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Exiled in the Homeland: Migration, Refuge, and Diasporic Longings in the Fiction of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay

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Abstract: *Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay's fiction, widely acclaimed for its lyrical realism and deep empathy for rural Bengal, also serves as a profound meditation on migration, displacement, and interior exile. Though his works do not employ the modern terminology of 'diaspora' or 'refugee', his protagonists often embody these very conditions—loss of homeland, precarious labour, cultural dislocation, and persistent longing. In* Pather Panchali*, the Ray family's migration, driven by economic hardship, unfolds as a painful journey from village life to urban uncertainty, marked by illness, death, and emotional deracination. Similarly, in* Aranyak*, the narrator's bureaucratic transfer to Bhagalpur's forested terrains initiates an emotional exile, wherein both land and self are alienated through ecological and moral conflict. Across his oeuvre, Bandyopadhyay depicts not spectacular migrations but slow, silent displacements rooted in caste, class, and environmental vulnerability. His affective realism expands the discourse on migration by foregrounding internal, rural, and often invisible exiles. This paper argues for a critical reappraisal of Bandyopadhyay's work as an essential archive of subcontinental migration, demonstrating how his fiction prefigures contemporary concerns in diaspora studies and offers a nuanced literary geography of movement, loss, and fractured belonging—deeply relevant to the understanding of displacement in South Asian literature.*
Keywords: *Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay, migration, internal displacement, exile, diaspora, Bengali fiction*

Introduction

Migration has often been theorised within the framework of national borders, transnational dislocations, or postcolonial diaspora. In this scholarly configuration, the refugee, the exile, and the displaced subject are frequently imagined as figures in motion across geopolitical divides, torn between memory and modernity. However, what remains largely marginalised in dominant discourse is the silent and continuous stream of internal migrations—the slow movements across forests, caste boundaries, rivers, and socio-economic thresholds that rarely leave a paper trail or command international attention. In this context, the fictional world of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay offers a profoundly relevant and underexplored literary archive. Known for his pastoral sensibility, lyrical realism, and deep humanism, Bandyopadhyay's fiction articulates the everyday displacements of the subaltern subject within colonial Bengal. His works illuminate how internal migration is not merely geographical relocation but also a complex re-negotiation of identity, memory, and belonging.

Bandyopadhyay does not dramatise displacement in overtly political or polemical terms. Instead, his narratives are grounded in the rural lifeworlds of ordinary individuals—Brahmin priests, tribal farmers, impoverished children, wandering scribes—who inhabit the margins of colonial modernity. In his seminal works like *Pather Panchali* and *Aranyak*, movement across

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space becomes an existential and epistemological condition, marking characters with a sense of emotional exile even within the contours of their homeland. The act of migration, in Bandyopadhyay's fiction, emerges not as a spectacle but as a slow, affect-laden process—one imbued with grief, nostalgia, ecological rupture, and spiritual dissonance.

It is crucial to emphasise that Bandyopadhyay's fiction predates and prefigures many of the concerns now central to refugee studies and diaspora theory. Terms like 'refugee' or 'diaspora' are never directly used in his oeuvre. Yet, his characters embody those very experiences: forced departure, estrangement from the familiar, adaptation in hostile environments, and a longing for return or restoration. His stories evoke what Edward Said called "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 173). However, in contrast to the modernist alienation typical of Western exile literature, Bandyopadhyay situates dislocation within community, ecology, and labour, thereby constructing a collective poetics of suffering and survival.

Moreover, his narratives resonate with what James Clifford defines as "dwelling-in-displacement" (Clifford 311) in diasporic consciousness, where exile is not just about loss but also about re-inhabiting the world in fractured yet meaningful ways. This is evident in how his characters adjust to new rhythms of life while carrying within them the sediment of earlier attachments. The forest in *Aranyak*, for instance, becomes both a site of estrangement and a surrogate home—a liminal space where the narrator learns to recalibrate his urban sensibility. Similarly, the journey in *Pather Panchali* is not merely a physical movement but a metaphysical descent into grief and dispossession.

The politics of space and mobility in Bandyopadhyay's fiction also invite an eco-critical and materialist reading. His prose often dwells on the relationship between land and livelihood, between environmental degradation and the precarity of labour. The characters' movements are frequently responses to the ecological violence wrought by colonial land policies, deforestation, or the failure of subsistence agriculture. Thus, his writing offers a counterpoint to urban-centric migration narratives by foregrounding what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence" (Nixon 2)—the attritional force of poverty, drought, and displacement that unfolds outside the gaze of media spectacle.

By examining Bandyopadhyay's fictional universe as a literary geography of displacement, this paper argues for his repositioning within South Asian migration literature. He must be read not merely as a chronicler of village life but as a subtle cartographer of subaltern migrations. The term 'diaspora' in his context does not denote a global scattering but an internal, psychic scattering—an 'exile in the homeland' where belonging is fragile and always deferred. This reframing not only enriches the thematic scope of diaspora studies but also decentres the hegemonic models of displacement that privilege state boundaries over affective boundaries.

In advancing this argument, the paper undertakes a close textual analysis of *Pather Panchali* and *Aranyak*, as well as selected short stories, to highlight the affective, spatial, and ecological contours of migration in Bandyopadhyay's fiction. It explores how the migrant figure is not exceptional but ubiquitous—woven into the very fabric of rural Bengal. Migration here is not a singular event but a lived condition: a state of emotional deracination that persists even amidst settlement. The focus remains on the affective realism of displacement—the textures of memory, grief, adaptation, and yearning that animate Bandyopadhyay's narratives.

In sum, the paper positions Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay as a key figure in an alternative genealogy of diaspora—a genealogy rooted not in border-crossings but in the

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intimate ruptures of internal dislocation. His fiction bears witness to the migratory undercurrents of colonial Bengal, offering a literary cartography where every river crossed and every forest traversed inscribes a story of exile. As global discourses on migration and refuge continue to be shaped by crises and catastrophes, returning to Bandyopadhyay allows us to attend to the quieter, long-term exoduses that remain embedded in the textures of everyday life. His work challenges us to expand our critical vocabularies, to see exile not just in camps and visas, but in the haunted gazes of the dispossessed who remain exiled within the nation itself.

Migration and Internal Displacement in *Pather Panchali*

Published in 1929, *Pather Panchali* is perhaps the most iconic of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novels. While it has been largely celebrated for its depiction of rural Bengal, its philosophical realism, and its emotive portrayal of childhood, the novel is also a poignant meditation on forced internal migration and the emotional consequences of uprootedness. At the centre of the novel is the Ray family, whose steady descent into poverty triggers a painful journey from the village of Nischindipur to the ancient city of Varanasi. While this migration lacks the dramatic political charge of Partition narratives or the diasporic expansiveness of transnational novels, it nonetheless encapsulates the core elements of displacement—loss, uncertainty, alienation, and the slow erosion of social belonging.

The rural setting of Nischindipur is not romanticised in the novel; it is a place where survival is tenuous, and the small joys of life exist alongside the constant shadow of economic vulnerability. Harihar, the family's patriarch, is a Brahmin priest and sometime writer who is unable to provide for his family through his inherited occupation. His failure is not moral but systemic—rooted in the economic marginalisation of traditional caste roles under colonial capitalist transformations. As a result, the family is forced to consider migration, not as a choice but as a last resort. The movement from village to city is driven by the structural failure of the rural economy, a motif that recurs across much of Bandyopadhyay's fiction.

The very title *Pather Panchali*, or *Song of the Road*, underscores the thematic centrality of movement and transition. The 'path' is not just a physical route but a metaphorical journey through pain, aspiration, and impermanence. The Ray family's decision to leave their ancestral village is the novel's turning point, marking a symbolic rupture from rootedness. In one of the most memorable and melancholic moments of the narrative, the family departs from Nischindipur with heavy hearts. As they leave, Apu and his parents look back at the house that once sheltered them, now abandoned and decaying. This backward glance mirrors the retrospective nature of exile—the inability to fully inhabit the present because the past clings with unresolved intensity.

The road, often a site of possibility in the romantic imagination, is in *Pather Panchali* fraught with hardship and loss. The journey to Varanasi is not one of social mobility but of social descent. The migration exposes the family to illness, hunger, and death—most tragically manifested in the loss of Durga, Apu's sister, whose death prefigures the final disintegration of the family's earlier life. The travel motif here becomes what Michel de Certeau calls "a spatial story" (de Certeau 115), where movement is not liberatory but traumatic. The promise of a better future remains always deferred, and what is left is a lingering sense of exile that follows Apu throughout his life, even in the sequels to the novel.

Bibhutibhushan does not offer a redemptive narrative of migration. There is no triumphant arrival, no reintegration into a new community that erases the scars of departure. Instead, the sense of displacement is internalised, particularly in Apu, who inherits the emotional residue of his family's migration. The affective weight of exile is transmitted generationally, creating what Marianne Hirsch has termed "postmemory" (Hirsch 22)—the

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experience of displacement inherited from those who directly suffered it. In later works like *Aparajito*, Apu's dislocation continues, not just across geographies but across languages, professions, and social roles. He becomes a perpetual traveller—always departing, never arriving.

It is important to note that the migration in *Pather Panchali* is not precipitated by a singular catastrophic event but by a long accumulation of systemic exclusions and ecological pressures. The family's house is frequently damaged by storms; their food supplies dwindle; medical help is unavailable; and Harihar's lack of steady income renders them increasingly vulnerable. This portrayal aligns with what Rob Nixon identifies as "slow violence" (Nixon 2)—a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but that accumulates over time, leaving behind invisible but devastating consequences. The family's departure is not heroic but desperate, reflecting the lived reality of countless rural families across Bengal who have been displaced not by war or partition, but by the slow violence of poverty and neglect.

A striking aspect of Bandyopadhyay's narrative strategy is his refusal to monumentalise the experience of migration. The Ray family does not become a metaphor for the nation, nor do they seek to articulate a collective demand for recognition. Their suffering is private, ordinary, and quiet—marked not by rage but by resignation. Yet, it is precisely this ordinariness that lends the novel its profound political charge. By focusing on the intimate and the affective, Bandyopadhyay invites the reader to see the migrant not as an abstract problem but as a human being shaped by histories, emotions, and fragile hopes.

In one moving passage, Harihar, looking at the sky after Durga's death, murmurs: "আমাদের সবই যেন দুঃখময়...আকাশটা পর্যন্ত কেমন ম্লান লাগছে" ("Everything around us seems to be filled with sorrow... even the sky appears pale") (*Pather Panchali* 241). This line captures the spiritual exhaustion that accompanies displacement—a fatigue that is not just bodily but cosmological. The loss of home reverberates across the senses, altering one's perception of the world itself. Bandyopadhyay's prose here is both restrained and evocative, allowing emotion to emerge through silence and atmosphere rather than melodrama.

Further, the representation of female displacement in the novel—especially that of Sarbajaya, Apu's mother—is equally significant. Sarbajaya's anxiety about leaving her home is compounded by the emotional labour she performs to hold the family together amidst uncertainty. She experiences migration not just as a movement through space but as a crisis of identity, as she is forced to abandon her social networks and familiar routines. Her inner conflict reflects the gendered dimensions of displacement, where women bear the brunt of emotional management even as their own needs are ignored.

The ecology of displacement is another recurring motif in the novel. The rural landscape, with its ponds, trees, fields, and footpaths, is not just a backdrop but a living presence in the narrative. When the Rays leave their village, they are not merely vacating a house—they are severing a relationship with the land itself. The novel mourns this loss in subtle ways, describing the landscape with a sensory richness that intensifies its emotional resonance. As the family departs, the text notes how the "dust rose behind them as they walked," (Bandyopadhyay 248) a simple image that evokes both movement and erasure, as if the path itself is swallowing the traces of their presence.

Thus, *Pather Panchali* offers a deeply affective account of internal migration—one that is rooted in ecological, emotional, and socio-economic realities. It dismantles the idea that migration is always about upward mobility or cosmopolitan integration. Instead, it foregrounds what it means to be exiled within one's own land—to be made foreign in the place of one's birth. In doing so, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay constructs a counter-narrative to dominant

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migration literature, privileging the rural, the slow, and the intimate over the urban, the fast, and the spectacular.

The novel's final image—of the family walking into the unknown—does not offer closure. It leaves the reader with a sense of unending journey, of exile as a permanent condition. As Edward Said observes, "Exile is predicated on the existence of a homeland that has been lost, or at least temporarily mislaid" (*Reflections on Exile* 177). In *Pather Panchali*, this homeland is not a nation but a village, a house, a path, a sky—and its loss is no less profound for being local. The novel thus transforms internal migration into a diasporic experience, one marked not by border crossings but by affective ruptures and existential displacements.

Landscape, Labour, and Exile in *Aranyak*

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* (1939), shaped by his own tenure as an estate manager in Bhagalpur's forested terrains, meditates on a form of exile that is neither political nor economic in the conventional sense, but emotional, ecological, and moral. Unlike *Pather Panchali*, which foregrounds familial migration due to poverty, *Aranyak* explores an internal dislocation—a psychic and ethical exile experienced by the narrator, Satyacharan, who is caught between the colonial machinery he serves and the natural world he gradually comes to revere.

Satyacharan, a young educated Bengali, arrives in the forest as a reluctant migrant. His confession—"আমি বনে আসিনি বনবাসীর জীবনযাত্রা জানতে, এসেছি টাকার জন্য" ("I did not come to the forest to understand the life of its people; I came for money") (*Aranyak* 9)—sets the tone for a journey rooted in economic compulsion rather than romantic longing. While his migration appears upwardly mobile, it soon reveals itself as a dislocating passage into solitude and moral ambivalence. He is alienated from both the city he left behind and the wilderness he inhabits, embodying what might be called an affective exile.

The forest, described in lyrical detail—"এই বনের রূপের তুলনা কোথায়! যেন প্রকৃতি নিজে এখানে ছবি এঁকেছে ধ্যানমগ্ন হয়ে" ("Where else is such beauty! As if Nature herself painted it in meditative calm") (*Aranyak* 72)—invites deep aesthetic appreciation. Yet, Satyacharan's administrative role requires him to facilitate deforestation and settlement. This contradiction fosters a state of interior exile, one born of ethical rupture. His anguish—"আমি দেখেছি বৃক্ষহত্যা—তবু আমি নীরব থেকেছি…" ("I have witnessed the murder of trees—yet remained silent") (*Aranyak* 124)—marks his complicity in ecological violence, underscoring the moral costs of colonial governance.

The forest is not a blank wilderness but a lived and contested space, home to Adivasis, impoverished Brahmins, and landless migrants. Figures like Raju Pnaare and Dhaotal Sardar embody varying dimensions of displacement. Raju, once a learned Brahmin, now scavenges firewood—"একদিন কাশীতে শাস্ত্র পাঠ করতেন…আজ কাঠ কুড়িয়ে বাঁচেন" ("Once he studied scripture in Kashi… now he gathers wood to survive") (*Aranyak* 87). Dhaotal's declaration—"এই বন তো আমাদের বাবাদাদার, এখন কাগজে-কলমে অন্যের" ("This forest belonged to our ancestors; now it belongs to others on paper") (*Aranyak* 98)—speaks to colonial dispossession and epistemic erasure.

Aranyak thus offers a profound critique of what Walter Mignolo terms the "coloniality of power" (Mignolo 23), revealing how bureaucratic rationalities overwrite ancestral geographies. Through Satyacharan's melancholic reflections, Bandyopadhyay renders exile not merely as movement from place, but as a psychic fragmentation—of self, land, and memory. When the narrator departs, he notes: "মনে হল যেন কিছু চিরকালের জন্য হারালাম" ("It felt as though I had lost something forever") (*Aranyak* 154). This loss, subtle yet irreversible,

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defines the novel's enduring meditation on ecological exile and the moral burden of complicity in dislocation.

Diasporic Longings and Emotional Fragmentation in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's Short Fiction

While best known for his novels, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's short fiction offers profound reflections on exile, displacement, and emotional fragmentation. These compact narratives often depict characters who are not geographically exiled but internally dislocated—estranged within their own homes, communities, or selves. In this sense, Bandyopadhyay's stories become a literary archive of **interior exile**, where dislocation unfolds in silence and everyday moments.

In "Dalan," a clerk returns to his ancestral village, only to feel like a stranger in a place once called home. His reflection—"এই গাঁয়ে আমার শিকড় ছিল, এখন যেন আমি একজন অতিথি, আগন্তুক" ("In this village, I once had roots, now I feel like a guest, a stranger")—captures the essence of **diasporic consciousness**: not the loss of home, but the realisation that home is no longer emotionally accessible (Bandyopadhyay, *Dalan*). This quiet alienation resonates with Svetlana Boym's idea of **reflective nostalgia**, which "dwells in longing and loss, in the imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym 49).

Stories like "Achalayatan" and "Basa" expand this emotional map. In the former, a baul's wandering is marked by both spiritual yearning and economic precarity—his nomadism is less a choice than a condition of survival (Bandyopadhyay, *Achalayatan*). In "Basa," a widowed woman is forced to leave the only home she has ever known. Though she has never migrated, her **displacement is total**, stripping her of identity and belonging (Bandyopadhyay, *Basa*).

Bandyopadhyay's characters live in **liminal spaces**—railway stations, crumbling houses, forest edges—where they confront the **fragmentation of memory and meaning**. Their emotional exile is rendered in half-spoken regrets and lingering silences. In "Nayonbondhu," a schoolteacher's quiet grief over a boy's departure becomes a meditation on enduring loss: "এই পৃথিবীতে কিছুই যেন থাকে না, সব হারিয়ে যায়" ("Nothing remains in this world; everything is lost eventually") (Bandyopadhyay, *Nayonbondhu*).

Crucially, Bandyopadhyay resists sentimental closure. His endings are unresolved, honouring the ambiguity of lived experience. The migration he depicts is not merely physical, but existential—marked by endurance rather than arrival. Through these subtle portrayals, his stories redefine diaspora as an **emotional and psychological state** woven into the fabric of ordinary lives.

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and the Affective Archive of Migration

To situate Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay as a chronicler of migration is to recognise his quiet but radical contribution to what may be called the "affective archive" of displacement in South Asian literature. His fiction resists the grand narratives and spectacle often associated with migration—such as the Partition or transoceanic diaspora—and instead focuses on the inner lives of the displaced, the subtle erosion of home, and the emotional topography of movement. What makes his literary interventions so significant is the way they centre the interiority of migration, rather than its external logistics. In Bandyopadhyay's world, the true displacements are those that occur in memory, in love, in shame, in silence.

Traditional archives of migration tend to privilege the material—visas, border crossings, refugee camps, ship manifests. Against this, Bandyopadhyay builds an archive of affect: the mother folding away her memories in a cloth bundle, the young man staring at the horizon where the forest meets the sky, the child whispering his sister's name into the dark. These

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moments, scattered across his fiction, constitute a counter-memory that speaks not in the language of statistics or policy but in the grammar of longing and loss.

This affective dimension is especially significant in the context of internal migration within India, a phenomenon often rendered invisible by nationalist discourse. The nation-state tends to conflate internal movement with mobility, progress, and development. Bandyopadhyay challenges this assumption by revealing the psychic and ecological violence embedded within such movements. In *Aranyak*, for instance, Satyacharan's professional migration into the forest seems benign on the surface but leads to the destruction of entire ecosystems and the dispossession of tribal communities. The novel critiques the developmentalist ethos that equates land clearance with progress, showing instead that every act of settlement carries within it an act of erasure.

Moreover, Bandyopadhyay's fiction insists that displacement is not merely spatial but also temporal. His characters are haunted by the past even as they move forward. This temporal disjuncture—where memory lags behind movement—forms the core of what Avery Gordon calls "haunting," the "sociopolitical-psychological state in which something invisible, immaterial, or seemingly absent makes itself felt" (Gordon 8). In *Pather Panchali*, the Ray family's departure from Nischindipur is marked not just by sorrow but by the persistent return of memories—of Durga, of childhood games, of familiar landscapes. The past is never left behind; it is carried, like a wound.

Such a framing demands a critical rethinking of the categories through which migration is understood. The legal and policy-oriented discourse of refugee studies often distinguishes between 'refugee' and 'migrant,' between 'forced' and 'voluntary' movement. Bandyopadhyay's fiction blurs these boundaries. His characters move not because they are forced at gunpoint, but because they have no viable choice. Their migrations are compelled by structural violence—poverty, ecological degradation, caste oppression, and the slow collapse of rural economies. In this sense, they inhabit what anthropologist Didier Fassin calls "precarious lives"—lives marked by chronic instability and lack of protection, where agency itself is circumscribed (Fassin 41).

Importantly, Bandyopadhyay's representation of migration is always embedded in specific ecologies and social formations. His narratives are not abstract tales of movement; they are deeply grounded in the physical and cultural geography of Bengal. Rivers, forests, village paths, courtyards—all carry emotional charge. The erosion of land is linked with the erosion of kinship ties; the cutting down of trees is equated with spiritual loss. This ecological consciousness is what gives his fiction its haunting power. His work anticipates the insights of eco-migratory theory, which emphasises the interconnection between environmental change and human displacement (McLeman 5).

Moreover, his portrayal of gendered experiences of migration adds another layer to this archive. Female characters in Bandyopadhyay's fiction often suffer dislocation not through travel but through the loss of emotional and domestic space. Characters like Sarbajaya in *Pather Panchali* or the widowed woman in "Basa" experience displacement through the breakdown of familial structures, revealing how migration is often gendered not in terms of who moves, but in how the movement is endured. Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed has noted that "home is shaped by the bodies that inhabit it and by the exclusions and inclusions they perform" (Ahmed 9). In Bandyopadhyay's fiction, the home becomes both a site of security and of vulnerability—something that can vanish not just in the act of leaving but also in the act of being left behind.

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Another crucial aspect of Bandyopadhyay's affective archive is its emphasis on silence. Unlike contemporary diasporic literature that often includes confessional or testimonial narratives, Bandyopadhyay's displaced characters are often reticent. They do not proclaim their suffering; they live it quietly. Their silence is not emptiness but eloquence—what Veena Das has termed "language in the act of being torn" (Das 7). This aesthetic choice is politically charged. In a world saturated with noise and spectacle, Bandyopadhyay's silences resist commodification. They demand attention not through visibility but through subtlety.

His fiction also complicates the idea of return. In much of diasporic discourse, return is imagined as a form of closure or redemption—a homecoming that heals the trauma of exile. Bandyopadhyay subverts this trope. In stories like "Dalan" and *Aranyak*, return is marked by alienation, not reunion. The protagonists realise that the home they longed for no longer exists, or perhaps never did. Their longing is not fulfilled but transformed into a deeper, more complex understanding of self. This insight aligns with Homi Bhabha's notion of "unhomeliness"—the disjunction between physical dwelling and emotional security that characterises the postcolonial subject (Bhabha 9). Bandyopadhyay's characters are often unhomed even when they are at home, revealing the profound dislocations wrought by colonial modernity and economic precarity.

In literary terms, Bandyopadhyay's contribution to migration literature is distinctive because of his stylistic restraint. His prose is lyrical yet spare, evocative yet unsentimental. He does not aestheticise poverty, nor does he dramatise suffering. Instead, he allows the textures of everyday life—sounds, smells, gestures, silences—to carry emotional weight. His narratives unfold slowly, mirroring the temporalities of rural life and slow migration. This slow storytelling is itself a political act, resisting the acceleration and commodification of narrative time that often marks urban and global migration stories.

Thus, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's fiction functions as an alternative archive—an archive of the everyday, the unnoticed, the affective. It challenges dominant paradigms of diaspora and displacement by centring the internal, the emotional, and the ecological. His characters do not cross oceans or settle in foreign lands, yet they experience exile in the most profound sense. They are migrants not because they move across borders but because they live in conditions of permanent uncertainty, dislocation, and longing.

In a global moment increasingly defined by migration crises, climate change, and rising nationalism, Bandyopadhyay's work offers a vital counterpoint. It reminds us that exile is not always spectacular, that displacement is often internal and continuous, and that the most enduring archives of migration may be found not in institutions but in stories—in the quiet, lyrical, painful stories of people who walk, wait, remember, and endure.

Conclusion

To read Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay through the lens of migration and exile is to unearth a deeply resonant and complex vision of movement—one that bypasses the dominant tropes of global diaspora and instead dwells within the internal migrations of the subcontinent. His fiction does not seek to monumentalise displacement, nor does it render the migrant into a political archetype. Rather, he allows his readers to experience exile as it is most often lived: slowly, quietly, and emotionally. From the weary footsteps of the Ray family in *Pather Panchali* to Satyacharan's ecological disquiet in *Aranyak*, from the widowed woman's dislocation in "Basa" to the estranged urbanite in "Dalan," his literary world is peopled by characters who bear the marks of migratory suffering not across seas but across lives.

In centring internal displacement, Bandyopadhyay radically expands the scope of South Asian migration literature. He forces us to reconsider what counts as migration and who is deemed

worthy of diasporic discourse. His protagonists are not the heroic exiles of nationalist fiction nor the cosmopolitan subjects of transnational novels. They are rural, poor, female, tribal, and caste-oppressed individuals whose journeys are frequently erased from history. By making these lives visible—through detailed observation, lyrical evocation, and deep empathy—he creates what can be termed a 'subaltern archive' of migration.

His fiction also challenges the liberal binaries of forced versus voluntary migration, legal versus illegal migrant, or refugee versus settler. In Bandyopadhyay's world, movement is always layered: economic compulsion is entangled with emotional desire; professional relocation is infused with moral loss. The landscapes his characters traverse—forests, rivers, railways, village lanes—are not merely settings but emotional terrains. When they move, they do not just change places; they change selves, relationships, memories, and moral orientations.

What is perhaps most powerful in Bandyopadhyay's literary treatment of displacement is his unwavering attention to affect—to the textures of grief, longing, fatigue, nostalgia, and fragmented belonging. As his characters migrate, they carry with them emotional residues that cannot be dissolved through adaptation or settlement. The exilic condition, for them, is not one of alienation alone but of haunted persistence. They endure, quietly, unheroically, and often invisibly.

This emphasis on affective migration offers an important corrective to both migration studies and postcolonial theory. As critics and theorists increasingly attend to the material conditions of migration—borders, visas, camps, citizenship—Bandyopadhyay reminds us of the inner landscapes of movement. His fiction is not devoid of politics; rather, it reveals the politics of feeling, the ethics of witness, and the violence of invisibility. He asks us to feel the cost of movement, not just trace its logistics.

Moreover, his literary voice—marked by stylistic restraint, descriptive intensity, and emotional subtlety—embodies the very conditions he writes about. His prose does not announce suffering; it allows it to unfold. His stories do not resolve into closure; they echo in silence. This narrative ethic deepens the political and philosophical impact of his work. It reveals exile not as a single event but as a mode of being, a chronic state of temporal and spatial fracture.

In this sense, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay stands as a foundational figure in an alternative literary genealogy—one that speaks to the forgotten, the slowly displaced, the emotionally exiled. His work challenges us to rethink our critical vocabularies and broaden our moral imagination. It teaches us that migration is not always about the movement from one country to another; it is often the movement away from one's place in the world, one's people, one's self.

As contemporary South Asia continues to grapple with forced relocations—be it due to climate change, urban expansion, economic vulnerability, or political unrest—Bandyopadhyay's fiction remains deeply relevant. It bears witness to the long history of internal dislocation and offers a language for mourning and memory that resonates across generations. His stories ask a simple but profound question: what does it mean to be exiled in one's own land?

In the final reckoning, to be "exiled in the homeland" is not only to lose home but to lose the certainty that one ever belonged. Through his deeply human portraits of such fractured belonging, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay gives us not only stories of migration, but also stories of resilience, quiet resistance, and the enduring search for meaning amidst displacement.

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