

Healing Potential of Nature: An Analysis of Gopinath Mohanty's LayaBilaya: High Tide, Ebb Tide

¹Navdeep Kaur Gill, ² Kapil Chaudaha

Abstract- *The present paper intends to explore the healing power of nature in Gopinath Mohanty's LayaBilaya: High Tide, Ebb Tide. Mohanty has a very profound love for nature that reflects in all his works. Co-existence with nature is the fundamental need of humanity that not only provides physical but also emotional well-being, bringing positivity, high-spiritedness and alleviating feelings of loneliness or emptiness. It becomes a medium to establish bonds with the Supreme force paving way for spiritual awakening.*

Keywords- *Gopinath Mohanty, Healing, Nature, Civilization*

I INTRODUCTION

Connectivity with nature is one of the basic necessities of human beings which is not only required for fulfilment of their everyday essentials but it is also their inherent tendency to form relationships with it. Living in close contact with the nature and its components is needed for the effective development of their cognitive abilities, emotional as well as physical well-being. Nature has the magical power to influence the behavior of an individual and being a part of the nature, the individual feels connected with the larger whole which alleviates all the thoughts related to loneliness and emptiness rather it elevates him to high spiritedness. Nature in all its forms, shapes, sizes, colours, movements has a lot to teach the man for his total transformation inculcating values of patience, sharing, caring, selflessness, love, positivity, mutual understanding, generosity, determination, tolerance and compassion, thereby nurturing him throughout his existence. It aids in establishing bonds with the supreme force by enlightening him with the feelings of belongingness with all the life around, furthermore, oneness of all, thus paving way for spiritual awakening.

Healing in the present context means "a holistic, transformative process of repair and recovery in mind, body and spirit resulting in positive change, finding meaning and movement towards self-realization of wholeness regardless of the presence or absence of a disease" (Firth et al. 50). Nature according to Oxford Dictionary is defined as comprising of "all the plants, animals, and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people". For Emerson, "Nature in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf" and philosophically it is "NOT ME", where he believes his soul being subordinate to nature, making his vital contact with the later possible (7). E. O. Wilson in his book *Biophilia* describes the relationship between human beings and the natural world. He defines Biophilia as "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (Wilson1). He states that humans have an evolutionary inclination of living in close

¹PhD Scholar (DAV University), Jalandhar, navdeepgill9993@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor (DAV University), Jalandhar

connection with nature and the various processes associated with it. They have it as an inherent need which works for their complete evolution as well as their emotional and cognitive development.

According to Wilson, relationship with nature determines the extent of wholeness and fulfilment in the life of human beings. He states that without nature, the entire world is spiritless, also bereft of life. He compares human beings' life devoid of the company of nature and life forms to a torture of the extreme kind which will have very fatal consequences:

Where are we? If the ultimate act of cruelty is to promise everything and withhold just the essentials, the locality is a department of hell. It is a tomb built on a lunar landscape with air and elaborate contrivances added. This is a world (and more than a theoretical possibility in the age of space travel) where people would find their sanity at risk. Without beauty and mystery beyond itself, the mind by definition is deprived of its bearings and will drift to simpler and cruder configurations. Artifacts are incomparably poorer than the life they are designed to mimic. (Wilson 115)

Sigurd F. Olson in *The Meaning of Wilderness* has compared the life of civilization to "nightmare" which contains "no part of reality" (61). He states that connectivity to nature "does play an important recreational role, its real function will always be as a spiritual backlog in the high speed mechanical world in which we live. We have discovered that the presence of wilderness in itself is a balance wheel and an aid to equilibrium" (Olson and Backes 65-66). Nature brings oneness which makes people "slowly realize that once again they are in tune with sun and stars and all natural things, and with that knowledge comes happiness and contentment" (62). Similar to Wilson's views, he also believes that this need to connect with nature is inherent in human beings and they have a longing for "naturalness and simplicity" (62). He further advocates that it "is a tonic, a panacea for nervousness and monotony" whose value cannot be measured in any form (63). People of civilization stripped of enthusiasm, merely existing "go to the wilderness for the good of their souls"(62). Moreover "[t]hese people know that wilderness to them is a necessity if they are to keep their balance" (63).

Mohanty has also conveyed the importance of natural surroundings and human beings' affinity with them. He has also pointed to the lack of wholeness and alienation in the life due to the absence of contact with nature. He loves man and humanity as whole. That is the main reason behind his concern for the artificiality, void and drudgery in their lives. He has satirized the life of city people in his novels like *High Tide Ebb Tide*, *The Survivor* alongwith some of his stories. J. M. Mohanty on Gopinath Mohanty's treatment of nature in his works states that:

Gopinath's emphasis was on nourishment, and he shows how these people lack nourishment (though they are fully nourished physically) which, as he points out comes only from a contact with the soil and the nature and in which sense the Parajas, the Kondhs, the village-folk in *Matimatala* and even the Harijans, are fully nourished. (146)

Tarun Roy in Mohanty's *High Tide Ebb Tide* lives in one of the flats in Calcutta where he barely has any time to look at the vast sky which looks divided from there due to the tall buildings and various obstructions. He has an intense desire to witness it as he used to enjoy in the village during his childhood. After coming to Calcutta, like other people of the city, he has also lost touch with nature. Tarun is so encapsulated in his work that he never gets any chance to feel the presence of the sun. However each time he gets a few spare moments he goes to a park nearby to get a glimpse of the sun besides to refresh himself in the green environment there. He

has never imagined that the sun that rises everyday, could be so beautiful. Tarun is hopeful of a positive as well as total transformation of him when he reaches in Puri. Not only Tarun, even his wife and daughter Chhalana experience absolute bliss as they stand wondering:

“Everything’s new here!” she said. “How beautiful the sun is! How beautiful the sky is ! The trees, the sand, the sea. How beautiful they all are. I wish we didn’t have to go back!” their daughter said “Everything seems so wonderful, father! Look! How many kites there are flying up there! It’s a regular meeting of the birds! My goodness!” (Mohanty 48)

Earlier Tarun was restricted to his own self but the vastness of the whole cosmos with its elements reflecting each other strip him off his individuality, merges him with the infinite components around. Being in the city he has always considered his existence as too meagre and unimportant, on the other hand in Puri he feels he is also a substantial part of this whole creation, “he feels tangibly connected to everyone he sees. Not just people. The sky, the light, wind, trees, animals. He belongs everywhere. He is powerful. ... Without them he would have been incomplete; without him creation would be unfulfilled. He is necessary” (Mohanty 15). All the greenery and extensiveness brings him contentment as well as tranquility therefore, he like a child, watches everything in amazement, “[l]aughing he blinked his eyes, feeling the powerful current surge into him as he stood open-doored, soaking up the experience” (11). His mind opens with the ecstasy of life overflowing around him, which he feels has been created to provide him bliss as he exclaims with wonder, “Joy! joy!” , visualizing the scene which was just a fantasy for him living in those pigeon holes in the city (14). John Muir in *Or National Parks* feels elated that people of civilization are slowly realizing the worth of nature:

Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. (1)

As Tarun Roy passes besides the sea in the rickshaw, he feels a sudden surge of power inside him forgetting his life in the city that is not only controlled but also calculative demanding sacrifice at every step. Bound to a limited space with few people he has always hoped for a life of courage, passion and liberty which he finds in Puri:

Tarun Roy, seated comfortably in the rickshaw, was being driven mad by the sea. Fanned by the cool breeze; no scars, no wounds, only strength overflowing, producing an overpowering excitement. ... Something wonderful is happening there. A vast motion, a vast freedom-a vast adventure; something he had dreamt of once, in some forgotten lifetime; such power he had longed to possess. (Mohanty 17)

Even when he was at his place in Calcutta, nature influenced him significantly. As a result he felt emancipated sweeping away all his apprehensions with the rumbling of the clouds and the heavy downpour, but as soon as he reaches back to those “marble casting”, the same fear, worries and tensions start tormenting him again (Mohanty 18). Though his life in the city has taught him to compute and make estimations about everything beforehand, it has never directed him towards the healing power of nature apart from the warmth that it can provide. Mohanty advocates that true understanding and evolution takes place when the individual starts comprehending nature, at the same time he visualizes his identity as inclusive of the whole universe where his

narrow arithmetic holds no value against this realization. A change comes over him as this “cosmic awareness filled his being, driving away sorrow, all regret, filling him with boundless compassion” (18). He feels that there is a soul in every object around him that manifests its lively presence in him as “[h]e gazed and gazed. The individual soul mingling with the universal” (19). Tarun Roy is so ecstatic with the feeling of smell, touch, music of the cool breeze, sight of the sky and the sea, that he even forgets about his own physical existence:

From the contact of body against body he rose once again into the sky, from this end to the other, trailing the flocks of gulls that skimmed the waves. A little later the west turned pale red, pale orange and yellow, with flex of many other mysterious colours; young, tender, burgeoning colours. Soft, soft, music; the gentle thrumming of the *tabla* under the tips of sweet fingers. He listens rapturously. (Mohanty 19)

Tarun Roy’s wife, Kantimoyee is also frustrated with the city life that lacks any kind of harmony or balance and comforts her husband who is agonized at the thought of his work and stress back in the city as she says, “Well, you may not get your two square meals but at least you’ll have sound sleep!” (Mohanty 21) and wishes for equilibrium in the mechanical life of the city. Olson and Backes also advocate that there is dire need of connecting with nature as drifting away from it adversely affects mankind:

City life is artificial. Because artificiality leads to a sense of unreality and frustration, unhappiness often results. That is the price a people pays for high technological success, and that is the reason an intelligent, thinking people knows that unless it can break away and renew its contact with a slow-moving natural philosophy, it will lose its perspective and forget simplicity and wholesomeness. (66)

Not only Tarun is infatuated by the cosmic display but other people present there are equally transported to a level where they are relishing their life fully away from the hubbub. Similarly Chhalana, daughter of Tarun Roy is so captivated by the movements in the sea that she is lost in singing all alone and is “[j]umping, frisking, clapping, attracting many eyes, she shouts ‘Oh how wonderful! Wonderful!’” (Mohanty 23). She is fully contented and has forgotten the complexities of her existence. Everyone including Tarun Roy and his family are so awestruck by the world outside that they never even notice the least significant things including the debris as if they have never felt the wonder of this natural beauty and have kept complaining about the emptiness in their lives. The silent reverberation of the sea and sand provides them that calming and soothing effect that they earlier used to get out of *birisand* cigarettes and have totally forgotten about any kind of intoxication as “they stood silently in the dark, palms placed in other palms, gazing out at the sea, listening to the sea echo their own heart-beats, breathing in deeply” (25). Advocating the healing potential of living in co-existence with nature Olson and Backes state:

We also know that if we are to retain our contentment and balance, then we must never lose our contact with the earth, never forget the pioneer traditions of independence and resourcefulness under primitive conditions, never for a moment exchange the philosophy of the backwoods settler and Indian fighter for the comparative ease of the modern city. (68)

Nature in the form of sky, moon, breeze and sand also becomes a medium of connecting him with his ancestors without whom he always feels alone and as he recalls that they have also been alive under the same moon, sun and have trodden on the same sand, he feels very close to them. The cool breeze makes him feel as if

his grandmother is near him and is stroking him fondly making him feel secure and loved as “[h]e felt no fear. His eyes were fixed on the sea where, amid the deepest joy, darkness gave birth to light, rolled it towards the sand, gave new birth again. He was with his dearest ancestors” (Mohanty 39).

Emerson shares his experience of immense satisfaction on finding oneness with the Supreme Being narrated in his own words, “Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God”(13). Visualizing the vast sea and sky, Tarun in the similar manner senses that the two are merging with each other. He realizes that he himself has also lived in an illusion throughout his life about his separate identity and now he thinks that there is no such individual self. There was darkness in his life due to this ignorance however the sea gives him new hope. He comprehends himself becoming one with the universal existence where everyone is alike without any distinctions:

He doesn't exist; he never has existed. Only the all-encompassing Void, the Eternal present, the Great Bubble. He had once assumed a shape, assumed a name- Tarun Roy. Otherwise he was only Man, entirely Man. His past had been consigned to that cave and now his present too was about to enter it. All differences, of setting or character, language or caste, were lost in that Great Ocean. (Mohanty 79)

Tarun further observes how a little dog is enjoying while playing with waves giving expression of happiness and fulfillment living in the moment without any fear for future unlike the humans at the beach who remain tense unnecessarily. He also visualizes a variety of patterns on sand made by the wind and small creatures carrying sand heaps to merge with other piles of sand. So many people and crabs visit the beach where lots of dead fish, sea-shells or other uncountable articles are thrown there by waves. No one can guess about the arrival or departure of anybody or anything which makes Tarun apprehend that with time all circumstances, favourable or unfavourable will pass. Further it makes him assimilate that everything is transitory, with time it comes to an end and new is created which inspires him to cherish what he has in hand ignoring all negative thoughts:

Wherever one looks, the waves are rising in mountains and valleys, row upon row; walking, leaping on to the sand. This too will pass. Tarun Roy tells himself; this is not the end. All that one sees will disappear; what is not there yet will come and disappear too, in its turn. Profit will vanish and so will loss. (Mohanty 76)

Carson and Linda in an article “The Real World Around Us” in *Lost Woods* has also tried to illustrate the therapeutic value of nature which teaches patience and positivity to a number of hairdressers, fisherman, musicians, scholars and scientists who had lost all their strength and hope. These people express their views to Rachel through their letters about reaffirming their belief that sooner or later their problems will get solved:

In contemplating “the exceeding beauty of the earth” these people have found calmness and courage. For there is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of birds; in the ebb and flow of the tides; in the folded bud ready for the spring. There is something infinitely healing in these repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.(Carson and Linda 250-251)

Similarly Kantimoyee, is lost in her thoughts about her past with insufficient means and analyzing the health and behaviour of people around her. When she comes in contact with natural beauty contrary to her restricted

city life, she rises higher out of herself, reaching the sky, becomes a part of the setting sun. She observes only vastness and newness everywhere and man being a part of it. Different images and shapes in the darkness without any differences of name, colour, creed, language or nation make her realize that so many people visit Puri and depart yet they are all alike in the same vast space and feel at peace without any complaint of suffering, tiredness or grumbling. She gets influenced by the cosmic beauty so much that even from her hotel room she wants to hold the sea shining in the moonlight which helps her keep all other thoughts at bay. She vehemently wants to merge in the sea rejecting all man made distinctions:

[S]he gazed and gazed at the moonlit sea, as though she was planning to eat up the moon and the thought had driven everything else out of her mind. This was the taste of life! Devouring the moon, feeding on the setting sun; sucking up the moon's light into one's being, like one's own breath. Feeding on light and wind. The mind flew ever upwards, higher and higher. ... Her mind grew heavy and wet with tenderness; she wanted the whole world to be happy. Impulse of sacrifice rose within her like a tide. (Mohanty 116)

Chhalana, although young and only child of her parents, is leading a life of insecurities and uncertainties in a city where so many people live yet they feel isolated. On her trip to Puri along with her parents, as she sits facing the sea on the beach she feels all her life that she has lived: all the moments and relationships as a mere illusion. She hasn't lived at all. She thinks she doesn't even know her self. She perceives that life of everyone in the city is similar to her. Everyone is oblivious of their own existence, living mechanically. But sitting in front of the moving waves, she realizes she is living, conscious of every minute thing in front of her. She rises from her individual self which had narrowed down her existence, merging herself with the entire cosmos with nothing but feeling of love for all forms of life:

No longer prisoner to her body. She too was a spreading light, like the dark sky now smeared with crimson. Mysterious. A stir in the pulse of infinite Nature. She felt herself aspiring for the happiness of all; not just her own. She was benign, like the Mother. She could draw away all sorrows. Withering plants turned green at the touch of her feet; the desert bloomed. Each atom in her being was filled with the desire to serve. Her happiness lay in sacrifice. New dreams sparkled within her; she existed in a new dimension. (Mohanty 126)

Thoreau in *Walden* expresses his own contact with nature as he states, "I experienced sometimes that the sweetest and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature" (83). Chhalana, whose holiday in Puri is almost over, once again gets engrossed in her thoughts about city and its problems, sufferings faced by people, their resentment in the form of aggression, where wealth is considered the basis of individual's prosperity and values that provides only a suffocating atmosphere to the city dwellers. She diverts her attention towards the moon to which she has looked up for hope or direction since her childhood. She smiles looking at the moon. Surprised and thrilled to see the moon smiling back at her she feels at ease and quite comfortable. She espies that with the help of moon she is able to go beyond her worries to enjoy the beautiful life away from ignorance. She reflects that moon has often guided her towards different spheres due to which she finds her new realization:

The dark cave of despair had vanished; she had emerged into the light, thrown off her shackles. She realized once again: She was in Puri with her parents; here there was no anxiety. The sea was before her, sparkling in the moonlight: how beautiful! ... She could feel the last remains of her sorrow being drained away; the moon glittered within her; the tide was rising. Time and again, the influences of surrounding nature had entered her life, participated in contemplations of her free mind, guided her ahead of her own tastes and values and given her new hope and strength. (Mohanty 129)

Finally towards the end of his visit at Puri Tarun Roy undergoes a complete transformation pondering over the fluidity of life and realizing that his soul is immortal being a part of the whole creation. Awareness dawns upon him that his soul is “indestructible” and “free” (Mohanty 177). He stands there completely satisfied. As his wife and daughter ask him what he wants to carry home; some relic or buy any other item from Puri, he simply says that he will take only sand with him. There is nothing more precious to him than that. Peace and contentment overflows his being as he contemplates:

This brief play of worldly house-keeping will end, and the clay image will be immersed in the river. All the plotting and planning, all the throat-slitting, is only for this brief hour; then, nothing. This too could have been joyful. So it will be. His mind overflowed with peace. He was startled to find that the sea had washed his feet clean and gently moved away. His heart bursting with peace and self-confidence he stood on the shore, staring for a moment into space—a solitary human figure beside the limitless ocean. (Mohanty 177)

Biman Babu, an insurance agent, very social and friendly, yet very calculative, often visits the beach in Puri in search of his customers. He is very depressed at the destruction caused by the advancement and progress that paves way only to terrible death. He also thinks about the consequences of anger, discrimination on the basis of colour, caste, avarice, self-concern when man crosses all limits due to which even the great civilizations have come to an end. He feels so tormented that he wants to divert his attention to something palliative. Earlier Biman Babu was reproving of the people and their purpose of coming to the sea, finding no importance of anything there but that day he stands at the sea like other people whom he considered only wasting their time, looking at the sea in full admiration and reverence. Exalting about nature’s value to mankind Thoreau states, “We need the tonic of wilderness” (187). The ocean that is the end line of land, teaches him to be selfless, not to be possessive and egoistic besides the waves that are rolling, rising, falling, halting continuously are helpful in cleaning out Biman’s brain of anguishes, bringing renewal and awakening:

Pride vanished somewhere; the defects, the sense of injury and the memory of loss; the mind grew quite. Night fell; the moon rose, and the worldly Biman Babu sat entranced, unable to leave. No skepticism or ideology here; no personal motives. Only the thrill of simple contact. As though the sea was someone intimate. All he wanted was to stand at its edge and look, sometimes touch; to listen to its voices. ... How lucky one is to be alive, he thought. At this moment there is life; there is the moonlight, the sea. There is joy. Who cares what lies beyond? (Mohanty 148-49)

Mohanty has strongly condemned the artificial life of civilization which does not provide any kind of freshness, open space, natural environment and pure food. Their life is dependent on technology for their health,

entertainment and other daily chores which compels them to struggle for survival, providing no relief or comfort.

He laments at the miserable condition of the city dwellers:

He could see them now. They sat surrounded by clouds of blue cigarette smoke in the glare of electric lights. There was no moon here to provide light; only street lamps. No fresh breeze; only whirring electric fans; no rivers, only municipal taps. Here man depends on machines for survival. He knows the kind of lives they live: vegetable oil instead of *ghee*; synthetic foods packaged in cellophane; vitamins in phials. Admiring moving pictures on a screen instead of nature's glories. (Mohanty 99)

Life of civilization devoid of the touch of nature has been described as encapsulated, depressed, alienated and lacking vitality. Nature lends a ray of hope to these spiritless lives, connecting them with life around, providing ecstasy and making them rise above the narrow walls of self to realize the higher truth of life. Gopinath Mohanty, being a true lover of humanity and nature has conveyed his viewpoint lucidly that nature has the ability to make mankind achieve the state of fulfilment and wholeness.

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