former occupant making that special design on wallpaper, all mixed up with spatter of grey matter from his brains. Authentic grey mess, as myself can testify since is me exactly who put the silver bullet through his head. Now we have his mansion, I wearing his general stars and stripes and long-service medallions on personal orders of commander-in-chief...

Maariya: ... At least your predecessor in this mansion had brains – the fatty blobs on the wallpaper prove that... when your head is blown open, there'll be nothing but soap, and not even the kind that foams...¹⁵¹

In addition to the cruelty that this couple exudes here, there is a point in the text where Basha describes in gross details how he would torture and kill any person who betrays his trust.¹⁵² It is here itself where he makes the traditional distinction between what human beings are and how they are different from animals. Ironically, the readers/audience realize who is acting as the so-called animal at this point.

¹⁵⁰ Nelson O. Fashina, "Baboons of the insane society: A literary inquiry," *Nigeriaworld*, October 25, 2001, <http://nigeriaworld.com/columnist/fashina/102501.html>.

¹⁵¹ Soyinka, *Baabu*, 6.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

In order to please his people superficially and keep them by his side, Basha introduces a ridiculous scheme without proper planning and forethought. The following speech grabs his ridiculous mentality:

Basha (from a bulging briefcase, he heaves a pile of files on to the table): My ministry is committed to make the country return again to be feeding itself, instead of we spending scarce foreign exchange on importing common foodstuffs. The whole country will be mobilized to grow food. Eatable food that people must eat. My ministry therefore... inaugrating [sic.] campaign called Operation FILL THE STOMACH!

...

Rent¹⁵³: All obas, obis, emirs and other titled chiefs nominal and traditional will lead the way by turning half their palace grounds into farmland for cultivation of foodcrops. Feed the stomach and the people shall honour their ancestors.¹⁵⁴

Maariya's treachery continues in this text in various ways. Basha himself comments at one point on how she indulges in excesses at the expense of others –animals included:

[Basha as] Baabu: Ignore her. She get that way after eating giraffe udders and over two dozen sun-dried crocodile nipples...¹⁵⁵

In a public gathering, Maariya takes the upper hand in executing her husband's plan of trying to please the subjects through secretive corrupt means. In addition to exploiting

¹⁵³ He is the representative member of the body called Royal Estates Nominal and Traditional. Note that his name is formed through the abbreviation of the name of the body.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 80.

natural resources and indulging in excess, she even betrays her husband by secretly forging his signature, when required. Even Baasha is stunned:

Maariya: ... Operation Fill the Stomach has already begun to yield full harvest. Look at those twenty fat cows tethered to the trees. They're all for you. Eat and drink till daybreak... There is pito [millet or sorghum beer] and palm wine... Those huge vats over there are rice and beans... We have laid out eggs to beat the Guinness Book of Records. Yes, plenty for the stomach but also something for the pockets. The leader has nothing because he has sold all his assets and is distributing the money to all the citizens...

Basha: You crazy woman... I suppose it's forged currency you emptying over people's heads for popular consumption, not real money, eh?

...

Maariya: You are the one who should be certified for thinking such a thing. You think I would start circulating forged currency with my own hands, and in full public view. Those are mint-fresh banknotes I ordered in your name this morning. Why would I forge bank notes when I can forge your signature?

Baabu [Basha's Baabu persona] (tearing his hair): I know longest time I must not only kill this woman but disembowel her with a rusty bayonet ...¹⁵⁶

Baasha, as Baabu, goes to a Marabout¹⁵⁷ in the later part of the text, insecure as he becomes. What he does not realize is that the Marabout is taking advantage of his insecurities. The Marabout is a part of a bigger conspiracy that is being created to overthrow him – the mastermind being his once General, Potipoo, head of the Supreme Council for Advance Redemption (SCAR). It is interesting to note the abbreviation of the name of the body where Potipoo belongs to. The abbreviation could point out to the impending doom of Basha (as the king) in the hands of Potipoo, that ultimately happens

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁵⁷ A Marabout is an African Muslim religious leader.

in the text. For Basha's well-being, the Marabout suggests a ritual that involves heavy harm to the animal life, without being sensitive to the issue:

Marabout: ... Baabu must sit on the skin of a freshly sacrificed goat for forty days and forty nights. A spotless white he-goat. A new one will be sacrificed each day and Baabu must consume its testicles.¹⁵⁸

Another instance in the text, where the human wrongfully claims ownership of animals and forests occurs when Basha (as the king) gets the news of Potipoo's army of rebels trying to infiltrate his territory:

Baabu: Upon my imperial sceptre, this is too much! First they infiltrate royal forest preserves, slaughter wild animals right and left, roast the defenceless creatures and breakfast on them fit to burst their disloyal stomachs...¹⁵⁹

Basha and other characters here show insensitivity to nature and the non-human life, even if they put on a show that they are traditional. What they fail to realize is that indigenous traditional teachings always call for a peaceful and kind coexistence of all forms of life on the earth.

We now discuss *A Play of Giants*¹⁶⁰ (1984). Being a serious critique of dictatorship, the title of the text calls for attention. Who are the "giants" in the text? Soyinka gives his reader/audience the answer himself:

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 68.

No serious effort is made here to hide the identities of the real-life actors who have served as models for *A Play of Giants*. They are none other than: President for Life Macias Nguema (late) of Equatorial Guinea; Emperor for Life (ex) Jean-Baptiste Bokassa of the Central African Republic; Life President Mobutu Sese Koko etc., of Congo Kinshasa (just hanging on); and – the HERO OF HEROES in the person of Life President (ex) the Field-Marshal El-Haji Dr Idi Amin of Uganda, DSc, DSO, VC etc., etc, who still dreams, according to latest reports, of being recalled to be the Saviour of Uganda once again.¹⁶¹

He also expresses his own take on the political so-called “giants” and “monsters”:

Unlike many commentators on power and politics, I do not know how monsters come to be, only that they are, and in defiance of place, time and pundits.¹⁶²

When it comes to the landscape of the African continent, we get the general idea of how the four heads of State (as characters of the play) gobble more and more power up, and abuse their position to exploit and misuse natural resources, while seriously curbing basic human freedom of the subjects. Benefacio Gunema, Emperor Rasco, Field-Marshal Kamini and General Tuboum are these cold-blooded, power-hungry and despotic “giants” meeting together at the Bugarian Embassy to the United Nations, New York, a few years before 1984. These four characters are so delusional about their right to be in power positions that one of them, Gunema, even states once that “... we who are gifted naturally with leadership, after a while, we cease to govern, to lead: we exist, I think, in a

¹⁶⁰ Soyinka, *Plays*: 2, 10-82.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

rare space which is – power...”¹⁶³ While all four of them find coup attempts in their respective areas annoying, Tuboum comments very insensitively and casually that the “coup attempts are as common as floods or drought on the continent.”¹⁶⁴ They show quite explicitly that they do not care to take care of such situations or their people who suffer therein. As in the case of dictatorship, the four Heads do not tolerate the slightest attempt of dissent from their subordinates. Gunema and Kasco call any category of rebels, “traitors”, and Gunema adds:

Gunema: ... Traitors breed like maggots, no? They are rotten to the bone, to the tissue inside the bone. Their souls fester with corruption. They infect others.

Kasco [to Kamini]: I see you send [Kamini’s Presidential Task force Specials] to the village. That is good. The root may have poisoned the surrounding soil.¹⁶⁵

Ironically, they use images of natural processes and elements in their verbal illustrations but practice something “unnatural” like domination of people and the landscape they have been given in charge of, by the power-structure. They continue talking about the topic like this:

Kasco [rebels in general and also about the two Russian delegates that they meet]:
Ants, ants, what they understand? Gnawing away at the seat of power. Flies, flies, what they care anyway? Buzzing around the red meat of power... you turn your back, they come back... it is better to squash them first time...

¹⁶³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 27.

Gunema: ... Even the animal world understand power, even the insect world. I have studied the colonies of ants in my garden. I sit down and meditate and collect my power from the night, and I watch the insects...¹⁶⁶

Kamini also shows insensitivity to animals and justifies their killing by referring to his indigenous communal traditions.¹⁶⁷ He has a misogynistic conversation with Gunema at a point, where he implies that physical relations with a woman means possessing and dominating her body and soul. He also adds that good leaders “should have many wives.”¹⁶⁸ He also enters into a debate with the other three regarding whether they should drop an atom bomb on South Africa or Cuba, speaking of the bombs as if they were toys and the countries as their own backyards.¹⁶⁹

Even if it makes Kamini furious with the two Russian delegates towards the end and he threatens that he would not let them leave the premises, the Russians do a great job for the readers/audience to point out the wrongdoings of the four despots. About Tuboum, the first delegate has this to say:

First Russian (speaking in Russian): We are particularly revolted by the unexpected presence of the General Barra Boum Boum Tuboum, the well-known neo-colonial stooge and shameless exploiter of his own African peoples.¹⁷⁰

He also mocks Kamini, when he says to his fellow-delegate:

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 73-74.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 55.

First Russian [to the Second one] (speaking in Russian): Tell the overgrown child [Kamini] to enjoy himself tearing off the Babushka's [a traditional Russian doll which they seek to present to him] limbs instead of those hapless Bugarian workers and peasants.¹⁷¹

The Second Russian sums us Kamini's personality brilliantly, for us:

Second Russian: Yes. A common butcher... we did not create him – the British did. They sustained him in power, backed by the Americans. Then they disagreed. The pupil had more than mastered the game of his masters...¹⁷²

Thus, we get the idea of how much danger the African landscape and its organisms were, under the rule of these four.

Next, let us look at *Madmen and Specialists*¹⁷³ (1970). The text presents to us voices of characters who are marginal to the society, like in many other Soyinkan plays. The events of the text take place just after the Nigerian Civil War.¹⁷⁴ Dr. Bero's character is described to have just returned from the war¹⁷⁵. The characters of the beggars compare themselves with animals as if to deliberately dehumanize their states of being after the violent war. This means that they bear in mind the common prejudiced hierarchy between humans and non-human beings:

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁷² Ibid., 68.

¹⁷³ Soyinka, *Plays: I*, 221-293.

¹⁷⁴ The war took place from 1967-1970, between Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, where ultimately Nigeria won.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 222.

Goyi: ... I have a personal aversion to vultures.

Blindman: Oh, come come. Nice birds they are. They clean up after the mess.

...

Aafaa (posing): In a way you may call us vultures. We clean up the mess made by others. The populace should be grateful for our presence... we are not here because we like it. We stay at immense sacrifice to ourselves, our leisure, our desires, vocation, specialization, etcetera...¹⁷⁶

In addition to this elsewhere, while talking among themselves, they imply to have a master-slave relationship with Bero, using the images of parrots and watchdogs.¹⁷⁷ They express a dual attitude of dislike and fellow-feeling towards animals in general. It is also interesting to note, from an ecocritical angle, a particular dialogue in the scene where they sort Si Bero's (Bero's sister who deals with herbs) herbs. The expression and the rhythm that they put in while sorting, is similar to agriculturists at work, which later turns into calling out violent images. The violent images could be a subconscious appearance of the horrors of the war in the minds of the beggars. The dialogue is below:

Goyi: First the roots.

Cripple: then peel the barks.

Aafaa: Slice the stalks.

Cripple: Squeeze out the pulps.

Goyi: Pick the seeds.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 227.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 268.

Aafaa: Break the pods. Crack the plaster.

Cripple: Probe the wound or it will never heal.

Blindman: Cut off one root to save the other.

Aafaa: Cauterize.

Cripple: ... amputate!¹⁷⁸

Speaking of Si Bero, she and the other female characters (the two old women) seem to appreciate nature and its power and maintain closeness to it, admitting its beauty and its fearful forms – reminding of other similar female Soyinkan characters like Sidi. Si Bero's nurturing quality towards natural elements are thus described by Aafaa:

Aafaa: That woman's [Si Bero] herbs are not just herbs. She hoards them and treats them like children. The whole house is full of twigs. If it's a straightforward business, why doesn't she use them? Or sell them or something?¹⁷⁹

This gives us an idea how Si Bero respects natural elements and does not think of them as mere commodities. The herbs could be seen as healing elements against the horrific effects of the war. The scene below is also significant, where she contrasts her brother's attitude towards nature:

(Si Bero reappears with a gourd of palm wine, pours it on the ground in front of the doorstep. Then she moves to unlace his boots.)

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 228.

Bero: You still keep up these little habits.

Si Bero: I like to keep close to earth.

Bero (stepping back to prevent her from taking off his boots): Bare feet, wet earth. We've wetted your good earth with something more potent than that, you know.¹⁸⁰

Bero expresses arrogance, implying that his blood at the war was the more “potent” ingredient to wet the earth. His shocking mentality is also exposed when he says, at another point in the text, “Control, sister, control. Power comes from bending Nature to your will. The Specialist they call me...”¹⁸¹ Bero does perform a criminal act at the end of the text, violating nature. He shoots and kills the “madman” – his own helpless and heartbroken father, whom he had earlier imprisoned.¹⁸² Bero, the “specialist” had rejected traditional knowledge in the form of the healing herbs and had taken part in the war as a killer.

Lastly, it is necessary to note how the two old women, Iya Mate and Iya Agba, seem to wonder at and respect both the nurturing and the deadly aspects of nature; how they accept these as they are, as mentioned earlier. As they chance upon some berries brought by Si Bero, they examine them and remark thus:

Iya Mate: The berries are all right too. Birds attack them quite early. You [Si Bero] are lucky.

...

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 244.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 247.

¹⁸² Ibid., 293.

Iya Agba: Just now I remember what you said – birds haven't attacked it. Usually it's the poison kind they don't go near... I thought so. This is the twin...

...

Iya Mate: It can't be poison.

Iya Agba: They don't grow much... Farmers destroy them as soon as they see them...

... Foolishness. Poison has its uses too. You can cure with poison if you use it right. Or kill.

Si Bero: I'll throw it in the fire.

Iya Mate: Do nothing of the sort. You don't learn good things unless you learn evil.

Si Bero: But it's poison.

Iya Mate: It grows.

Iya Agba: Rain falls on it.

Iya Mate: It sucks on the dew.

Iya Agba: It lives.

Iya Mate: It dies.¹⁸³

*Opera Wonyosi*¹⁸⁴ (1977) continues to be another important Soyinkan play that criticises totalitarianism. In this text, as Abdul Yesufu effectively puts it, "Soyinka creates a play of individual, institutional, and governmental beggars and criminals."¹⁸⁵

Yesufu also points out that:

¹⁸³ Ibid., 233.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 295.

¹⁸⁵ Abdul R. Yesufu, "Book Review: Opera Wonyosi," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 11, no. 2 (January, 1982): 182, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5dd6q8n2>.

Apart from the artistic universals of the satiric mode which it shares with the European ‘predecessors,’¹⁸⁶ Soyinka’s play is quite ‘original’ and African in matter. It is a concentrated satiric statement on life in post-civil war ‘oil boom’ Nigeria under a directionless militocracy. The dramatist deftly draws a grotesque picture of a world of beggars – where only ‘he who begs, bags,’ a world of petty and big-time thieves, corrupt official, betrayal and opportunistic loves. This rottenness of the Nigerian world of *Opera Wonyosi* seems to be the writer’s metaphor for a more widespread pan-African, post-independence decadence. This is why a play which basically focuses its satiric searchlight on a social, economic, and political corruption in Nigeria, becomes a laconic comment on the almost continent-wide brutalization, vulgarity, sycophancy, and institutionalized ‘favour-seeking.’¹⁸⁷

Concerned about the entire continent’s economic, social and environmental well-being due to hostile regimes, as seen in his other plays, Soyinka comments about the context of this play below:

The African continent has been rid of the two singularly repellent and vicious dictators who features in the play; ‘President-for-Life’ Idi Amin and ‘Emperor-for-Life’ Jean-Bedel Bokassa. A third, no less odious and bloodthirsty, ‘President-for-keeps’ Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea has not only been removed from power; he came to a well-deserved end on a hangman’s rope.¹⁸⁸

The shrewd and cunning con artist and “King of Beggars”, Anikura, is an individual displaced from his home in Nigeria to the present expatriate colony in the (then) Central African Empire. However, he has quickly made up his mind to take advantage of the present situation to make money at the cost of others:

¹⁸⁶ John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) and its Brechtian adaptation, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) are specifically referred to, here.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

¹⁸⁸ Soyinka, *Plays: 1*, 296.

Anikura: ... I'm a first-generation Nigerian exile here. Came here during that Civil War we had over there. This used to be Central African Republic – still is, but I hear it's going to become something grander very soon. So what with one thing and another... But we try to keep us the old home culture around here, so not to worry, I know you're going to feel at home. You know what they say of us Nigerians don't you? We know how to take care of business. We are always getting thrown out of one country or another but, while we last, well – we do know how to take care of business. So, with your permission, I beg leave to make hay while the sun shines...¹⁸⁹

Looking at the speech the reader/audience realize again, how people who come into power at a certain point of time (in this case, Bokassa – renamed in the text as Boky), try to reshape the landscape that they are in charge of – sometimes through renaming it and its inhabitants within, and also by attempting to tailor the flora and fauna and exploiting its resources. Coming back to Anikura and his cunning ways, we get to see how he takes advantage of a helpless man named Ahmed. The poor man Ahmed, lets us know of his situation:

Ahmed: You own the business 'Home from Home for the Homeless'?

...

Chief Anikura, I am totally destitute, my parents' house was burnt over our head during the Civil War. My father lost his life and my mother is still missing...¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 306.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 307.

It is enraging and frustrating for the reader/audience to see the present bleak state of the land and its people, after the Nigerian Civil War – The humane activity of the rehabilitation of the homeless and the helpless, has now turned into a ‘business’. It is also sad to see that large parts of the area are unfit for human beings to live in a healthy manner, due to massive amounts of garbage. Anikura lets us know of this, when he says to Ahmed that, “our [their] sector is marked by sign-posts of up to ten feet of garbage, so you can’t miss your [Ahmed’s] way.”¹⁹¹ The unhealthy local environment is also expressed through a certain song in the text:

Chorus: I know now it’s true – life is a wheeze
 The proof’s in my lungs when I sneeze
 Well, my chest is congested
 But the port’s decongested
 While I breathe like a dying accordion
 Seven more years says the surgeon
 And you end on a slab of cement
 It ends on a slab of cement.
 ...
 From port to horizon the ships lay spent,
 Cement in the holds, on the decks, cement...
 A man’s lungs for clean air is meant
 Not for breathing in clouds of cement...¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 308.

¹⁹² Ibid., 312.

It is seen that privileged people are harming the underprivileged ones for material gains
(in this case some valuable furniture:

A broken rib or two I think, maybe a case of heart attack – cardiac arrest I think
it’s called these days – but definitely no blood.¹⁹³

During this event, a rare privileged character and the fiancée of a Captain, Polly, shows signs of sympathy towards those underprivileged ones, crying and saying, “but... killing all these poor people, just for a bit of furniture.”¹⁹⁴ In contrast to this her fiancée, Captain Macheath glorifies himself as a “multiple murderer”¹⁹⁵ at one point. There is an instance in the text, where Macheath and Polly’s wedding feast is being discussed. Over there, expensive and exotic dishes made of fish and meat are mentioned.¹⁹⁶ It is upsetting to realize the two contrasting scenarios in the same land presented to us by the playwright. On the one hand, the underprivileged section of the then society is residing in unhealthy living conditions and cannot even obtain food properly, while the wealthy privileged class are squandering their money to indulge in excesses. Songs in the text continue to inform the readers/audience about the grim and gritty realities of the land. A song appears that talks about the exploitation of oil resources from the country and that same song demonstrates how those in power view the civilians:

¹⁹³ Ibid., 318.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 319.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 327.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 322-323.

Civilians are sheep, just hear them bleat
 When my good Taphy¹⁹⁷ whip clears the street...¹⁹⁸

The last thing to point out in this text from our present perspective, is the shocking and inhuman reaction of the tyrannical emperor towards his own subjects, when he becomes insecure of his power at one point:

Boky (alternating between himself stopping and exhorting the Squad to greater actions): Those are ingrates at your feet. Juvenile delinquents. Future criminals. Little Ingrates! Putative parricides! Pulp me their little brains! Wastrels! Prodigal sons! Future beggars! Suspects! Vagabonds! Rascals. Unemployed. Subversives. Bohemians. Liberals. Daily paid labour. Social menaces. Habeas corpusites. Democrats. Emotional parasites. Human Rightist Vagabonds. Society is well rid of them. They disgrace Imperial dignity. Louts. Layabouts. Now their heads are under your feet. Your chance to clean up the nation once and for all. Protect property. Protect decency. Protect dignity. Scum. Parasites. What do you do with parasites? What do you do with fleas! Bugs! Leeches! Even a dog is useful. But leeches on a dog? Ticks? Lice! Lice! Lice! Crab-louse! Stomp! Imperial Stomp! Studs in. Grind! Pre-frontal lobotomy – the Imperial way! Give your emperor a clean empire. Sanitate. Fumigate. Renovate...¹⁹⁹

Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*²⁰⁰ (1972) is essentially a retelling of the Athenian Euripides' original play²⁰¹. What is interesting to see is how Soyinka has adapted it to suit the then reality of the Nigerian civil unrest. Like his other texts, Soyinka's version of *The Bacchae* on the whole, also becomes a site for his critique

¹⁹⁷ Al J. Venter, *Biafra's War 1967-1970: A Tribal Conflict in Nigeria That Left a Million Dead* (West Midlands: Helion & Co., 2015), 213. This is most probably a reference to a Welsh-South African Major by that surname, who was in office at the place.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 336.

²⁰⁰ Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 235.

²⁰¹ *The Bacchae* by Euripides (c. 484 - c. 406 BC), first performed around 405 BC.

of totalitarianism, even though he follows the original text quite closely.²⁰² The character of Dionysos (Soyinka spells the name this way. The character is also an inspiration from Ogun), his followers and an added group of slaves in the text, seek to overthrow the prevalent order (Pentheus' rule) in favour of a new one. Before the play begins, it is also interesting to note that Soyinka wants the actors playing the group of slaves to be ethnically diverse.²⁰³ Does that imply that Soyinka wants the readers/audience to identify with and relate to the crowd in the postcolonial time-frame? State that the situation is a universal one, and not restricted to just Nigeria or the entire African continent? Probably so.

In the text, Dionysos' character and his influence or effects have been described using images and terms of natural elements and processes, as opposed to the domination of Pentheus being "unnatural." With Dionysos' appearance as the text opens, in the background there is "a smell and sweat of harvest. Ripeness."²⁰⁴ Dionysos himself says that he was born when "a seed of Zeus was sown in Semele my mother earth."²⁰⁵ We see the traditional association of the feminine with that of the earth and nature, in this text. Dionysos goes on to describe himself and his influence, saying:

The phoenix rises and that is life—wings from cooling cinders, tendrils from putrefaction, motion from what was petrified. ... There are green vines on the slag of ruin. Mine. As on the mountain slopes, clustering and swelling. They flush,

²⁰² The stark difference is towards the end of the play. In Soyinka's text, Agave (Pentheus' mother) attaches her dead son's head to the palace archway, as opposed to carrying it around and recognizing it rightly, in the original. Soyinka also makes Dionysian wine spurt out of the mouth of the head and other characters drinking it.

²⁰³ Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 234.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

they flood the long parched throats of men and release their joy. This sacrament of earth is life. Dionysos.²⁰⁶

Outside the city walls, the effect of Pentheus is lesser. We the readers/audience, meet a group of slaves, unhappy with their present ruler and speaking against him. They associate freedom with the natural:

Leader [of the slaves]: A scent of freedom is not easily forgotten. Have you [to the Herdsman] ever slept, dreamt, and woken up with the air still perfumed with the fragrance of grapes?²⁰⁷

The character of the Leader adds that, “the air of Thebes is sterile. Nothing breathes in it.”²⁰⁸ A similar idea is echoed by the character of the philosopher Tiresias elsewhere in the text, when he comments that, “the city must be cleansed. Filth, pollution, cruelties, secret abominations—a whole year’s accumulation.”²⁰⁹ As Dionysos approaches and his influence is felt, the Leader and the Herdsman say:

Leader: ... we all fold our arms and thank the gods for a generous harvest.

Herdsman: ... The vines went mad so to speak; they were not themselves. Something seemed to have got under the soil and was feeding them nectar. The weight that hung on the vines even from the scrubbiest patch ...

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 235-236.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 236.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 237.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 242.

Leader: I felt it on my tongue. The sun has left the heavens and made a home within the grapes of Boetia.²¹⁰

Again,

Herdsman: ... Have you ever known famine? Real famine?

Leader: Because the [prevalent] rites bring us nothing!...²¹¹

At a point in the text, the Leader and the Chorus of slaves welcome Dionysos and besides associating the natural with freedom again, they recall animals like the bull, and the skin of fawn, traditionally associated with Dionysos.²¹²

Hinting that tyrannical authority is unnatural and the belief that nature itself will save them from it, the character of the Leader comments:

Leader: ... This master race, this much vaunted dragon spawn
 Have met their match. Nature has joined forces with us.
 Let them reckon now, not with mere men, not with
 The scapegoat bogey of a slave uprising
 But with a new remorseless order, forces
 Unpredictable as molten fire in mountain wombs.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 237.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 250-251. Traditionally, the bull is a sacred animal of Dionysus and he sometimes takes its shape as well. In order to worship him and take part in his ritual one must wear fawn-skin. The figure of the fawn might imply carefree childlike innocence and energy.

To doubt, to hesitate is to prove undeserving.²¹³

Rooted to nature and believing that human natural instincts are the ones that need to be catered to, some of the things that the Bacchae women say in the text give us an impression. An impression, that with Dionysos' blessings they hold mysterious powers of nature that heals entire geographic spaces, whenever they pass them. Like Dionysos and the slaves do, these women also include images of natural elements and processes in their verbal illustrations. We could see this in the speech below, for example:

Another [Bacchante]: We've journeyed together. Through Lydia and Phrygia ...

Another: Over rivers of gold, Bactrian fastness ...

Another: Through slopes of the clustering vine.

Another: Companion of forest and towered cities,

Of the steppes of Persia and wastes of Media.

Another: Through the dance of the sun on Ethiopia's rivers,

Lakes, seas, emerald oases.

Another: Rooting deep, ripeness and mysteries

Rooting as vine in the most barren of soils.

1st Bacchante: The silvering firs have trembled, we have seen rockhills

Shudder, earth awaken, ramparts of heaven cave

Beasts answer from their lairs, sap rise in the trees

And the sevenfold bars on the gates of Thebes...²¹⁴

²¹³ Ibid., 240.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 246.

Then again,

1st Bacchante: Blessed are they who know the mysteries of god...
 ... who are one
 With earth, leaves and vine in the holy body of god,
 Blessed are the dancers whose hearts are purified
 Who tread on the hill in the holy dance of god.
 Blessed are they who keep the rites of the Earth-Mother
 Who bear the thyrsus, who wield the holy wand of god...²¹⁵

Finally, what is noteworthy in this text is a significant speech by the character of the “unnatural” tyrant Pentheus. Here, he expresses his anger and cruel mentality:

Pentheus: I shall have order! Let the city know at once
 Pentheus is here to give back order and sanity.
 ... And tell it to the women especially, those
 Promiscuous bearers of this new disease.
 They leave their home, desert their children
 Follow the new fashion and join the Bacchae
 Flee the hearth to mob the mountains—those contain
 Deep shadows of course, secret caves to hide
 Lewd games for this new god—Dionysus!
 ... We netted a few.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 247.

The rest escaped into the mountains. I want them
Hunted down...²¹⁶

It is clear that Pentheus is a power-hungry misogynist, and views his orders in the city as the supreme one. He would go any length to torture and kill his subjects to ensure that his order and “sanity” prevails in the landscape he “owns.” On another note, looking at the act of women joining Dionysos and moving to forests and mountains, we could recall the following observation by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert – placing this act vis-à-vis the postcolonial African time-frame:

... The forest has been a site of multiple power struggles over time... In the early colonial days forests represented spaces of fear, but in more recent times the forest and rural spaces in general have been recuperated as sites of refuge for the escaped slave and places of folk authenticity in nationalist movements.²¹⁷

Pentheus does get defeated and meets his well-deserved doom in the text²¹⁸ (just like in the original one). The slaves and the women of Thebes (under Dionysos’ guidance) become stronger in the wilderness and nurture their “banished knowledge” to fight back at the tyrannical power-structure.

*The Strong Breed*²¹⁹ (1963) is set in a certain village headed by Jaguna. The central event here is a yearly “purification” custom where an “outsider” or a degenerate

²¹⁶ Ibid., 256.

²¹⁷ DeLoughrey, *Postcolonial Ecologies*, 31.

²¹⁸ Soyinka, *Collected Plays 1*, 298-299.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 113-146.

individual is marked and humiliated by the rest of the village, as s/he is driven through the streets and pushed to the bushes. An educated “outsider” figure, Eman, ultimately becomes the sacrificial lamb for the treacherous villagers, as he volunteers to save the childlike Ifada, the “marked” for that year.²²⁰ Eman volunteers to substitute himself in place of Ifada, as a “carrier.” When Eman attempts to run away, he is dragged into the politics of Jaguna and his people, who declare that the former needs to be killed. Jaguna and his minions sets a trap for Eman, viewing him like an animal which they are hunting. Jaguna’s egoistic personality shows in his speech as he sets the trap:

When Jaguna sets the trap, even elephants pay homage— their trunks downwards and one leg is up in the sky. When the carrier steps on the fallen twigs, it is up in the sacred trees with him.²²¹

Following the common assumption, Jaguna places animals at a lower place in the natural hierarchy compared to human beings, but the vegetation is of divine importance in his belief system. A young girl and Ifada are viewed by the villagers in the text as irregular people who are “sick” in some way. The girl carries an effigy by a rope as her carrier. Ifada is described both by the girl and Sunma (Jaguna’s daughter who is a friend to Eman) as a “horrible insect”,²²² a “creature”,²²³ an animal²²⁴ and an untrained pig.²²⁵ In this way, Ifada has been categorized as not “human” enough to belong to the community.

²²⁰ Ibid., 145.

²²¹ Ibid., 144.

²²² Ibid., 116.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., 130.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Eman is one of the only two characters who are kind and friendly towards the mentally challenged Ifada, in the text. The other character being that of the girl. The girl is suffering from some kind of sickness, does not want Eman to come near her for her condition, and recognizing Ifada as marginalized and deemed “unnatural” by the villagers, like her, asks him if he could play with her.²²⁶ Eman, on the other hand, recognizes Ifada’s childlike innocence as something natural, attempts to help him out. At one point of time Eman clears a bush to make it convenient for Ifada to farm, but was let down as the latter was not interested. Sunma continues to hurl unkind words towards Ifada as she were doing earlier, showing her intolerance.²²⁷ The kinder and caring side of Sunma is seen with respect to Eman. Sunma wants to go away from the village with Eman. She worries about him. She asks him the reason he wants to “continue to stay where nobody wants”²²⁸ him. She continues, saying, “You are wasting your life on people who really want you out of their way,”²²⁹ and “you think they love you? Do you think they care at all for what you—or I—do for them?”²³⁰ At the end, she does prove to have been right, all along.

The last thing to point out here is that Eman (bearing the voice of Soyinka), the proven “strong breed” – stronger than the others in heart and mind – shows how a child of nature should be. S/he should be possessing an artistic, kind and sensitive soul. No wonder Eman has the following conversation with Sunma:

²²⁶ Ibid., 118-119.

²²⁷ Ibid., 117.

²²⁸ Ibid., 120.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

Eman: ... Love comes to me more easily with strangers.

Sunma: That is unnatural.

Eman: Not for me. I know I find consummation only when I have spent myself for a total stranger.

Sunma: It seems unnatural to me. But then I am a woman. I have a woman's longings and weaknesses...²³¹

Sunma fails to recognize the fellow-feeling and unconditional love for living beings that Eman possesses. Ironically, it is she who has internalized the unnatural and irrational dominant patriarchal discourse that considers women, in a lot of ways, inferior to men. Eman, through his sacrifice as the village scapegoat, shows that a “strong breed” is not a human being who uses his brawns for the Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” Rather, it is s/he who attempts to be the change and hope that the society would learn something, and evolve as more tolerant and accepting of fellow humans and other living beings. Just like in the case of *Death and the King's Horseman*, it might not be the case that Soyinka either overtly criticises or glorifies the traditional beliefs in *The Strong Breed*. It might be so that Soyinka is asking the contemporary people of Africa to make a choice and negotiate with these traditional rituals to create a balance – to maintain elements of tradition without the aspects of it that demand sacrificing human and non-human lives. In other words, revisiting and re-working traditional knowledge to suit the present times – promoting peace, harmony, tolerance, care and kindness – while remaining proudly rooted to tradition. Soyinka has been through enough historical events to not want any more sacrifices of the African population.

²³¹ Ibid., 125.

On reading *The Trials of Brother Jero*²³² (1960) and *Jero's Metamorphosis*²³³ (1973) – also popularly known as the “Jero plays” – ecocritically, three main ideas could be noticed. Firstly, how natural elements have been painted in the light of divinity in the two texts. Secondly, the land-politics of that particular space where the texts are set. Thirdly, the exploration of human nature – especially through Jero's misogynistic attitude, and his desire to take advantage of the common folk and control their minds. Overall, the two texts show the journey of a Christian prophet/“Beach Divine”²³⁴ named Brother Jeroboam (Jero), and how in the contemporary times religion has become a commodity. How the so-called holy men have become materialistic, earthly and the least spiritual or religious-minded. Viewing the sea as a supernatural and a divine element, the beach becomes the ideal place for serving God peacefully and in isolation:

The beach. A few stakes and palm leaves denote the territory of Brother Jeroboam's church. To one side is a palm tree, and in the centre is a heap of sand with assorted empty bottles, a small mirror, and hanging from one of the bottles is a rosary and cross.²³⁵ [*The Trials of Brother Jero*]

There are instances in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, where the sea water is considered holy and having healing or cleansing properties:

²³² Soyinka, *Collected Plays 2*, 142-171.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 172-213.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

Brother Jero, as the singing starts, hands two empty bottles to Chume [Jero's assistant, whom he calls "brother"] who goes to fill them with water from the sea.²³⁶

Again,

Jero hesitates, then hands over his rod to Chume and goes after them...²³⁷

Also,

As Jeroboam is not forthcoming, he [Chume] begins, very uncertainly, to sprinkle some of the water on the penitent [a woman who was behaving violently], crossing her on the forehead.²³⁸

There are instances in *Jero's Metamorphosis* which hints at a grim situation. Sometimes, the false men of god could kill people they dislike or have trouble with and throw them into the sea, claiming that the sea had punished the latter:

Ananias [a shady boxer-turned-prophet]: ... Brother, depend on my vote any time. (Getting warmer.) And if there's anyone you'd prefer to take a walk outside on his head for making trouble ...

Jero: I don't need your violence...²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid., 158.

²³⁷ Ibid., 159.

²³⁸ Ibid.

Also,

Caleb [another shady beach prophet]: ... Rally the union. No business sharks in our spirituous waters.²⁴⁰

Now comes the second idea – the land-politics in the particular beach where the texts are set. It has already been mentioned that religion (which includes the practice of divine guidance to people) has become a commercialized profession for the prophets of that beach – where most of the prophets are of criminal and shady backgrounds. It so happens (in *The Trials of Brother Jero*) that the town council have become aware of this, have divided the land among the prophets and have come to intervene in the ongoing squabble for land among the latter:

Yes, it did come to the point where it became necessary for the Town Council to come to the beach and settle the Prophets' territorial warfare once and for all.²⁴¹

It is also here in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, that Jero lets the readers/audience know how he betrayed his mentor. When his mentor trusted him with the paperwork of the land for their church, he occupied it in his own name, rendering his mentor landless:

²³⁹ Ibid., 181.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 200.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 149.

My Master, the same one who brought me up in prophetic ways staked his claim and won a grant of land. ... I helped him, with a campaign led by six dancing girls from the French territory, all dressed as Jehovah's Witnesses. What my old master did not realize was that I was really helping myself.²⁴²

The mentor then lashes out at him with curses:

Old Prophet: Ungrateful wretch! Is this how you repay the long years of training I have given you? To drive me, your old tutor, off my piece of land ... telling me I have lived beyond my time. Ha! May you be rewarded in the same manner. May the Wheel come right round and find you just as helpless as you make me now.
...²⁴³

In *Jero's Metamorphosis*, it is clear to the readers/audience that the government has decided to get rid of all the churches on the beach. The beach would be reconstructed as a tourist spot, and an amphitheatre would be built for public execution for added attraction:

Executive: They have to be evicted. They stand in the way of progress. They clutter up the beach and prevent decent men from coming here and paying to enjoy themselves. They are holding up a big tourist business. You know yourself how the land value has doubled since we started public executions on the beach.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Ibid., 145.

²⁴³ Ibid., 146.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 185. The character of the Executive is the Chief Executive Officer of the Tourist Board of the City Council, who comes to Jero's office.

Then again in the meeting of the prophets, organized by Jero to protest against the government decision:

Isaac [another shady prophet]: ‘Unfortunately the beach is at present cluttered up with riff-raff of all sorts who dupe the citizenry and make the beach unattractive to decent and respectable people. Chiefest among these are the so-called ...’ ...

Jero (taking back the file): ... ‘... the so-called prophets and evangelists. All these are not only to be immediately expelled but steps must be taken to ensure that they never at any time find their way back to the execution stadium.’²⁴⁵

Also pointed out by Ananaias at another point:

Ananaias: ... the City Council have taken a final decision. They’re going to chuck us out. Every last hypocritical son of the devil.²⁴⁶

There is also the mentioning of a water-crisis in the area by Amope, the wife of Chume whom Jero owes money, in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. At a point in the text, Amope tells Chume, “Careful ... careful now ... the cork nearly came off that bottle. You know how difficult it is get any clean water in this place...”²⁴⁷

Now we come to the last point of discussion, with regards to the two Jero texts. Here we look at how Jero places women in a position beneath men, and treats them disrespectfully – even after being a so-called man of God. He is just one of the men who

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 201-202.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 179. Note how self-aware the character of Ananaias is of his and his fellow prophets’ hypocrisy and shady backgrounds.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 148.

does that in the area where the texts are set. In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, he tells us of “some prophets I could name [who] gained their present beaches by getting women penitents to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy.”²⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier, in the same text, he owes money to Amope and views her with disdain. He even escapes from another side, whenever he sees her:

Jero: ... How does one maintain his dignity when the daughter of Eve forces him to leave his own house through a window? God curse that woman! I never thought she would dare affront the presence of a man of God. One pound eight for this little cape. It is sheer robbery.²⁴⁹

At a point soon after, it so happens that a young girl passes him by, wearing wrappers for her swim. Unlike that of a prophet, the readers/audience see Jero expressing a materialistic and earthly desire for that girl:

(The young girl crosses the stage again. She has just had her swim and the difference is remarkable. Clean, wet, shiny face and hair. She continues to wipe herself with her wrapper as she walks.)

Jero (following her all the way with his eyes.): Every morning, every day I witness this divine transformation, O Lord...²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 145.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 153.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 153-154.

In the same text, when Jero gets to know that Amope is Chume's wife (whom Jero hates), he permits the latter to beat her, even if he forbade him to do so for quite some time, earlier:

Jero: ... After all, Christ himself was not averse to using the whip when occasion demanded it.

... Brother Chume, your wife seems such a wicked, wilful sinner...²⁵¹

However, Chume manages to sniff out Jero's cunning:

Chume: ... Suddenly he decides I may beat my wife, eh? For his own convenience. At his own convenience.²⁵²

In *Jero's Metamorphosis* the readers/audience find Jero enjoying the company of his beautiful assistant, Sister Rebecca:

A demure young woman, quite attractive, is seated at a table taking the dictation [by Jero].²⁵³

Then again,

²⁵¹ Ibid., 162.

²⁵² Ibid., 167.

²⁵³ Ibid., 175.

Once outdoors Brother Jero slips round the side and observes her [Rebecca] through the window. The woman's condition obviously uplifts him for he moves off with even jauntier step and a light adjustment to his chasuble...²⁵⁴

Rebecca expresses her blind devotion to Jero when she utters statements like, "Not if you don't think it, Brother Jeroboam,"²⁵⁵ and "Whatever you say, Brother Jeroboam."²⁵⁶

Jero also wishes to use his position of religious power to control minds of the general public. In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, He blatantly lets the readers/audience know that he treats those who come to him for guidance as customers and he cares about money a lot, giving them an idea of how treacherous he could be:

Jero: ... I am glad I got here before any customers—I mean worshippers... I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full, they won't come again.²⁵⁷

In *Jero's Metamorphosis*, Jero confronts Chume knowing fully well that Chume would be mighty angry with him. He had conspired against Chume in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and had sent the latter to a mental asylum.²⁵⁸ However, due to his convincing power, Jero

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 178.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 175.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 153.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 192-193.

manages to turn Chume's brain around by making Chume doubt his present position at the band:

Jero: But look round you, Brother Chume, look around you. You want to make this world a better place? Good! But to get hanged in the process? And perhaps in public? For whom? For the sake of people like Major Silva? People who don't even understand the musical soul which the Lord has given you? Are they worth it, Brother Chume? Oh I was watching you for some time you know—that man is an enemy believe me... He does not understand you. I am sure they are all like that.²⁵⁹

It is through his developed shrewdness and gift of the gab, that Jero becomes a ruthless politician in *Jero's Metamorphosis*. He finds a way through blackmailing the other shady prophets²⁶⁰ and the Tourism executive²⁶¹, to head a church and earn a permanent income. In the meeting of prophets, he lets the others know of his plans, displaying an aura of sly superiority:

Jero: ... 'It is proposed however, that since the purpose of public execution is for the moral edification and spiritual upliftment of the people, one respectable religious denomination be licensed to operate on the Bar Beach. Such a body will say prayers before and after each execution, and where appropriate will administer the last rites to the condemned. They will be provided a point of vantage where they will preach to the public on evil of crime and the morals to be drawn from the miserable end of the felons. After which their brass band [the Salvation Army] shall provide religious music.'²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 193.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 201-202.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 208-210.

²⁶² Ibid., 202.

After analyzing Wole Soyinka's plays the ecocritic sees that he not only delves into his traditional Yoruba community knowledge, trying to highlight its relevance in the contemporary times, but also makes his reader/audience realize what an important position the natural world holds in it. Bearing his indigenous community knowledge, Soyinka expresses ecological concerns, awareness and the presence of natural processes in his drama in different ways. To him, the supernatural world is but an extension of the ecosystem of this world. Soyinka spreads the awareness to the fractured, selfish human community of today, of how colonization has exploited/transformed huge landscapes. He also expresses the relevance of natural elements and non-human life in the contemporary world. Even if he is geographically and culturally separate from Sircar or Walcott he is united with them in his eco-consciousness and its display of it, in his works.

APPROACHING A CONCLUSION: Literature continues to be a vessel for environmental consciousness and activism

This thesis has examined the concern for the natural environment and ecological degradation of the planet in three literary figures, as expressed in drama composed by them. The figures chosen for the study are Badal Sircar (from Bengal, India), Derek Walcott (from St. Lucia, the Caribbean) and Wole Soyinka (from Nigeria, Africa). The conceptual location of the researcher has essentially been at the intersection of ecocriticism (ecological literary criticism) and postcolonial studies, so the lens through which the primary texts have been looked at, has been a harmonious combination of the two (ecocriticism being the foundational and dominant theoretical framework, here). As expected, the researcher has found an overall unison of the voices of the chosen literary figures on the issues in focus.

Specifically speaking, what has been observed in the study of Sircar, Walcott and Soyinka is that they respond to ecocritical questions both consciously and subconsciously. In their individual chapters of this thesis, it has been indicated where the researcher witnesses it as being obvious and where there are indicators. Sircar, Walcott and Soyinka have some similar perspectives, as expressed in their plays. All the three of them view the human community as an ecosystem, the primary foundation of which would be to co-exist peacefully, to care and help out its members, and also the equal give-and-take relationship with natural elements and non-human beings. However, the literary figures realize that the modern-day dystopic world is the result of the fracture in that ecosystem due to various conflicts and disharmony from the inside. A section of this community has become privileged by indulging in human vices like power-plays,

capitalistic attitudes, greed and selfishness, and has began marginalizing/exploiting/discriminating the weaker and lesser-privileged ones (especially women), gradually extending their grips on the landscape, flora and fauna. The figures exhibit exploitation of the natural environment (including the act of “tailoring” it according to their whims), the natural resources and animals in their texts. Next, all the three of them show in their texts, ways in which nature/natural elements hit back at humans – with displays of their fury and control of the latter’s lives, even killing some of them. Here, it would be interesting to mention that all the three literary figures respect/give importance to the belief of certain indigenous communities that supernatural deities and spirits are also part of ecology. The succeeding point of similar thinking of these literary figures is that they have all shown the importance of environmental imagination in their texts – how the environment of a specific place influences the psyche of a character. So much so that when those characters are displaced from their familiar environment, they feel disoriented, seeks to re-define/re-establish their individual identities, and desperately search for a “home” (physical and psychological). The last (but not the least) significant matter that all the three literary figures agree on, is the examination of the concepts of history and historiography. Expanding on this issue, it means that all the three postcolonial literary figures attack the dominant concept of history. Through their texts, actively or passively, they make their readers/audience realize that the mainstream narrative of history of any former colony of the White West European colonizers is essentially controlled by the colonizers themselves. What is called for in the present age, is a historiography “from below”. Citizens of former colonies like India, West Indies or the African countries should stop the European discourse from

controlling the former's historical narratives, stop them from defining/conceptualizing the former's landscape, people, the vegetation, and the fauna; stop them from constructing the former's identities based on the latter's perspectives. The figures also make their readers/audience aware that the history of the people cannot be separated from the history of the landscape and its environment. There is a need for a post-colonial "inclusive" history essentially composed by the very people of those geo-cultural landscapes. All the three of them utilize literature as a form of activism and spreading awareness. Ecological awareness is just one of them. Curiously enough, all the three of them keep the landscape and femininity side by side, and also associate the feminine/female characters in their texts with nature and its elements. They do not seem to question this age-old traditional association.

As individual artists, Sircar, Walcott and Soyinka's thoughts differ from one another as well. The three artists coming from three different geographic spaces/cultures were impacted by three different events/situations, even if their eco-consciousness and ecological concerns are similar in pattern. Sircar was impacted by the Second World War, more particularly by the Hiroshima-Nagasaki incident. It seems such that the greater part of his ecological concerns are centred on it. Walcott has been impacted by the bitter Western European colonial domination of the West Indies (more particularly St. Lucia) and the lack of identity the later generations of African origin West Indians suffer from – a majorly psychological tussle between imitating the White Westerners and a painful and guilty-feeling of nostalgia towards an ancestral memory of Africa. For Walcott, the local West Indian environment is part of the new West Indian consciousness, historiography and identity-creation – attempting to be free from the earlier act of "capturing and

naming” of the colonizers. While Walcott searches for a contemporary West Indian identity in his land, Soyinka searches for an essentially African (more specifically Nigerian) one. Like Walcott and to an extent Sircar, he also wants to write back to the Empire, try his best to decolonize his people and assert an identity that is not defined by the West. Events that majorly impacted Soyinka and are centred on his care for ecological issues are the constant ruthless dictatorships and political unrest that Nigeria and some other African countries have faced, across time. The next point of difference between the three figures is that in their plays, Sircar has the most amount of audience-interaction. Characters of many of his plays even address and speak/interact with the readers/audience members directly. This is not found in either Walcott or Soyinka, even though they not necessarily compose their plays to be staged in a proscenium one where the audience become passive. Sircar, Walcott and Soyinka also differ from each other when it comes to the concept of “disaster” or “illness/sickness/disease”. After reading their plays, it is found that Sircar alone visibly questions the nature of disaster: Should we only blame nature and say that every harmful disaster on the planet is a natural disaster? Does human beings not have any role in it? Soyinka also expresses this thought, but in a more subdued manner, not found in most of his plays. Walcott does not express this thought actively enough in his plays. He uses sickness or illness more as metaphors. Again, among many other issues, Sircar deals with issues of caste and class within the context of India and Bengal, while Walcott and Soyinka in the context of their geo-cultural spaces deal (along with class and other issues) racial issues and “blackness”. It also calls for a mention that among the three figures, through his plays, Walcott is more vocal at hitting out on the Western European construction of the Third World and that

particular label. Sircar or Soyinka do not address this point so explicitly, although their reader/audience realize that they are quite concerned about it.

In literature by this time, interdisciplinary dialogues in the field of ecocriticism has paved the way to the solidification and parallel development of a number of related fields of study. Some of them are ecofeminism, eco-poetics, nuclear criticism, animal studies and literary animals, illness narratives and biopolitics. Calling some of these fields as sub-fields might open up a lot of debates, so it would be more appropriate to view them as parallel fields. Ecofeminism is majorly concerned about the patriarchal forces exploiting/dominating natural landscapes parallel to women, and how women take active participation in environmental movements and related forms of resistance. The category of gender is highlighted the most.

Eco-poetics examines the lyrical use of language that could open up multiple ways of speaking and thinking; how the act of composing poetry could be modelled on natural processes and sustainability, how far could the human poet see himself/herself in the place of a plant or an animal, among other issues.

What nuclear criticism is, has been mentioned earlier in the first chapter. To repeat, this form of literary criticism seeks to find in literary texts the destructive image of the ending of the world, the fear of the highest level of dystopia on the earth arising out of real-life destructive historical events. Whether the author expresses a collective fear of what could happen, what could have happened and what would eventually happen, in the text. Nuclear criticism points out to an impending terrifying apocalypse,

where the highest level of cruelty (human and otherwise) has been reached, and there would no longer be a possibility to bring justice and mending things.

Animal studies/literary animals look specifically at the presence/absence of animals in a literary text. The field is concerned with questions about the position given to the animal in the text, whether the flora, other natural elements or humans treat it well; whether the animal is being useful to them. Also, the accuracy with which the author depicts an animal in a text, with regards to its real-life counterpart. Isn't the animal, made up of the (human) author's words and imagination, given a mind and an agency (or the lack of it) by the latter? How far lies the authenticity then?

Speaking of illness narratives, the texts in focus usually comprise written or oral accounts of individuals/communities (from the same or different classes/races/genders) suffering some kind of terminal illness or temporary sickness. Accounts of illness or sick person/s could also be looked at in literary texts where the main focus might not be the illness. The researchers of this field gain a different and detailed perspective on the disease/illness concerned and its origins/background. They also observe a different form of social and individual identity-creation of the sick person; how a particular illness sometimes becomes an inseparable and subconscious part of a person's daily lived-experience, opening up a new dimension of it.

A key issue that biopolitics as a field deals with, include the criticism of the construction and thriving of a new form of power. A self-appointed power (the forms of which could be experiment-labs or healthcare facilities) that views society as healthy, living organisms whose good health must be maintained/preserved/safeguarded by it

through its unquestionable intervention. Human population and its growth are seen as political, scientific, biological or authoritarian hindrances. The field also studies conflicts between various forms of life-sciences and the consequent impact on the world outside.

Due to the limited time and scope of this thesis, there were areas of research that could not be discussed this time, leaving the scope for further research at a later point of time. In this thesis, drama composed by Sircar, Walcott and Soyinka has been treated primarily as being “read” and not “performed”. So, a separate study of the theatrical aspect, the staging and production of their plays in relation to the environment is desired in the future. The thesis has not primarily taken into account other genres of writing by the figures, so it would be great to conduct a separate research in the future on the texts of other genres by them. As mentioned earlier, all of the three figures tend to relate natural elements to women characters of their texts and femininity in general. A separate study is desired to be undertaken where this traditional association could be examined and questioned. It would also be great to undertake another research, which deals with the reception of the texts of these individual figures. Areas of human experience like caste, class and religion are categories of critical examination. These have been explored in the selected genre of the chosen literary figures, in this thesis only within the purview of ecocritical concerns. These categories need their separate spaces of research in the works of these literary figures in the future.

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