Lonely Lives and Unseen Struggles: Exploring the Depths of Isolation through the Lens of Indic Knowledge in a Few of Satyajit Ray's Standalone Short Stories

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Abstract—**This paper will deviate from the assembly-line interpretation of the term indigenous with a specific *jan-jaati* and look at the term 'indigenous' from a socio-cultural standpoint, with time, location, habitation and hence, class being its principal markers. Consequently, it would delve into the moral and psychological complexities of the indigenous community of the post-independence Bangali *''bhadralok','* In his fictional world, Ray unveiled a few *'bhadralok',* s and the weathered terrain of their minds, where moral turpitude exists in an uneasy truce with uprightness, arising from an epistemological position rooted to this land. As Uddalak Mukherjee refers to them as 'Twilight Men,' which will be explored in this paper concerning the psychological and epistemological identity of the average middle-class *Bangali* ('60s–'80s), its locus in a changing socio-cultural mindscape and its functioning within the enthalpy of their 'own' knowledge system. Patol Babu dreams of fleeting stardom, while elderly Pintu'r Dadu seeks to prove his musical talent to his grandson. Among the young, Shibu turns to *'pagla'* Photik for help against his *'rakkhosh'* Math teacher, while heartbroken Tipu mourns the loss of his cherished *'roopkathā'* books—another casualty of his Math teacher. That *kalpanā* and *vijnāna* can coexist may be alien to Western theories of objective knowledge, and Ray subverts that very colonial sense of superiority embedded in Modern (Western) science through his eccentric adolescents. Ray's *'bhadralok',* often finds himself at a crossroads between his svabhāva and the lure of materialism stemming from mithyā and saṃsārikamāyā. *Lobha* pitted against *bodha* and *saṃskāra* egg him on towards conflict. Thus, despite persuasion, Asmanjo Babu refuses to part with his dog. The eternal *ātmān* (*sat-chitt-ānanda*) manifests in Ray's Saddananda, the lonesome boy finding wonders in the tiniest of nature's living creatures.**

Key Words: *'bhadralok',* Twilight Men, *Saṃskāra, Roopkathā, Kalpanā, Vijnāna*

I. IN SEARCH OF THE INVISIBLE SELF: SITUATING THE *'BHADRALOK',* IN AN INDIGENOUS EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK:

"The word 'indigenous' is an adjective used for a person, language, culture, or some aspect of culture– and it's a word I do not capitalise." – Georgina Stewart (Educational Philosophy and Theory 740 – 743, 2018).

This paper aims to deviate from the assembly-line interpretation of the term indigenous with a specific *jan-jaati* and it would choose to look at the term 'indigenous' from a socio-cultural standpoint, with time, location, habitation and hence, class being its principal markers. The paper would therefore strive to delve into the moral and psychological complexities of the indigenous community of the post-independence Bangali *''bhadralok', ',* and this would be done through Satyajit Ray's characters abounding in the pages of his short stories (excluding his Felu-Da and Shonku tales). His anthologies *'Ek Dojon Goppo'* (1970), *'Aro Ek Dojon'* (1976), *'Aro Baro'* (1981), *'Ebaro Baro'* (1984), *'Bah! Baro'* (1986), *'Ek-er Pithhey Dui' (1988)* and *'Jobbor Baro'* (1990), each a collection of twelve short stories, unveiled a few *'bhadralok'*, s (affectionately termed 'Babu' by Ray) and the weathered terrain of their minds, where moral turpitude exists in an uneasy truce with uprightness, arising from an epistemological position rooted to this land. These individuals — not Ray's celebrated detective or scientist — are, as Uddalak Mukherjee terms them, Ray's 'Twilight Men'. This very twilight zone will be explored in this paper concerning the psychological and epistemological identity of the average middle-class *Bangali* from the 1960s to the 1980s, its locus in a changing socio-cultural landscape, and its functioning within the context of their knowledge system. Ray's *'bhadralok',* doesn't inhabit a specific geography that is dissociated from the urban landscape. He embodies the cultural, socioeconomic and hence, psychological implications of being a middle-class individual in that particular time and space, and he becomes a 'placeholder' of an entire milieu of unobtrusive men trudging along their humdrum paths in a rapidly changing nation

"I borrow the idea of 'placeholder' from Mathematics to describe the concept of 'indigenous', in the sense that 'indigenous' is a placeholder for any of many specific identity names", argues Georgina Stewart in her article "What does 'indigenous' mean, for me?" (Educational Philosophy and Theory, p. 740). On similar lines, my assessment of the term indigenous would rest with the analysis of a select group of Ray's 'unheroic' protagonists, as silent middle-class 'placeholders' of an Indic system of *gyaana* and bodha, functioning within the bindings of two decades at the throes of the impending (American) Globalisation in the early '90s.

Ray was observed stating in an interview, "Somehow I feel that an ordinary person– man in the street, if you like – is a more challenging subject for exploration than people in the heroic mould. It is the half shades, the hardly audible notes that I want to capture and explore." Thus, the elderly Rontu'r Dadu tries to 'prove' his credentials as a musician to his grandson, and the timid Ashamanjo Babu wonders at what fame a 'special' mongrel could bring him. Among the younger ones, a helpless Shibu turns to *pagla* Photik to save himself from his *'rakkhosh'* Mathematics teacher, and a heartbroken Tipu rues the loss of his 'non-scientific' *'roopkathā'* books at the hands of, again, his Mathematics teacher. That *kalpanā* and *vijnāna* can coexist may be alien to Western theories of objective knowledge, and Ray subverts that very colonial sense of superiority embedded in Modern (Western) science through his eccentric adolescents.

II. THE ADULT LONER AND HIS ANXIETIES:

Satyajit Ray's short stories frequently explore the inner lives of solitary individuals, particularly adult loners grappling with existential issues. These characters navigate a world that is both ordinary and captivating, revealing deep-rooted fears beneath the surface. Ray skilfully merges the everyday with the supernatural, amplifying the emotional and psychological struggles of his lonely protagonists. He examines themes of solitude, alienation, and identity through subtle narrative twists and reflective monologues. Ray portrays the anxieties of these adult loners, highlighting the silent turmoil that exists behind their seemingly ordinary lives. Uddalak Mukherjee noticed a pattern in these characters, whom he found belonging to a grey zone of human psyche and called them "Ray's Twilight Men".

We begin our exploration of Ray's 'Twilight Adults' borrowing the term from Uddalak Mukherjee's article "Feluda and Co.: Satyajit Ray and his Twilight Men", featuring the character of Amiya Kanti Lahiri from the short story "Rontu'r Dadu". Set on a soul-searching pilgrimage, this old man desperately sought evidence to assure his cynical grandson that the latter's gifted vocals stemmed from his 'biological inheritance' of his grandfather's exquisite singing skills. Consequently, despite battling a failing memory, this old man embarked on a futile quest to find a vinyl record he likely had recorded in his younger days. His delusion is shattered when he learns that the song had been recorded by another man with the same name as his. He had to confront this truth before his grandson, who was already skeptical that his grandfather could also be a singer. After this revelation, it became inconsequential to tell Rontu that the old man had a fleeting glimpse of memory, convincing him that he had missed recording his own song due to unavoidable circumstances. Although heartbroken, this realisation (*upalabdhi*) ultimately allowed him to make peace with himself. According to the *Vaisheshika* School of Philosophy, this *'upalabdhi'* refers to perception that is entirely independent of tangibility. The old man's *'bodha'* led him to the 'perceiving-act' (*upalabdhi-kriya-karana*); while the main instrument of this 'perceiving-act' was his passion for music. Thus, his inner struggle was resolved at the moment he became convinced that the reason for his grandson's musical genius was his genetic contribution. The awareness of the truth (*bodha*) thus became more significant to him than tangible proof of it.

Ray's *'bhadralok'*, often finds himself at a moral and psychological crossroads, torn between his *svabhāva*—his intrinsic nature— and the lure of materialism born from *mithyā* (illusion) and *sāṃsārika māyā* (worldly entanglement). In this internal tug-of-war, *lobha* (greed) is pitted against *bodha* (awareness), while deep-seated *saṃskāras* (cultural and moral imprints) propel him toward a state of inner conflict. This existential tension is not merely circumstantial but rooted in a metaphysical struggle for self-realization. In this context, it is fitting to recall the verse from *Ātmabodha* (29): "*Svabodhe nānyabodhecchā bodharūpatayātmanaḥ. Na dīpasyānyadīpecchā yathā svātmaprakāśane*," which means, 'A self-luminous lamp does not require another lamp to illuminate it." This metaphor underscores Ray's subtle philosophical undercurrent—true awareness arises from within, not from external validations or possessions.

A similar trajectory can be stressed in the journey of Patol Babu in "Patol Babu Film Star". In this story, Satyajit Ray presents yet another of his 'Twilight Men'—a modest, middle-class *'bhadralok'*, grappling with the erosion of his self-worth in a rapidly modernising world. Once employed in a steady clerical job, Patol Babu's life is derailed by war-induced layoffs, forcing him into a series of failed ventures. His fleeting opportunity to appear in a film as a pedestrian, uttering only a single word—"Oh"—might seem trivial to a casual observer, yet it becomes a profound moment of self-realisation. Initially dejected by the meagreness of his role, a memory of his mentor's advice rekindles Patol's commitment to his craft: no role is too small, and dignity lies in performance, not in reward. Thus, he rehearses that lone syllable with sincerity, finding multiple shades of meaning in it. In his short-lived yet intense immersion into the act, Patol Babu experiences tripti—fulfilment through karma—and walks away from the shoot without accepting payment, having transcended the commodification of his art.

This quiet assertion of dignity situates Patol Babu among Ray's *'bhadralok'*, who, rather than succumbing to the materialism of *sāṃsārikamāyā*, rediscover a rooted, indigenous understanding of self-worth through *bodha* and *saṃskāra*. His triumph, like that of Ashamanjo Babu or Amiya Kanti Lahiri, lies not in external validation, but in a deeply personal *upalabdhi*—a realisation that his ephemeral moment on screen was less about stardom and more about honouring his craft. His choice to reject remuneration is emblematic of the *'bhadralok'*s silent resistance to the encroaching consumerism and superficiality of modern life.

In this introspective journey, Ray subtly critiques the Western cinematic-industrial complex while elevating the spiritual ethos of the native Indic knowledge system, where the karma performed with sincerity eclipses any material gain. Thus, Patol Babu found comfort and completion in his tiny fleeting moment of stardom, which to the objective eye would be rather imperceptible. Rather than being star-struck by the *saṃskāra* māyā of the tinsel town, he poured his heart and soul into the one dialogue (or non-dialogue, to be precise) that was given to him, and attained satisfaction (tṛpti) in the 'karma' itself.

A deeper exploration of the middle-class Bengali '*bhadralok's* rejection of the Western materialism is observed in the character of Ashamanjo Babu from "Ashamanjo Babu'r Kukur", where the otherwise timid protagonist refused the materialistic lure of a fat sum of money from a rich American businessman, in exchange for his special mongrel. Standing at the crossroads of his 'swa-bhava' and the lure of materialism stemming from '*mithya*' and *'maya'*, Ashamanjo Babu remained unfettered; steadfast with his dog, a common stray (and not a fancy breed), hence, underpinning Ray's critique of the consumerist bully in the erstwhile USA. Being true to his civilizational ethos, Ashamanjo Babu chose Dharma over Artha (as goes the triad *Dharma > Artha > Kāma*), just as Yudhisthira refused to part with his companion, the *shwān*, even after Indra's repeated cajoling; even at the cost of access to *Vaikuntha* that promises a partaking in the eternal indulgence of the hedonistic pleasures of *lobha* and *bhoga*.

Yudhisthira said–

"Mā me śriyā saṅgamanaṁ tayā astu

yasyāḥ kṛte bhaktajana tyajeyam."

(Mahāprasthānika Parva, Mahābhārata, Section 3)

This śloka exemplifies Yudiṣṭhira's steadfast commitment to righteousness and loyalty. He values the principles of compassion and duty over personal gain, even when offered the highest celestial rewards. This act is a testament to his character and the ethical ideals upheld in the epic. Ashamanjo Babu was more than content in having his 'ordinary' canine friend by his side; his middle-class *'bhadralok'*, existence didn't view a monetary impetus as an absolute necessity- a value that has completely been turned on its head post the '90s, in the context of India as a whole, and the Bangali consciousness too. This change of thought, this shift from the ideal to the material was brought about by the rise of a more suave class of post-globalisation, urbanised Bengalis that rose to prominence in the 2000s. Ashamanjo Babu and Patol Babu represent a bygone ethic, a spirit of *santosha* that has ceased to exist after the influx of the gluttonised 'Yeh dil maange more' motto of consumerist aspirations.

Ray had further borrowed from the Mahabharata when he wrote the story of "Khagam". *Khagama* in the *Mahābhārata* was a Brāhmaṇa who cursed his friend Sahasrapāt and turned him into a snake. In Ray's short story, the sadhu Imli Baba transformed Dhurjoti Babu into a snake to punish the latter for murdering his pet snake Balkishan. However, beneath the seething 'body-horror' in the vivid description of the gradual and painful transformation of Dhurjoti Babu into a snake, and the allusion to Mahābhārata , Ray's real intention was to take a subtle dig at the 'objective Science' of the Western world (a cornerstone of Western Atheism). Ray pitted his protagonist against Nature, which like the Sthalapurāṇa of the place asserted the supremacy of the mystical indigenous *Kathā* over the standardised Western Rationalism based on the 'binaries' of true or false.

III. THE CHILD LONER AND HIS FANTASIES: THE CHILD LONER AND HIS FANTASIES:

Psychologists have frequently noted that conflicts within an individual's behaviour often signify the level of maladjustment. Daydreaming and escapism are examples of how fantasy can serve as a mechanism to help individuals manage their suffering. However, when Ray's characters sought refuge from the anxieties of the nascent materialistic world surrounding them, they found solace in the indigenous realms of Bengal's native folklores and fairytales (*lokokathā, upokathā* and *roopkathā*). The author's personal experience of having been nourished by a bountiful supply of roopkathā in his younger days, not only due to his Bengali middle-class background but also because of the family legacy of the Rays of Garpar— who single-handedly took on the responsibility of enriching the childhoods of many generations of Bengali children through the publication of their children's magazine Sandesh— must have made *roopkathā* an obvious choice. Often recounted by the elderly female family members, the charm of a feminine touch that has nurtured these oral tales for generations lent them a soothing and embalming quality that allowed his young, anxiety-ridden loners to wage a battle against their regular existential crises.

The first story from *Galpo Eksho Ek* that deserves mention in this context is "Shibu Aar Rakkhosh'er Kathā". Interestingly, the title of this short story showed a preference for the domain of '*roopkathā*' by its incorporation of the word '*kathā*' indicating the oral tradition of native folklores, rather than the more mundane choice of the word '*kāhinī*'. Shibu, the young and imaginative loner, survived in the boring and practical world of post-independence Calcutta, which was indeed a world filled with thwarted dreams, unemployment, false promises and broken institutions. Ray often recorded various snippets of this anarchic world through his cinema. In such a world of adult frustrations, it was obvious that there were not many adults who could empathise with the overtly imaginative preview of this young boy. Neither did the writer mention any young friends of Shibu who shared his love for the '*roopkathā*'. However, there was one friend cum mentor who made a connection with Shibu. He was pāglā Fotik.

Fotik, though dismissed as a lunatic (Pāglā) by adults, found an eager admirer in Shibu, who began to idolize him. Everything Fotik said seemed attractive to Shibu, who also had a natural inclination towards fantasy. Thus, when Fotik pointed out an anomaly in the physical appearance of the new maths teacher, Janardan Babu, Shibu couldn't ignore it. Janardan Babu's extra-large canines bore a striking resemblance to those of a carnivorous animal capable of tearing flesh or the (*Rakkhosh*) monsters found in (*roopkathā*) fairy tales. Gradually, other features of Janardan Babu, such as his hunched back, red eyes, and the habit of wiping saliva from his lips with his hands, convinced Shibu of the teacher's sinister nature.

Gradually, Shibu's fear of the maths teacher began to affect his grades in the subject. Interestingly, Dr Dilipkumar Guin observed in his article, "Psychological Perspective of Mathematics Phobia" that maths phobia was a serious concern in the field of education, and that a bad experience with teachers of mathematics could also foster anxiety in Mathematics (Tobias). Nevertheless, this failure of Shibu allowed Janardan to persuade his parents to arrange private tutoring. Shibu knew that meeting Janardan alone could be dangerously perilous. In his desperation, he turned to his mentor, Fotik, seeking a solution. Fotik informed Shibu, after reviewing the teacher's birth chart, that Janardan was not a complete monster but a half-monster known as a 'Pirindi Rakkhosh,' who could only be defeated by killing the largest fish in the vicinity. It was commonly believed that a monster's soul was hidden outside its body, so Shibu accepted Fotik's calculations without question. Fotik explained that, in Janardan's case, his soul resided in the belly of a large fish recently caught by Shibu's uncle from the Saral Dighi.

Shibu had to secretly remove the fish from their kitchen and present it to Fotik. Fotik then extracted a moist stone from its belly and gave it to Shibu as an amulet. The more drastic step of killing the monster could be avoided, as a 'Pirindi Rakkhosh' would automatically revert to human form after their fifty-fourth birthday, and Janardan was only four days away from reaching that age. In the meantime, the fish stone effectively protected Shibu from Janardan, and Shibu's maths grades began to improve dramatically, allowing him to achieve full marks once again. Thus, operating far away from the lairs of Western medicine and psychoanalysis, young Shibu's rescue was possible in the native realms of *roopkathā*, though the materialistic adult world remained unaware of this.

Interestingly, 'Kathā', 'Ākhyānika' and 'Ākhāyana' together constitute the set of 'Akhyana- jati' or the class of narratives in Sanskrit grammar. Dandin in his treatise *Kāryadarśana* stated that both 'kathā' and 'Ākhyānika' are narrative structures designed to tell 'truths''. The Hindu School of logic further supports the idea of the multiplicity of truths to reach the epistemology of knowledge. Hence, Shibu in Ray's short story could easily rely on the truth he learnt from *pāglā* Fotik, though it could be different from the 'objective truth' of the reader.

The second story from *Galpo Eksho Ek*, which chronicles a similar conflict in the life of yet another young, imaginative loner and his math teacher, is "Anker Sir, Golapi Babu Aar Tipu." Unlike Shibu, who found a human mentor providing a fantastical solution to his anxieties, Tipu encountered a friend from the realm of fantasy who descended to Earth to address his mortal troubles.

No adult had ever taken the time to inquire about Tipu's feelings, so he was taken aback when a pink man appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, and asked if he was sad. Tipu's experience in the modern world had led him to believe that deep emotions were beyond his understanding and that he, as a young boy, should not assert his will against the authority of his elders who controlled his life. However, upon learning that Golapi Babu had been exiled from his planet for a transgression and could only return if he resolved Tipu's sadness, Tipu promised to call on him if he ever felt unhappy.

Interestingly this entire conversation happened between the two in the absence of a witness. Thus, there always remained a possibility that young Tipu had imagined the presence of Golapi Babu as a benefactor who had solely appeared to help him out of the monotony of his mundane life. Psychologist Lawrence Kutner mentioned in his book Insights for Parents: Midnight Monsters and Imaginary Companions that "Imaginary friends are an integral part of many children's lives. They provide comfort in times of stress, companionship when they are lonely, someone to boss around when they feel powerless, and someone to blame for the broken lamp in the living room. Most importantly, an imaginary companion is a tool young children use to help them make sense of the adult world."(p.48).

The anxiety of surviving in the lonely and meaningless modern world not only affected the adults but also percolated into the psyche of young children like Tipu. Thus, despite acknowledging the fact that young children are prone to having imaginary friends, Tipu's Golapi Babu could also be a reflection of his psychopathology turned into a physical reality, just as Marjorie Taylor and Anne Mannering explain through their article, "Of Hobbes and Harvey: The imaginary Friend Created by Children and Adults" (Play and Development: evolutionary Sociocultural, and Functional Perspectives. pp. 227-245).

Further, Golapi Babu was an adult male with the dwarfed appearance of a pink-coloured child from an alien world. The authors of the above-mentioned article, also observed that "… many imaginary companions (16%) were not regular children in that they had special or magical characteristics- they could fly, change shapes, exert special powers- or they had unusual special characteristics like blue skin and tiny size." (p.231). Noticeably, the skin colour of Tipu's Golapi Babu was pink, showing his child-like preference for the softer colour pallets, rather than the malicious green colour associated with evil aliens in general SF literature of the world.

Tipu also tried to make sense of Golapi Babu's appearance by comparing him with either 'Ram Khel Tilak Singh'- a Bengali version of the German folklore character of Rumpelstiltskin, or 'Ghyaghyashur' or one of the seven dwarfs of Snow white. This showed that the child was subconsciously aware that his pink friend had his origin in the realms of the fairy tales. Furthermore, as enthusiasts of Ray's creative world, it would be difficult for the readers to avoid finding a similarity between the pink alien friend of Tipu and the benevolent "Bhuter Raja" from *Goopy Gyen Bagha Byne* who seemed more than eager to help the two tramps out of their distress by granting them three magical boons.

Nevertheless, a few days after his meeting with Golapi Babu, a new mathematics teacher Narahari Babu entered the scene. From the very beginning, Tipu disliked the stern and angry demeanour of this man. However, things turned serious when Narahari tried to prevent Tipu from reading his favourite fairy tales. Tipu tried to protest with an argument that the mythologies also mentioned the fantastic incidences. However, Narahari brushed off the boy's logic with the counterargument that the wisdom of the ancient saints was no match for the ludicrous and meaningless ideas presented in folktales and fairy tales. He added that such archaic reading habits made Tipu suitable for a backward and rustic education at the village 'paath-shalas', and not the modern education that he was privileged with. Thus there was a conscious effort on the part of Narahari Babu to supplicate Tipu's free will with his understanding of the utilitarian world. In this, he also reflected the impact of a colonial education on him which tried to undermine Tipu's native choice of books. This conflict brought real anxiety and sadness in Tipu's life.

For a solution, Tipu remembered his pink benefactor who had promised to help him overcome his sadness. When Golapi Babu arrived and Tipu recounted his troubles, the former assured him that he would resolve the issue without directly confronting the math teacher. Interestingly, Golapi Babu's understanding of Narahari Babu was limited to Tipu's observations of the latter's actions. For instance, Golapi Babu had seen Narahari Sir while riding Pegasus, the pet horse of the local Bishnu Ram Babu, just as Tipu had seen.

Nevertheless, Golapi Babu kept his promise and made Narahari Babu, who was perched on Pegasus, vanish into the full moon night sky, narrowly missing Tipu, who was waiting in the 'Hamlatunir Maath' for his pink benefactor to resolve his problem. After the incident, Golapi Babu instructed Tipu to return home. Tipu later learned that Narahari Babu had spent three days in the local hospital after the flight. On the fourth day, Narahari returned for another private conversation with Tipu's father, after which Tipu was joyfully reunited with all his beloved storybooks. Tipu never saw Golapi Babu again, who had evidently returned home after resolving the issue. Tipu's performance in maths class improved, and Pegasus also returned to his human master. The only lasting change was in Narahari Babu's outlook—he seemed to develop an appreciation for Tipu's love of fantasy.

Thus, in both Shibu and Tipu's stories, we observe a conflict between the Western ideas of materialism and worldly success—through a mechanical submission to the world of mathematics and science and a native affinity to the realms of fantasy. The eternal debate between the empirical Science and the omnipotence of *Vijnāna* (*Vishesh- Jñāna*)-encompassing everything like *Tantra*, *Yoga*, Ayurveda or even myths within the realms of pursuit-able Knowledge (*Jñāna*), has been very subtly touched upon in the unfolding of these narratives. In blending science and fiction, Ray has borrowed elements from the horizon of myths and fantasy, and seamlessly attached them to the native legends of unknown benevolent figures. Consequently, Ray subverts the colonial sense of superiority embedded in modern (Western) science through his eccentric adolescent characters.

Finally, we come down to the last young misfit on my list who would once again struggle to make meaning of the adult world of post-independence Bengal that he survived in. Saddananda from 'Sadanander Khude Jagat' is a quintessential loner, as evident from the title of the story. The eternal *ātmān* (*sat-chit-ānanda*) manifests in Ray's Saddananda, the lonesome boy finding wonders in the tiniest of nature's living creatures. According to Vedanta philosophy, *sat-chit-ānanda* represents the three fundamental attributes of Brahman: bliss (*ānanda*), consciousness (chit), and truth (sat). A state of perfect being, perfect consciousness, and perfect bliss—the aim of spiritual realisation—is symbolized by this phrase, which embodies the ultimate truth. It also enhances our comprehension of reality by reflecting the nature of consciousness and bliss as fundamental components of existence. Thus, far away from the scope of the controlling adults around him, Saddananda had built a small and snug microcosm for himself in the company of his little friends –the ants. Unlike the two previous young children mentioned earlier in this article, Saddananda sought refuge in the company of the natural world. His friends were neither imaginary nor scraps of the adult world. Rather they inspired him with their resilience and willpower that they used to survive in the ruthless world of modern humans, despite their inconsequential existence.

Saddananda's existence was inconsequential, too. His opinion hardly mattered. He neither had the power to protest having the bitter medicines that his mother gave him when he was sick nor was he allowed to fight back the bullies like Chiku, who dared to intervene in the tranquillity of his cosy world. His nonchalant reaction to being locked up in a room by his parents, also proved that he was habituated with such ignominy and submission.

Interestingly, Saddananda's role in the life of his ant friends was beyond mere friendship. He was their saviour. Often there would be occasions where he would be required to rescue his tiny friends from drowning or the meaningless onslaught that callous humans launched on them. He was their benefactor too, who often saved their day's struggle by supplying them with food. Thus, little Saddananda enjoyed the agency and power he was granted readily in the world of his ant friends. Consequently, he knew that it was his duty to protect the ants even at the cost of upsetting the controlling adults around him. His mother could not believe her years when Saddananda readily confessed to having banged the head of Chiku against a neighbour's compound wall when the bully trampled an ant hill killing hundreds of ants. Again, when the family was busy killing the ants, Saddananda's hysterical reaction to prohibit them was accepted by the adults as a manifestation of a fever-infused delirium.

Saddananda was hospitalised soon after to control his ailment. But this led to his separation from his friends, who had no access to the speck clean hospital room perched on a high floor of the building. Saddananda was desperate to meet his friends but the doctors, nurses and the worried family members surrounded him from all corners and made the rendezvous impossible. One fine day, when the guards were a little loose and the nurse fell asleep in the room, Saddananda tip-toed towards the widow in the room, hoping to reach for the hanging mango tree branch which might allow a few of the ants to drop in. However, before he could accomplish the task, the nurse woke up and raised an alarm, claiming that the delirious boy was planning to jump off the window. Strangely enough, Saddananda never protested against this. There was an uncanny muteness that seemed to stop all communication between this boy and the adults around him. Probably because he had lost all faith in the adults, who repeatedly failed to value his emotions and experiences.

Nevertheless, this little adventure to the window had allowed two red ants to drop into the room, which Saddananda noticed later. These two red friends identified themselves as Laal Singh and Laal Chand, respectively. They had dropped in to keep their benefactor entertained while he was confined in the boring hospital room. They promptly arranged for a wrestling match to keep Saddananda occupied. However, before long the stern-faced doctor entered the room to find Laal Chand on the table, while Laal Singh escaped him cleverly. Noticing an ant on the table, the doctor wasted no time in brushing it off the table and of course, hurting the little creature immensely with the steep fall. Saddananda tried to protest, but he was pinned against the bed by the nurse while the doctor got busy checking him.

However, Laal Singh, who had managed to escape being seen, crawled into the doctor's apron and avenged the predicament of both his friends. The weird dance of the doctor, writhing with pain at the sharp ant bites, finally evoked a burst of hearty laughter from Saddananda after a prolonged and sad phase of illness. He knew that his friends had repaid the callous adults on their terms. The adult world remained unaware of this imperceptible battle and Saddananda's inconsequential victory. Nevertheless, Saddananda's sense of perfect bliss (*Ānanda*) was aided by his perfect consciousness of the 'truth' (sat) that manifested only before him.

'Ecosophy' is a term defined by the ecological self that differs from the traditional self. As Wordsworth did in "Tintern Abbey", O. Henry in "The Last Leaf" and Tagore in his "Bolai", Ray magnificently based the idea of ecosophy in Saddananda and his relationship with the ants. In the context of Vedanta and the '*Pañca-mahā-bhūta*' the connection between the 'atman' and the elements of Nature is inseparable. This was where Saddananda sought refuge. When '*Kalpanā*', '*Upalabdhi*' and '*Pravṛtti*' came together in Saddananda's consciousness, he was intricately involved in the lives of the tiny ants. This was a manifestation of Saddananda's oneness with the supreme '*Bharhman*'.

IV. PRIVATE VICTORIES IN A PUBLIC VOID: RECLAIMING MEANING THROUGH BODHA AND SAṂSKĀRA:

Thus, Satyajit Ray's 'Twilight Men' and the Adolescents were stuck between the changing sands of tradition and modernity and struggled with the worries brought on by an increasingly materialistic world. The intrusion of Western rationalism, consumerist desires, and scientific objectivity shattered their epistemic security, forcing them into existential quandaries. Rather than entirely submitting to this foreign perspective, Ray's protagonists took refuge in their own deeply established cultural ethos—whether in the mystical embrace of *roopkathā*, the spiritual consolation of Nature, or the self-affirming wisdom of traditional Indian philosophy. The elderly, like Amiya Kanti Lahiri, Ashamanja Babu and Patal Babu, found contentment in their private realisations—*upalabdhi*— where material validation became secondary to inner truth. Ashamanjo Babu's defiant rejection of Western commodification in favour of dharma over artha showcased the moral resilience of the *'bhadralok'*. Even Ray's younger protagonists, such as Shibu, Tipu and Saddananda, shielded themselves from the oppressive logic of colonial education and Western scientific absolutism by retreating into the protective realm of folklore or Nature, where 'truth' was fluid, adaptive, and deeply personal.

In the end, these people neither launched frontal challenges against Western ideas nor sought great wins against the powers of modernism. Rather, they came out triumphant in their little, private ways, deciding to ground their fears inside the embalming certainties of their knowledge systems. Their peace came from an inner connection to the eternal Indic forms of knowing—a world where 'bodha', not monetary accomplishment, determined the lines of fulfilment—not from outside approval.

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