

Ecosystem and the Change of Lifestyle: Adwiata Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash*, Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Boatman of the Padma*, and Syed Waliullah's *Cry, River, Cry*

Rama Islam¹

Abstract

Adwaita Mallabarman's (1914-1951) *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (1956), translated by Kalpana Bardhan as *A River Called Titash* (1993), Manik Bandyopadhyay's (1908-1956) *Padma Nadir Majhi* (1936), translated by Ratan K. Chattopadhyay as *A Boatman of the Padma* (2012), and Syed Waliullah's (1922-1971) *Kando Nadi Kando* (1968), translated by Osman Jamal as *Cry, River, Cry* (2015) are novels which portray the identity of the people of Bangladesh who live by the side of the rivers Titash, Padma, and Bakal. The biodiversity of these rivers was once resourceful, but they lost their flow because of the imbalance in the river ecosystems for siltation, drought, and deforestation. The lifestyles and identities of fishermen and people are greatly influenced by the change of river ecosystems. Different writers in Bengali literature have written about the changes of human life in connection with the flow of different big and small rivers. Mallabarman writes about fisherman (Malo) community who catch fish in the Titash; Bandyopadhyay portrays the identity of fishermen who catch fish in the Padma; and Waliullah writes about the farmers and the people who depend on the movement of steamers and live by the side of a tributary called Bakal. These three novelists show beautiful landscapes of Bengal in different seasons and also show how people become victims with the change of biodiversity and ecosystems. This paper explores the change of the ecosystem of the rivers Titash, Padma, and Bakal which change the lifestyle of the people who are dependent on them.

Keywords: ecocriticism, river, land, ecosystem, human beings, lifestyle, change

1 Associate Professor in the Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet, Bangladesh
rislam@metrouni.edu.bd

How to cite this article:

Rama Islam. "Ecosystem and the Change of Lifestyle: Adwata Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash*, Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Boatman of the Padma* and Syed Waliullah's *Cry, River, Cry*". *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts and Humanities*, 1, 4, 2024, 61-78. doi: 10.22077/ISLAH.2024.6814.1343



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee Journal of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts & Humanities*. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Introduction:

Bengal's river-centric landscapes make an interrelation among land, water, trees and human life. As a riverine country, there are many rivers in Bangladesh and rivers circulate in the Bengalis' imagination as geographic, literary, and mysterious terms. In *A River Called Titash*, Mallabarmar writes about the fishermen who depend on the mercy of the Titash, in *Padma Nadir Majhi*, Bandyopadhyay portrays the fishermen who depend on the Padma which grasps and devours the lives of fishermen during the rainy season, and in *Cry, River, Cry*, Waliullah focuses on the sufferings of human beings who depend on the river Bakal. Mallabarmar and Bandyopadhyay show that if the Titash and the Padma flow, fishermen and boatmen find their lives lively and happy, because they can catch fish, and Waliullah shows that people from different professions can easily move for different purposes crossing the river Bakal. But during the dry season, their lives become miserable because of the great impact on the biodiversity of these rivers. Mallabarmar, Bandyopadhyay, and Waliullah show the human sufferings, especially of the people living around a dying river, and the difficulties of navigation in a dying river. The paper examines environmental changes, and ecological concerns along with the impacts of ecological changes on the lifestyle of river-centric people in these novelistic representations.

Methodology

Following analytical methods, this article highlights a comparative study of the primary sources, *A River Called Titash*, *A Boatman of the Padma*, and *Cry, River, Cry*. The narratives of these novels show human-land-water relations in the Bengal Delta and eco-consciousness of Mallabarmar, Bandyopadhyay, and Waliullah. The secondary sources are gathered from the works of other researchers and books based on ecology, ecosystem, and ecocritical reading. This research provides techniques and methods that are interdisciplinary and qualitative. Moreover, this article poses some basic questions: First, what are ecosystem and river and land ecosystems? Second, how does the imbalance of river ecosystems change the human lifestyle? Third, how is the concept of ecosystem related to literature? This analytic study will immensely contribute to the literary studies about the significance of ecology for sustainable development.

Ecosystems and River Ecosystems:

An ecosystem is a structural and functional unit of ecology where plants, animals, and other organisms (living organisms or biotic components) and weather and landscapes (the surrounding environment or abiotic components) interact with each other and work together. Loreau states, "One of its main benefits has been to foster integration of community ecology and ecosystem ecology. Ecology has traditionally regarded, implicitly or explicitly, species diversity as an epiphenomenon driven by a combination of abiotic environmental factors (such as temperature, rainfall and

soil fertility), ecosystem processes that are themselves determined by these abiotic factors (such as productivity, biomass and nutrient cycling) and biotic interactions within communities (such as competition and predation)” (2010:51). An ecosystem is necessary for ecological processes, life-systems, and stability and it keeps balance among different components in nature.

There are two types of ecosystems - Terrestrial ecosystems (land-based ecosystems, Forest ecosystems, Grassland ecosystems, Tundra ecosystems, and Desert ecosystems) and Aquatic ecosystems (water-based ecosystems such as Freshwater ecosystems and Marine ecosystems). The river ecosystem is a very important part of the Freshwater ecosystem and it is significant for human existence as Hassan Md. Naveed Anzum et al. state, “River ecosystem: trends of changing ecosystem pattern, number of abundant plants and fish species of the river, the biodiversity etc.” (2023: 135). The changes in the river ecosystem greatly affect the lives of people. Fishermen and people’s lifestyle and activities are highly influenced by the river; and sometimes they do not have knowledge of changing river ecosystems. Unfortunately, the river ecosystem and the grassland ecosystem have become degraded because of the imbalance between men and nature.

Rivers in Bangladesh: River Ecosystem

Bangladesh is created by the delta system as the country lies in the biggest river delta of the world - the Ganges Delta system. According to Shamsuzzaman et al., “Bangladesh has one of the biggest and most active deltas, fed by three mighty rivers: the Padma, the Meghna, and the Jamuna. This contributes to a high potential for fresh and brackish water capture and culture fisheries, in addition to the vast marine resource” (2017:145). Bangladesh has big rivers such as the Padma, the Meghna, the Jamuna, the Brahmaputra, the Dhaleswari, and the Karnaphuli. Mohsin, Haque, et al. note, “The Padma River is one of the longest and major freshwater rivers in Bangladesh and considered home to a large number of aquatic species and livelihood for many fishermen living beside it. This river is believed to be an important feeding and breeding ground for many riverine fishes in the country (2013: 680). Powerful rivers erode banks and destroy houses, farmland, and entire villages. Sometimes siltation occurs, and many *chars* arise in the beds of different rivers. There are many small rivers in different parts of the country as the Buriganga, the Shitalakshya, the Gomoti, the Teesta, the Atrai, the Korotoa, the Mohananda, the Madhumati, the Titash and many others which are rich in diverse aquatic species.

Changes in the biodiversity of the rivers hinder environmental sustainability and sustainable development of the country. Most of the people are polluting nature every day and few people are aware of ecological stability and human sustainability. Rivers are essential for the sustenance of people and the sustainable development of a country. About 230 rivers currently flow in Bangladesh during summer and winter. The number differs as these rivers change flow in time and season and the same river

carries different names in different regions.

The Ganga-Brahmaputra system carries approximately 250 tons of dry solids annually. Silt accumulations create navigational and other problems and can even divert a river from its original channel. The inclusion of sediment into watercourses can result from natural causes such as heavy run-off as well as from human conduct such as overgrazing or deforestation. Water systems may be blocked or the flow of water seriously reduced by the addition of fine material carried by the water. This may restrict the process of water systems for transport, fishing, reservoirs, irrigation, and drainage. Catastrophic sediment addition disrupts agricultural systems and transport facilities.

All these rivers are full of natural resources and are lively during the rainy season. Boats, launches, and steamers are used to carry goods and passengers from one place to another. But many rivers have disappeared from the map of Bangladesh by losing their flow and navigation. Some rivers disappeared, some became canals and some just like drains. In some areas, people build houses and haat-bazaars (markets) on the *chars*. Some land-grabbers occupied the wet beds of the rivers to make farming land, fisheries, and building structures.

Siltation occurs naturally in water systems and sometimes it occurs for unplanned construction by human beings. Some silt in water is essential for growing crops and fishing and sometimes additional tons of silt create a negative impact on the water quality. It negatively impacts ecosystems in different ways as excessive silt clogs gills and smothers eggs and nests. It increases the crisis of drinking water, and blocks drainage and irrigation channels. Human beings are responsible for the ecological imbalance and barriers to environmental sustainability. It is observed that "The careless disposal of untreated wastewater and solid waste to the water system significantly contributes to the poor quality of the water. Tanneries and textile industries are among the largest surface water polluters, and their wastewater alters the physicochemical and biological properties of the aquatic ecosystem in Bangladesh. Rivers are also being polluted with the leachate from solid waste as rainwater sweeps through where it is dumped" (Saiful Islam et.al. 2015: 281). Human beings make the river ecosystem vulnerable by pouring toxic products, garbage, and plastic wastes into the water and grabbing the wet beds of the rivers. River pollution is the cause of marine pollution.

Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism and Environmental Sustainability

In the 21st century, an ecological crisis becomes a global crisis and it is a part of discourse, in different disciplines, and as Md. Munir Hossain Talukder mentions, "Ecological problems, such as global warming, climate change, biodiversity extinction, deforestation, ozone layer depletion, natural disaster, and so forth, have had a major impact on the ecosystem, and as a result species, whether human or nonhuman, are

already under threat” (2018: 30). Human beings are in a threat because of ecological crises.

Ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary critical theory, is a method of analyzing literary texts related to environmental issues and it studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment. In the “Introduction” of *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*, James C. Mc Kusick observes the emergence of ecocriticism in the late twentieth century which helps to investigate the relation between different literary texts in different genres and their environmental contexts. Mc Kusick states:

ecocriticism offers the most effective and relevant means of literary analysis in an era of increasing human impact upon the terrestrial environment. Perhaps the most significant and useful tool that modern science offers to the literary critic is the concept of the ecosystem, which, as a consequence of recent environmental research, is now regarded as a much more chaotic and unstable structure than the classic scientific understanding of the “balance of nature” might have suggested. (2000: 18)

Ecocriticism is a discourse that creates ecological awareness. Though some people are conscious of the destruction of the balance of nature, they unknowingly pollute nature.

Capitalism is the cause of deforestation, and nature is exploited by humans. Nowadays human beings are dependent on technology, capitalism and consumerism which transforms the natural world. Since the 19th century, thinkers like John Stuart Mill have argued that human beings are irrationally trying to change their lives. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels referred to the materialist concept of nature which refers to modern technological development occurring through the exploitation of nature and the mechanization of life. Overproduction as a global capitalist desire has caused unprecedented environmental degradation. According to Greg Garrard, “Ecocriticism is essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction” (2004: 179). Nature is not more than a cultural construct. Ecocriticism emphasizes the eco-consciousness in human beings, and it promotes a systematic use of natural resources for the balance of the ecosystem and a sustainable future. Environmental sustainability refers to ecosystem reliability, carrying capacity, and biodiversity, and it is a necessary precondition of sustained economic growth. Robert Goodland states, “Environmental sustainability seeks to sustain global life-support systems indefinitely” (1995: 6). Environmental sustainability is very essential for a healthy planet and saving natural resources for all generations.

For the coexistence between the environment and people, consciousness about the environment and environmental justice is essential. Postmodernism focuses on the integral ways of thinking about human and nonhuman nature together. Gilles Deleuze (1925) and Felix Guattari (1930) write:

We make no distinction between man and nature: the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production of industry, just as they do within the life of man as a species ... man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting one another ... rather, they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product. (1983: 4-5)

Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on nature and man are mutually constituted in a network. Their concepts suggest an understanding of human (social, cultural, political systems) and nonhuman (natural or ecological systems) realities and discourse (narratives, literary and cultural representations). The relationships between human and nonhuman natures constitute a key approach in ecocriticism which shares with post-modernism as Cheryll Glotfelty states:

Problems such as climate change, clean-water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity will require that people around the world work together, imagining the whole earth as our collective backyard. At the same time, I think, we should not underrate the value and environmental efficacy of a local sense of place ... I believe we need to become "bothand" thinkers, capable of multi-scaled responses to the problems and opportunities of our time. (2010: 44)

Glotfelty shows concern for the ecological changes and the crisis of fresh water and thinks that people all over the world should work collectively to solve the environmental problems. In postmodern ecocritical contexts, the solution to the ecological crisis demands a radical epistemic shift in perspective from a mechanistic to an eco-centric paradigm.

Environmental problems can be analyzed from both scientific perspectives and socio-economic aspects. Khan states:

Environmental sustainability involves ecosystem integrity, carrying capacity and biodiversity. It requires that natural capital be maintained as a source of economic inputs and as a sink for wastes. Resources must be harvested no faster than they can be regenerated. Wastes must be emitted no faster than they can be assimilated by the environment. (1995: 65)

Social, economic, and environmental sustainability should be integrated and coordinated properly to keep balance in the ecosystem in nature. Nature-friendly development plans can protect natural systems.

Ecosystem and the Change of Lifestyles of River-Centric People of Bangladesh: Textual Analysis

Ecology theory refers to the coexistence of nature and human beings who must challenge their senses. Timothy Morton writes, "What is real and what is unreal, what counts as existent and what counts as nonexistent. The idea of Nature as a holistic, healthy, real thing avoids this challenge" (2010: 10). The concept of ecology influ-

ences all aspects of life, culture, and society; Mallabharman, Bandyopadhyay, and Waliullah portray the lifestyles of the people who depend on rivers.

A River Called Titash

In *A River Called Titash*, Mallabharman portrays different faces of *Titash*. Mallabharman writes, “the name of a river. Its banks brim with water, its surface is alive with ripples, its heart exuberant. It flows in the rhythm of a dream” (1993: 11). The river directly or indirectly influences the lives and livelihood of people. The full current and natural beauty of *Titash* sustains the lifestyle and culture of the fishermen (Malo) community. The river calmly flows as “The sunlight warms its water by day; the moon and stars sit with it by night, trying to lull it to sleep,” (1993: 11) and witness the suicide, starvation, and other evil deeds of people quietly. *Titash* arises from the Meghna and returns to it; it sees no rocky mountains with gushing waterfalls. It only sees fishermen and farmers, the marginalized rural people, who toil along its banks and depend on it.

The river is the only giver and the only taker of the Hindu and Muslim families of the Malo community. Fishermen from the Hindu community dominate the narrative as Basanti, a young girl; Kishore, a fisherman; Rajar Jhi, Kishore’s bride; and Ananta, Rajar’s son. Mallabharman has portrayed the happiness and sorrows of the fishermen living in the riverside. Malo community and their children “play in the coolness of the water at the end of long hot summer” (1993: 26). Fishermen feel lively and excited during the rainy season because they “cook, eat, and sleep in their boats and catch fish” (1993: 16), the young wives go to their fathers’ places to visit “when the river dies and the Malos see nothing but darkness before their eyes” (1993: 15) and they believe that “Mother Ganga reigns there and protects boatmen from harm” (1993: 35). Their worship of *Titash* as mother Ganga shows their religious faith, also rooted and influenced by the river.

Life goes well during the rainy season and “when that time is over, *Titash* again recedes, turns distant, exposes the silt bed at its heart” (1993: 246). Farmers occupy and use it for paddy fields, the Malo community begins to die seeing no other resource to survive. They say, “When the river dried, we died. We’re not going to fight and bite over land” (1993: 246). The community had no access to farming and they became displaced. Due to the imbalance of the river ecosystem, fishermen are compelled to migrate to nearby towns and West Bengal in search of work to minimize their economic pressure. As they could not have any alternate occupation due to the change of river course and formation of sandbars naturally, young people chose other professions, many took wage labour, and old people stayed on losing their profession ultimately inviting their death. A rich woman Kalur Ma becomes a beggar and many aged people die due to prolonged starvation, especially Kishore’s father.

Changes in the river ecosystem disrupt the lifestyle of the fishermen commu-

nity who become displaced as Mohammad Shafiqul Islam states, “Human life is intrinsically connected to nature’s life cycle—both follow an identical “coursing life.” It is widely acknowledged that ecological balance contributes to people’s smooth course of social life” (2022: 49). The lives of human beings greatly change by the changes of nature in different seasons in Bangladesh. Ecological balance keeps balance in the social life as an imbalance in the Titash River ecosystem creates an imbalance in Malos’ lifestyle. Mallabharman painted that “The Malo neighborhood is no more” (1993: 257). Not only do the people of a family but also the whole Malo society disappears due to the change of river ecosystem.

A Boatman of Padma

Bandyopadhyay, often called the founding father of modern Bangla fiction, portrays the lifestyles of marginalized fishermen communities residing on the banks of the river Padma. The novel is set in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and the author writes about a fictitious village named Ketupur and people of the village are dependent on the river, Padma as the narrator narrates:

The riverbank was now throbbing with life; and so was the water. The sirens of the steamers sounded at intervals. If one steamer cast off and chugged away, another anchored at the jetty . . . There was a never-ending flow of water in the river, a ceaseless flow of human life on water and land. (2012: 8)

The flow of the river continues the flow of human lives. People of different occupations are dependent on the Padma and they transport from one place to another using boats, steamers, launch, etc. Fishermen live by the side of the river and during the rainy season rainwater enters their huts; sometimes nature comes as destructive forces to destroy them. During the monsoon season, the village becomes extensively flooded, the floating village looks like an island and people from different villages take shelter on raised platforms. The fishermen catch different kinds of fish and deal with the customers.

Padma is very well-known for *ilish* fish, the national fish of Bangladesh, and fishermen earn more during the *ilish* season. The women of the community fetch drinking water from the river. All characters like the river Padma, especially Kuber as the narrator narrates, “loved the river passionately; to him there was absolutely nothing as blissful as sailing on the river” (2012: 109). People carry rice grains, peas, beans, turmeric, chili, and many other things from one place to another by boat. They use boats to carry a patient to the hospital. The poor fisherman Kuber is the main character who lives with his wife, daughter, and two sons in *Jelepara* (fisherman’s quarter). The fishermen community is peacefully living in *Jelepara* and enjoys the celestial natural beauty of the river. Bandyopadhyay mentions,

everything else was a superfluity, except the river. The coloured clouds and the birds of the sky, the white kaash and green trees on the weathered bank,

the throbbing of life on the surface of the river – if none of these were to exist, the boatman of the Padma would still be content to love only this vast on-ward-flowing mass of water all his life. (2012: 109)

Padma is always young as “the river was as limitless as the sea” (2012: 110). It is one of the big rivers of Bangladesh and people have to face adverse situations in different seasons.

The banks of Padma gradually eroded and “[s]omewhere a sandbank sprouted up from her bed; somewhere else a half-a-century-old extensive tract disappeared into her womb again” (2012: 13). As a result, fishermen’s families pass their days with hunger and thirst. There is an absence of dredging operations in different rivers of the country. As a result, the river beds are filled with silt, a lot of fish species have already disappeared and a large number of fishermen and boatmen have changed their profession. It is argued that because of the Ganges–Brahmaputra Delta, the world’s largest delta, according to Mehta and Kumar, Bangladesh “is particularly prone to future climate change-related migration flows, as it is a particularly low-lying and therefore vulnerable coastal zone (2019: 65). People dependent on rivers face problems due to the lack of navigation during dry seasons. When they find no way, they change their profession and migrate to Moynadwip, destroying the biodiversity of grassland.

Hossain Mian starts to populate an island in Noakhali and Bandyopadhyay states, “the island was overgrown with dense jungles; there were no towns, no villages, and no human habitation, only wild animals and countless birds” (2012: 28). Human beings destroy natural resources to grab land and the uninhabited island has become very alluring to the people. Mian declares, “If someone does not accept land in Moynadwip, I pay him instead for clearing jungle – food and clothes are free” (2012: 42) and “After deforesting parts of this island, Mian had been setting up a colony of families which were perennially burdened with debt and facing starvation” (2012: 28). Human beings are responsible for destroying the balance and sustainability in nature. There are many coconut trees in the West of the island and they also cut them.

Hossain Mian clears jungle-infested Moynadwip, which is full of tigers, lions, snakes, and crocodiles, according to Rasu, and provides dwelling, plough, and bullocks for cultivation. Nayar mentions that Marxist ecologists think that nature is just like “a *commodity* with capitalist production” (2012: 247). The narrator mentions, “The clearing in the midst of dense forest all around looked so dreadful that it seemed as if the woodland which had been virgin ever since the day of creation of this island had had a handful of flesh torn away from her breast! (Bandyopadhyay 2012:118). Rich people are destroying nature more than poor people. Mian plays the role of a materialist and he tempts people to leave fishing and choose a different profession for their survival. People, who think of earning money, destroy the biodiversity of the system, and poor people, who want to form a new identity in the new

land, help rich people. River-centric identity of the people transforms and they try to form a new identity in the new uninhabited and barren land.

Rasu and Aminudding come back from Moynadwip after losing everything. Now Moynadwip is a town. When Kuber is ravaged by the uncertainties of his professional life, Hossain Mia tempts him. According to the narrator, "Hossain Mia had plenty of money; his business empire was spread far and wide; he was the owner of an eleven-mile long island: Kuber was the only his servant; even so, Hossain found comfort sitting on a tattered mat in Kuber's hut; and he chatted with Kuber like a friend" (2012: 141). Hossain Mia is so materialistic that he is merely understood by the poor people. He always keeps business relationships with people and keeps good relations with boatmen to use them.

The author shows the ecological imbalance in the river and fishermen cannot catch a lot of fish. As a mysterious island (a remote silt bed island or char) named Moynadip emerges, fishermen think about changing their occupation. They start to choose a new landscape in the *char* where traders like to establish a new community. A local small businessman, Hossain Mia, takes settlers, who are the victims of either natural calamities like floods and cyclones or social ostracism, from different parts of the region to build up a settlement and in search of new beginnings. Nayar writes, "Ecological ideas about conservation come from the West and ignore the ancient social and cultural practices of local areas. People are evicted from lands they have occupied for centuries under the project of conserving wildlife" (2012: 249). Kuber's journey to the island indicates a new hope for the people who begin a new life of freedom. It indicates a transition to a new world for the establishment of equality and justice. Moynadip is a metaphor for the privileged classes.

Cry, River, Cry

In *Cry, River, Cry*, Waliullah writes about the flow of the river Bakal and the dying river. There are two narrators: Tabarak Bhuiyan and an unnamed narrator, the cousin of Muhammad Mustafa. Bhuiyan describes a town called Kumurdanga where most of the people are poor and the steamer is the only fast transport to reach different places. The financial condition of the people of this town is not good. Bhuiyan mentions the story of the closing down of the steamer station and the dying river. He narrates the beauty of the narrow tributary Bakal which he saw during his boyhood, as Waliullah states:

It was a vast and forceful river on the far side of which every autumn *kash* (pampas) flowers, covering field after field, gleamed in their silvery whiteness. In its fast current floated clusters of water hyacinths and numerous potters' boats nearly sinking under the weight of new pots. From time to time storms raised tumultuous waves on it and even the midday sun failed to dissipate the colour signaling the river's depth. (2015: 13)

Waliullah's father was in government service and he had traveled to many places in undivided Bengal with his father during the early twentieth century. He saw the beauty and attractiveness of lands and rivers, the destruction caused by rivers, and the destruction of different towns for the death of rivers. He gives a wonderful description of the beauty of nature and the flow of the river and highlights the sufferings of human beings living around the dying river. As the river was shallow, the steamer moved very slowly and with great caution during winter, and the human suffering increased.

The station master, Khatib Miah gets a telegram with the information indicating that the steamer will never arrive as a result of the river silting up at the bend. He becomes helpless thinking about his jobless life. He explains, "The steamer won't come, the river is silted up . . . a huge *char* (sandbank) is rising in the river. It won't be long before the river chokes" (2015: 28). When the river is silted up, the river service stops, and people who need steamers for business and trade face trouble. The steamer company stops the movement of the steamer and the station is finally dismantled. The narrator mentions, "Those who were talking about sandbanks were people who ran the steamer company, those who had stopped the steamer service without notice" (2015: 46). There is a mechanical purpose for stopping steamer movement as "there isn't as much money on this route as on the Kamalpur route; so they are stopping the service here and starting it on the Kamalpur route" (2015: 46). As a large new jute mill is established in Kamalpur, the steamer company does not think about the people of Kumurdanga. Capitalists think about profit as Pramod K. Nayar states, "Labour and production are always geared towards profit generation, and hence the environment is exploited. Marxist ecologists argue that nature has become a *commodity* with capitalist production. Nature is, therefore, internal to capitalist mechanism as a source of profits" (2012: 247). Capitalists do not think about the facilities of people and river ecosystems. Waliullah shows that a steamer company started steamers on the Kamalpur route for export and import and passenger movement. So, financial benefit is the reason for the termination of the steamer service. Though the river turns into a stream, the inhabitants of Kumurdanga protest against the injustice. The narrator mentions:

Then I heard a cry. No, not a cry, but a scream. Perhaps it was the farmer's screaming. Perhaps, bewildered by a profound darkness which had now overcome his soul, he was looking for a way out, looking for a little light, but was unable to find it. The farmer kept screaming, a scream which tore out of the deep and spread out in the darkness, a darkness which blended with the dark. (2015: 3-4)

The narrator explains that the river becomes so narrow that even the strong storm cannot create turbulent waves in the river and it is losing its depth. The suffering of farmers is portrayed through their tears. People also hear that the crying of the suffer-

ing and grieving heart of the dying river. There was no doubt that the river was dying and it was the dying river that was crying day and night.

Sakhina Khatun, the daughter of Mokhtar Moslehuddin, Mihir Mandal, and some other people of Kumurdanga hear a strange cry. Khatun says, "The river is crying. The river Bakal is crying" (2015: 117). The people of Kumurdanga do not find any reason for stopping the steamer service, still, they sacrifice many things, believing that if they give gifts to the river, the river will not die. They throw pots, pans, clothes, rice, pulses, gold and silver ornaments. Tabarak Bhuiyan becomes jobless as the steamer station is closed. The silence of the river indicates that it is weeping. Life flows in Kumurdanga though the steamer service has closed down as Arbab Khan adds, "I have retired one day, it's happened now. That's not important. I have decided to stay on Kumurdanga" (2015: 173). Arbab Khan, Khatib Mia, Doctor Burhanuddin, and a lot of people decide to stay in Kumurdanga as "life was restored; hopelessness and unhappiness were removed" (2015: 175). Every person of Kumurdanga loves the place, and it gives them hope and courage to live happily.

At the end of the story of Mustafa, the narrator, and Bhuiyan are the passengers of the steamer. Bhuiyan announces that the dying river is not crying for itself but for the people whose lives are ending with that of the river. As he travels:

The steamer slowly docked at the flat. The turbulent water around it hissed like hundreds of venomous snakes. Suddenly it seemed to me the river was crying in futile rage. Perhaps the river always cried in many voices, in many tunes. It cried for everybody. I said to myself: Cry, river, cry. (2015: 180)

The steamer is slow and it faces navigation problems because of siltation. The river is dying like a human being as Niaz Zaman states, "the story of the dying river is still relevant given the context of climate change and other environmental concerns" (2020). Though river ecosystems are more valuable than the economy, capitalists exploit both people and nature. The steamer company decides to transfer the steamer *ghat* without thinking about the resources of common people. Marxist environmentalism focuses on social inequalities and their relations with nature.

Nature changes by men and life changes by nature. People's lifestyles change with the changes in the flow of rivers and alternative modes of transport in Kumurdanga. The narrator mentions:

many boats had already gathered at the ghat to remind them that there were other means of transport . . . So many types of boats: big and small, stylish and ordinary, boats which could fearlessly sail on rivers like the Padma and the Meghna with thirty to forty passengers, braving storms and tyoons, and also boats in which one would not feel safe crossing a canal. (Waliullah 2015: 60)

The structure of the novel is complicated as Bhuiyan's narrative of the river moves to the story of Mustafa. The novel is mainly about a steamer station, but the tale of

Sakhina who hears the cry of the river is relevant.

Ecological Concern in Bangla Literature: A Comparative Critical Reading of *A River Called Titash, A Boatman of the Padma* and *Cry, River, Cry*

Bangladesh is a riverine country and the river ecosystem is very rich as M.G. Hus-sain states, “Bangladesh is endowed with unique water resources comprising both inland, open and closed water bodies, and marine waters” (2010: 87). River and human beings are interrelated in Bangladesh and the ecological change influences their lifestyles; as Chakrabarty states:

Humans today are not only the dominant species on the planet, they also collectively constitute—thanks to their numbers and their consumption of cheap fossil-fuel-based energy to sustain their civilizations—a geological force that determines the climate of the planet much to the detriment of civilization itself. Today, it is precisely the “survival of the species” on a “world-wide scale” that is largely in question. (2012: 15)

Global climate change affects river ecosystems and human beings’ lives, lifestyles, livelihoods, trade, economy, and culture.

Ecological thinking is not only applicable to science but also to art, philosophy, history, sociology, religion, anthropology, critical theory, and cultural studies. Romantic poets of English literature, the first ecological writers in the Western Literary Tradition, show ecological awareness in their poetry as William Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Percy Bisshe Shelley in “Ozymandias.” Many writers and poets from Bengali literature are greatly influenced by the natural beauty and the destruction of nature. For example, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Michael Madhusudhan Datta, Jibananda Das, and Jasim Uddin were greatly illuminated by nature, and they write and picture nature and environmental issues in their writings. They also show their ecological concern about the environmental change and the destruction of nature by the impact of modern industrialization, mechanism, and materialism. In an article titled “Environmental Degradation: Issues and Concerns” in Rabindranath Tagore’s Selected Poems,” Bhattacharjee writes:

Humans have the habit of destroying something to create something. They destroy a beautiful rock to create a sculpture of their liking. They cut a gorgeous tree to make a musical instrument for their use. Many trees are uprooted and many major massacres of nature have taken place for the implantation of tea or coffee gardens. This attitude is caused by their anthropocentric behaviour. It is totally unnecessary for humans to enter into the creating act. The modern invention in gene technology will boomerang on them one day. (2013: 4)

People are making many beautiful things using natural resources. But they are not equally concerned with keeping the ecosystem balanced. Some writers especially

emphasized river ecosystems as some of the Bengali novels are named after rivers as *TitashEkti Nadir Nam*, *Padma Nadir Manjhi*, *Ganga*, *KandoNadiKando*, and *Padma Promatha*. They would like to raise an environmental sensibility among the readers. In an article titled, "Rabindranath Tagore and Eco-consciousness," Alam states that Rabindranath is "indispensable for our region in general and our two countries in particular because of his eco-consciousness" (2012: 174). Tagore had a strong devotion to the natural world and he played a very significant role in protecting nature. He raised his voice against the destruction of nature and the introduction of machines in nature and established Santiniketan. Jibanananda Das portrays the harmonious, sustainable, and ecologically balanced environment of Bengal in his poems. The greatest artists and painters like Jainul Abedin have been greatly influenced by our rivers. River lovers of Bangladesh like the traditional songs *Shari*, *Bhatiali*, and *Murshidi*, which are the expressions of our village people.

The river is the center of life, and the current of the rivers controls fishermen living by the side of the river Titash and Padma, and it is very important to the people of the town Kumurdanga living by the side of the river Bakal. In comparison to Padma and Meghna, Titash and Bakal are gentle as Mallabharman writes, "The river Titash does not hold the awesome terror of the Padma and the Meghna" (1993: 11) and "Their terrible waves and frightening depths make boats capsize and sink" (1993: 16). Mallabharman portrays the lifestyle of fishermen and farmers. According to Bandyopadhyay, "Strong winds were blowing from the Padma that day; countless birds were chattering all around; golden sunlight was spread over the dew-soaked land; it was the advent of autumn, no doubt. The *kaash* forest on the riverbank would now turn white" (2012: 68). Bandyopadhyay has wonderfully painted the beauty of nature in the Autumn season and also shows the lifestyle of fishermen. Waliullah Writes about people from different professions. The Padma never dried up, but there would be almost no water in the Titash and the Bakal during *Phalgun* and *Chaitra* (dry season in Bangladesh).

The fishermen community is the focal point in Mallabharman and Bandyopadhyay's novels. They show the richness of water resources and various fish species that support fishermen to survive, as Shamsuzzaman et al. state, "Bangladesh, with its rich inland waters and river systems, has significant capture fishery and aquaculture potential. The favorable geographic position of Bangladesh comes with a large number of aquatic species and provides plenty of resources to support fisheries potential" (2017: 145). Fish biodiversity declines due to various ecological changes – over-exploitation, natural disasters, environmental degradation, aquatic pollution, pesticides, diseases, destruction of breeding grounds, and siltation, etc.

In *The Boatman of the Padma*, Bandyopadhyay shows the change of the ecosystem of the Padma which, as Md. Mosaddequr Rahman states, "supports livelihood and nutritional security of the people living alongside" (2012: 329). Fishermen face

ecological changes and the elite local landowners, the privileged class that inhumanly exploits the community. Fishermen's profession changes due to their marginalization and the river ecosystem, and they move to the island and destroy the land ecosystem. Leaving their occupation of fishing behind, they migrated to Moynadwip where they made "rooms for dwelling, ploughs, and bullocks for cultivation, and implements for clearing jungles" (Bandyopadhyay 2012: 28). Kuber starts to use a new variety of fertilizers to harvest the island with paddy crops, mustard, gram, pea, radish, cabbages, spinach etc. and pollutes the soil as a result.

In *A River Called Titash*, the dryness of the river and the drought largely affect the livelihood of the Malos - "As is the characteristic of rivers of Bangladesh, the course of the *Meghna* has changed, considerably altering the landscape since the time the novel was written. Monsoons result in the inundation of the banks. *Meghna*, like *Padma*, carries large amounts of silt that fall into *Titash*, and gradually choke the river resulting in the development of the silt bed (*char*) of *Titash*" (Qtd. in Biswas 2011, 30). Once the river was the property of all, but the river became a commodity or a private property to rich farmers and land grabbers. As their socio-cultural rhythm loosened, the economic pressure broke up the Malo way of life. They also start to "lose the sanctity of their inner home life" (Mallabarman 1993: 242). Jatrawallahs visit Malo homes and share different stories of Malo women with the young men of their communities. Mallabarman shows that Titash has spent her lifetime with Kisore, Basanti, Ananta, and others; the river supplies a rich variety of big and small fish to sustain the fisherman's life steadily. The change in Titash's ecosystem breaks the harmony of fishermen's lifestyle, "the Malos lose their self-identity" (Mallabarman 1993: 240).

In *Cry, River, Cry* the steamer company plays a role like that of capitalist, and people's lifestyle changes under the influence of modern material things. Waliullah also mentions siltation as Kafiluddin states:

The crux of the matter is this, the river Bakal hasn't silted up, at least not so extensively as to stop the steamer service. Yes, there's a little shallowness on one side, but then which river is not shallow? Take the Padma, the Meghna, the Jamuna – no river is equally deep throughout. All rivers silt up, sandbanks and islets rise and steamers can also make their way. (Waliullah 2015: 51)

The tale of a dying river represents the context of climate change and other environmental concerns. People of Kumurdanga decide to live in their place despite different difficulties

Conclusion:

Ecocritics mostly celebrate cultural, literary, and scientific diversities. Land and rivers are the most crucial geographical elements in lower Bengal. The flow of rivers determines the social, political, and economic development and change of lifestyles

of the people of this area. Rivers and land form a new place for habitation. Mallabarmar, Bandyopadhyay, and Waliullah focus on rivers as characters and they are the source of life. The novelists highlight the changing ecological, economic, and environmental conditions that affect the lifestyle of the river-centric people of Bangladesh. They concentrate on dying rivers and emphasize that human beings can take steps to bring balance back to the environment for their sustainability. In that case, sustainable development fundamentally depends on three conceptual pillars as Menash mentions, “‘economic sustainability’, ‘social sustainability’ and ‘environmental sustainability’” (Menash 2019: 9). Sustainability demands the integration of social and ecological problems and it can minimize the tensions between the goals of human beings and the environment. ‘Environment Sustainability,’ an essential paradigm for the ‘Sustainable Development’ of a country, is related to the ecosystem. Mallabarmar, Bandyopadhyay, and Waliullah emphasize the affection for the environment of the river-centric people of Bengal who face challenges, change their livelihood, and struggle to form and reform their identity. They show the changing river ecosystems of Padma, Moynadwip, Titash, and Bakal which create crises in nature and human life. Their works are about environmental issues and characters who struggle to survive within society despite the changes in the ecosystems of rivers and the change in their occupations and residences for sustainability. Mallabarmar, Bandyopadhyay and Waliullah’s works can help individuals recognize the multifaceted nature of sustainability. The novels focus on how human beings can frame nature-friendly plans to protect the ecosystems and establish the harmony between ecosystems and human lifestyles for sustainable development.

Funding Acknowledgments:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Works Cited

- Alam, Fakrul (2012). "Rabindranath Tagore and Eco-consciousness." *Rabindranath Tagore and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh: Essays and Reviews*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy.
- Anzum, and et al. (2023). "Changing Dynamics of River Ecosystem from Aquatic to Terrestrial: A Case of Bhairab River, Jashore, Bangladesh." *Watershed Ecology and the Environment*, 5, pp. 134–142.
- Bandyopadhyay, Manik (2012). *The Boatman of the Padma*. Translated by Ratan K. Chattopadhyay, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan.
- Bhattacharjee, Archana (2013). "Environmental Degradation: Issues and Concerns' in Rabindranath." *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research journal*, 2:1, pp. 1-5. <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/V2/n1/Archana.pdf>
- Biswas, Sravani (2011). "Nature and Humans in the Imagination of Bengali Intellectuals of 1930s- 1950s." *Studies on Asia*, 1: 2, Michigan, pp. 15-34.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2012). "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History*, 43: 1, pp. 1-18. DOI: 10.1353/nlh.2012.0007
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari (1983). *Anti-Oedipus*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, New York: University of Minnesota Press.
- Garrard, Greg (2004). *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Goodland, Robert (1995). "The Concept of Environmental Sustainability." *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 26, pp. 1-24.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll (2010). "Ecozon@ with Love." *Ecozon@*, 1:1, pp. 41-46.
- Hussain, M. G. (2010). "Freshwater fishes of Bangladesh: Fisheries, biodiversity and habitat." *Aquatic Ecosystem Health & Management*, 13:1, pp. 85-93. DOI: 10.1080/14634980903578233
- Islam, Md Saiful , et al. (2015). "Alteration of Water Pollution Level with the Seasonal Changes in Mean Daily Discharge in Three Main Rivers around Dhaka City, Bangladesh." *Environments*, 2:3, pp. 280-294. DOI:10.3390/environments2030280
- Islam, Mohammad Shafiqul (2022). "COP26 and the Crisis of Climate Change in Bangladesh." *Space and Culture India*, 10: 1, pp. 44-53. DOI: 10.20896/saci.v10i1.1241
- Khan, M. Adil (1995). "Concepts, Definitions, and Key Issues in Sustainable Development: the Outlook for the Future." *Proceedings of the 1995 International Sustainable Development Research Conference*, Manchester University Press, pp. 63-69.

- Loreau, Michel. (2010). "Linking Biodiversity and Ecosystem: Towards a Unifying Ecological Theory." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 365, pp. 49-60. DOI: 10.1098/rstb.2009.0155
- Mckusick, James C. (2000). *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*. New York: Martin's Press.
- Mallabarmarman, Adwaita (1993). *A River Called Titash*. Translated by Kalpana Bardhan, California: University of California Press.
- Mehta, Simi and Kumar Arjun (2019). "Perils of Climate Change in the Bay of Bengal: India-Bangladesh in Perspective." *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 15: 3, pp. 363-372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2019.16495>
- Mensah, Justice (2019). "Sustainable Development: Meaning, History, Principles, Pillars, and Implications for Human Action: Literature Review." *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5:1, pp.1-23. DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531
- Mohsin, A. B. M. et al. (2013). "Seasonal Abundance of Fin Fishes in the Padma River at Rajshahi District, Bangladesh." *World Journal of Fish and Marine Sciences*, 5: 6, pp. 680-685. DOI: 10.5829/idosi.wjfm.2013.05.06.75109
- Morton, Timothy (2010). *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nayar, Pramod K. (2012). *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. London: Pearson.
- Rahman, Md. Mosaddequr, et al. (2012). "Biodiversity in the Padma Distributary of the Ganges River, Northwestern Bangladesh: Recommendations for Conservation." *World Journal of Zoology*, 7:4, pp. 328-337. DOI: 10.5829/idosi.wjz.2012.7.4.6634
- Shamsuzzaman, Md. Mostafa, et al. (2017). "Fisheries Resources of Bangladesh: Present Status and Future Direction." *Agriculture and Fisheries*, 2: 4, pp. 145-256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aaf.2017.03.006>
- Talukder, Md Munir Hussain (2018). *Nature and Life: Essays on Deep Ecology and Applied Ethics*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Waliullah, Syed (2015). *Cry, River; Cry*. Translated by Osman Jamal. Dhaka: Writers. ink.
- Zaman, Niaz. (2020). "Kando Nadi Kando." *The Literary Encyclopedia*. <https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=39290>, accessed 22 April 2024.