www.asle-brasil.com/journal
RILE -Revista Interdisciplinar de Literatura e Ecocritica
ISSN: 9788-5232

"Multiple Anamorphisms": Imagining the Indigene in Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Last Wave*

Swarnalatha Rangarajan[i]

Abstract
Postcolonial ecocriticism in the Anthropocene calls for place and displacement as a new locus of critical discussion.This essay attempts to explore the complex state-indigene-place relationships in the Andaman and Nicobar islands, an Indian archipelago in the Bay of Bengal, through an analysis of Pankaj Sekhsaria's novel, *The Last Wave*, a postcolonial environmental narrative that articulates alterity and the limits of representation.This essay places Sekhsaria's island narrative in the tradition of 'nava aranyakas' or 'new forest texts' set in contemporary fractured Indian forestscapes that foreground the troubled history of state domination and also explore the contradictions and ambiguities that emerge in the tribal relationship with nature. At the heart of Sekhsaria's narrative is the endangered Jarawa who is inaccessible to the mainstream world due to multiple barriers. This essay focuses on the narrative's anamorphic aesthetics that employs multiple images and disparate measurements to capture the elusive reality of the indigene.

Key Words
Environmental Justice, Island Narratives, Slow Violence, Terra Nullius, New Forest Texts, Anthropocene Ethics

Postcolonial ecocriticism in the Anthropocene calls for place and displacement as a new locus of critical discussion. Alter-narratives and retellings of fractured placescapes, their human and greater-than-human inhabitants reveal that human history and ecological history are mutually imbricated, the recognition of which is necessary to reimagine a world based on ethical principles of sustainability. This essay attempts to explore the complex state-indigene-place relationships in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, an Indian archipelago in the Bay of Bengal, through an analysis of Pankaj Sekhsaria's novel, *The Last Wave* (2014), a postcolonial environmental narrative that articulates alterity and the limits of representation.

This island narrative, an important Anthropocene discourse draws attention to "the relational turn in island studies" by problematizing stereotypical perceptions of island insularity and peripherality (Pugh 94). Environmental histories of colonised islands that reveal declension narratives of degradation and decay are pertinent markers of the Anthropocene- a term coined by atmospheric physicist Paul Crutzen and ecologist Eugene Stoermer, to indicate a new

geological era in which human agency has become a ferocious geological agent on par with forces of nature modifying earth's natural processes and causing irrevocable damage as a result. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, a seminal thinker in this domain, proposes that the new ecological crisis that Anthropocene theorists talk about is actually 'belated' and advocates a deep reading of indigenous and postcolonial island writers to unearth the violent socio-ecological fractures that have taken place during colonisation. She observes that postcolonial subjects in the Caribbean and Pacific islands who have a long history of ecological violence have been driven to the brink of devastating ecological impact despite their minimal contribution to the current carbon and other ecological crises. Hence apocalyptic visions of the 'end of nature' (to use Mckibben's term) in the Anthropocene are also "a remembrance of a violent historical past with ongoing repercussions for the present" (DeLoughrey 7).

Pankaj Sekhsaria's debut novel draws from his work on environmental conservation and education in the islands and argues for the need of historically contextualized analysis of the socio-environmental problems that the endangered Jarawa tribe faces. His research articles, interviews and columns preceding the novel have repeatedly drawn attention to the intense geological activity that characterizes the Andaman and Nicobar islands and the high endemism that characterizes these islands that makes them vulnerable to anthropogenic stress.

Described variously an imperial outpost, penal colony, a postcolonial site for settlement the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to four dominant tribes–the Andamanese, the Onge, the Sentinelese and Jarawas–who have inhabited the islands anywhere between twenty to forty thousand years. Battered by alien cultures, these tribes have been subjected to diseases, dwindling numbers, and loss of land and culture. The most fortunate among these tribes are the Sentinelese who did not suffer as intensely as the others since they were confined to the North Sentinel island which was not disturbed by the British or the postcolonial state. The plight of the Andaman indigenes can be seen as a typical example of the "dominant culture subsuming a marginal one" in stages played out in virtually every corner of the globe" (Madhushree Mukherjee xix). The colonial policy of declaring 'wild' or insufficiently used land as 'terra nullius' (empty land) and appropriating it for profitable use has been the template for the postcolonial drive to rescue islands from 'backwardness.' It is only through the concept of terra nullius that, "can we explain how national development took the form of state-led settlement of "empty" land, using settlers from mainland India" thereby triggering "an extreme form of settler-colonialism upon the Andaman Islands because it was already imagined in terms of

multiple lacks" (Sen 971). For instance, the recent border confrontation that erupted between India and China in Ladakh's Galwan Valley triggered the Indian government's announcements to fast-track plans for a military build-up in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in July 2020. Environmental restrictions in this area were quickly lifted recognizing the geopolitical importance of these strategically located islands in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in the current context. Island narratives in these contexts also become environmental justice mapping tools that narrate environmental disappearance, loss and extinction in a neoliberal developmental model whose roots hearken back to colonial history. These narratives dismantle familiar stereotypes of the islands such as a 'tropical indigenous paradise', 'natural prison', 'terra nullius' by employing a collaborative approach connecting "the past with the present, the colonial with the post-colonial, indigenous tribal communities with settler communities, and the Andaman Islands with the Indian mainland" (Aufschnaiter 2).

The Wave has been aptly described as a "novel of questions" since it shuttles between the different layers of the islands' palimpsestic history and raises more questions than answers about the complex interplay of government policies that do not take into account the unique ecology of this island and the fate of these original inhabitants (Dutta-Asane). It holds a synecdochal mirror to the global environmental injustice meted out to indigenous groups drawing sustenance from their bioregional rootedness and culture whose way of being in the world is being increasingly threatened by unthinking nationalisms and noxious globalizations.

Environmental degradation in the Andamans is a typical example of what Rob Nixon refers to as 'slow violence.' Speaking in an interview about "the tradition of unconsulted displacements of peoples in the name of natural preservation" Nixon considers slow violence that is characterized by "invisibility, the absence of spectacle, the difficulty of finding narrative and imagistic forms of communicating profound damage that is diffuse and scattered across time and space" to be an important component of ecological imperialism (Christensen 3). The natural beauty of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago replete with lush rainforests and diverse species, mangrove beaches, pristine beaches and abundant coral reefs offers the image of cornucopian plenty. However, the colonial rule witnessed the overharvesting of the primary forests for timber extraction and the clearing of forests in the South Andamans during the World War Years. The forests increasingly became a resource base for the colonial regime with the setting up of the Indian rail network. This had dire impacts since "On the one hand, the traditional structure of forest resource use was shattered by the new forest laws; while, on the

other, the Andamans became the part of world capitalist economy" (Krishnakumar 109). Exploitative practices spearheaded by developmental projects became increasingly accentuated in the post-colonial period resulting in a major threat to the environment from soil erosion and climate change. Huggan and Tiffin's contention that "the proper subject of postcolonialism is colonialism" and that the postcolonial ecocritic should look "for the colonial/imperial underpinnings of environmental practices" in the present-day colonising societies holds good in the case of the Andamans (3).

The island's transformation into a literary subject has been depicted differently in colonial and postcolonial narratives. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890), the island is an "unlimited extension beyond the familiar Western world" (Said 176) replete with descriptions of its exotic natural beauty, miasmatic air and naked cannibalistic savages. However, this narrative does not concern itself with environmental care or the welfare of the indigenous people in the manner in which a postcolonial detective fiction *The King of the Verdant Forest* (2010) by Sunil Gangopadhyay does by drawing repeated attention to the environmental damage brought about the felling of forests, destruction of wild life and other myopic practices brought about by uneven neoliberal patterns of development (Bandyopadhyay 4).

The coming together of ecocritical and postcolonial frameworks in Sekhsaria's island narrative highlights what Guha and Martinez-Alier famously refer to as the "environmentalism of the poor" (1997) to differentiate it from the "environmentalism of the affluent." The materialist angle in Global South ecosocial contexts is inevitable due to "the interpenetration of nature and history, the differentiation and struggle in human society in relation to environment as a specific mode of capitalism" (Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee 74). In a similar fashion Raymond Williams draws attention to the complex material web of life, "a world of properly materialist history" where "there is no room for the separate abstract categories of 'nature' and 'man'…." (111). This is especially true of India's highly diverse tribal population, the 'adivasis' or original inhabitants of the land who share traditional attachments to the land and forest as a means of livelihood and also long histories of exploitation and otherisation (Collu 45–46).

Most ecosocial environmental narratives from India relating to the tribal populations like C.K. Janu's life narrative *Mother Forest*, or Mahasweta Devi's fiction are "set in in fractured Indian forestscapes foreground the troubled history of state domination and also

explore the contradictions and ambiguities that emerge in the tribal relationship with nature" (Rangarajan 442). Like many contemporary tribal environmental justice narratives, Sekhsaria's island narrative also falls under this category of a "new forest text", a 'nava aranyaka' – a term used to distinguish these ecosocial narratives from the traditional 'aranyakas' or Vedic texts that were written to prepare the seeker for the pursuit of transcendence in the solitude of the forests (Rangarajan 442). Sekhsaria's text uncovers and problematizes subsistence and survival issues faced by these indigenous forest-dwelling tribes who have depended on the forest's bounty for survival and sustenance since thousands of years.

The novel is overlaid by a dense matrix of identity issues that are further embedded in the spatial structures of land. For instance, Seema Chandran who is working on a doctoral thesis about the socio-economic evolution of the Andaman's 'Local Borns' is asked by her advisor to concentrate on the Onge or the Jarawas despite the fact that the genealogy of the mainstream islanders is a melting pot of diverse cultures and languages. The narrative also points towards the swelling numbers of outsiders– the labourers, traders and petty businessmen who migrate to the islands from the mainland only to encroach into the forest land. Krishna Raj, the secretary of the Local Borns' Association refers to the 250,000 strong population of outsiders as a rising tide that refuses to turn back and swamps the original dwellers of the island in the process. Seema comes up with a representative nomenclature, 'the first borns' for the Jarawa and Onge tribes who have inhabited these islands for anywhere between 20,000 and 60,000 years according to the findings of recent genetic research in the area. Her childhood memories of meeting the anthropologist and Andaman scholar, Vishvajit Pandya, provide a key to the binaries that operate in the formulation of this heterotopia. The scholar defines a forest dweller or 'junglee' in a simple and lucid manner to the child, "Those living in the forests, in the jungles, are jungles…But by junglees, if we mean savages, uncivilized people, that they are not" (Sekhsaria 26).

The heterotopic alter space of the Jarawa reserve that has been set apart by the Government is problematized by Sekhsaria's narrative. In his well-researched anthropological writing on the Andamans, Vishvajit Pandya refers to the Jarawa inhabitation as a "placeless place", "a place that belongs to nobody" created by the colonial administration located in Port Blair which tried to invade and tame the encompassing wilderness by employing prisoners from India and Andamanese tribals who acted as forest guides (Pandya 12). The Jarawas known for their 'hostile' behaviour showed aggression when their territory was invaded and this in turn

involved harsh punitive measures imposed by the British like setting fire to Jarawa sites and capturing women and children. However, the colonial legacy also involved the practice of contact expeditions which involved gift-giving to the Jarawas on a ship which enabled the tribals to cross boundaries and come into contact with the colonial universe in this tightly encapsulated heterotopic space constituted by the ship. Pandya writes that these practices continued to flourish in postcolonial India with the objective of bringing the tribals into the mainstream and winning their trust whereas in reality the meaning of contact was "constituted by continuous efforts of non-tribals to 'move in' and Jarawas to 'move out'" (11).

The Jarawas have the reputation of being one of the few tribal groups in the world who live in isolation without expressing the need to assimilate with the mainstream population. The popular image of the hostile tribe confined to seven hundred and sixty five square kilometer of reserve forest belies the complex colonial history to which this tribe was subjected. Pandya points out that the reserve forest is a phantom boundary that separates the Jarawas from the outer forest space since landscapes in the natural world are a fluid continuum. Hence this artificial division does not exist for the Jarawas since they are used to a 'boundless landscape' in which they have pursuing their traditional hunting and gathering activities. However, their present position as people restricted to the 'placeless place' raises important questions about their identity and the exploitation meted out in the name of development to the oikos of these forest dwellers.

In the novel, David Baskaran, the director of the Institute for Island Ecology, refers to the five kilometre wide, two hundred kilometre long Jarawa Reserve as "one of the biggest anomalies in the island" and "one of the last frontiers still standing…" (Sekhsaria 37). The narrative also questions the artificial boundary provided by the Andaman trunk road that cuts through the 1,000 sq km forest reserve. To the left of the road lay the Jarawa reserve, the demarcated territory meant for Jarawa protection; however, the land to the right of the road did not come under the reserve area. Harish, the protagonist of the narrative who has a passionate interest in the life of the islands, questions the anomaly of this artificial boundary and wonders whether the Jarawas were aware of this boundary and refrain from using the forest on the right of the road.

The narrative juxtaposes vignettes about the legendary hostility of the Jarawas towards the settlers, the construction of the Andaman Trunk Road and timber extraction activities in the Jarawa territory with the startling instances of unarmed Jarawas coming out of the forests into

the settlements. Understanding this paradigm shift where the loss of tribal hostility is the first step to their annihilation is at the heart of the narrative. As David puts it, "The enduring modern myth of the implacable jungelee, the unfriendly inhabitant, of the dark deep forests, the hostile, violent Jarawa is shattered" (Sekhsaria 38). Tanumei, the injured Jarawa lad, who is taken to the Tribal Welfare Department adapts to the ways of civilization more than willingly. He becomes fond of watching television programmes and starts wearing shorts and shirts and enjoys being driven around Port Blair in a white ambassador car. He becomes the accessible symbol of the mysterious Jarawa world to the mainstream world. When Tanumei re-emerges a month later with a group of unarmed, young Jarawa boys, there is widespread panic and speculation about whether this coming was a prelude and reconnaissance to a full-fledged Jarawa attack. The villagers discover to their dismay that the Jarawas visit the villages in swelling numbers to carry away bananas and coconuts from houses that they enter without any hesitation. The appearance of seventy-two Jarawas at the Jetty throws the passengers in the bus into a state of trepidation. The tension dissipates after the crowd realises that the inebriated Rajib Babu was killed by a PWD truck and not by the Jarawas as they had mistakenly assumed. Tanumei interlocutes between the police and his people and gives out that the Jarawas had come for bananas and coconuts. Everyone observes with interest the SHO's wife's gesture who slips on the dark bare wrist of a Jarawa woman a bunch of red and green bangles, the customary auspicious symbols of a married woman. Harish Kumar, criticizes this assimilationist gesture only to be told, "What's wrong? Is she not a woman? Does she not have a child with her? We are all Indians, aren't we?" (Sekhsaria 65) The irony of this scene is further accentuated by the arrival of Ms. Jacob, the Deputy Director of All India Radio who has come on a quest for some authentic Jarawa soundbytes. When she politely asks Tanumei who has picked up a smattering of Hindi about how he was doing, she is greeted with an offensive swearword in Hindi and a brisk injunction to give bananas and coconuts. However, her assistant is determined to make the most of the situation. He gets two little Jarawa boys who are playing in the water to yodel. The team leaves with the satisfaction that two full minutes of the Jarawa yodel has been recorded for posterity, "perhaps the first recording of its kind" (Sekhsaria 70). Harish, who is witness to this strange encounter between two cultures wonders what the Jarawas think of the outside world. He asks David uncomprehendingly, "Where do they see their future going? What is the future?" (Sekhsaria 71). David points to the unknowability of answers to these questions because the Jarawas are not accessible due to multiple barriers– the forest being the most

important one. Prasad, the journalist, suggests that the answer may be contained in a field of players living on the fringes of the Jarawa forest who might be able to reflect multiple images of the elusive reality of the Jarawas. Referring to this process as 'multiple anamorphisms', Prasad explains, "Reality will be reflected as it is, in bits and pieces, scraps of this and that, to be scavenged from the fringes of the Jarawa existence, and put together on a single canvas" (Sekhsaria 72). These interactions happening on a daily basis between the thousands of settlers who lived on the fringes of the Jarawa community and the tribals that go largely unnoticed by the media, researchers and anthropologists hold the key to imagining the indigene.

The narrative offers biophilic markers to imagine the indigene and also suggests that the settlers who live on the fringes of the forests in frequent contact with the Jarawas are the best reflecting mirrors of the elusive Jarawa image. For instance, Tirur, a small village along the southermost boundary of the Jarawa forests created for the settlers in the 1960s is a placethat had witnessed many intense Jarawa attacks. An old man hailing from this village whom Harish meets in the bus gives valuable insights regarding the source of Jarawa anger. He finds fault with the shortsightedness of Government's policy which allocated land to the settlers on which the Jarawas were living. "If someone comes into my fields and starts cultivating, will I not fight back" the old man asks and goes on to explain that the Jarawas did not farm but subisted on hunting and collecting honey (Sekhsaria 88). So when the forests were destroyed by the government, they were angry and took to attacking the villagers with bows and arrows. One of the startling examples of Jarawa brutality narrated by the old man is about Pillai the policeman who had tried to sexually misbehave with a Jarawa woman. He was killed in a most ruthless fashion, and the body is left on the outskirts of the village with hands severed. The old man concludes that "We might never become friends with the Jarawas, but I am sure we need not be enemies… Yes, we took their lands, but if we don't disturb them, they'll accept what has happened" (Sekhsaria 91). The encroachment into Jarawa land also results in an invasion of prime crocodile habitat. The dwindling crocodile population results from the legal assaults from the forest department and the illegal killings "by the noose and machete of the recent settlers" (Sekhsaria103).

The survey that Harish, Seema and David undertake in the dungi evokes the invasive colonial history of the place that tried to impose itself on the 'deep history' of the islands, multi-millenial in scale and clearly subversive of the 'coloniser's trope of firstness' (McGrath 5). The original inhabitants of the island, the Great Andamanese were estimated at anywhere between

five and eight thousand when the British established their presence in the islands in 1858. The population dwindled to less than a hundred when the Japanese landed a century later, taking complete control of the islands in 1942. The narrative references M.V.Portman's 1899 classic about the island inhabitants. Portman's book details the 1877 measles epidemic which drove the Great Andamanese to the brink of extinction. Harish speculates whether a similar fate awaits the Jarawas whose present population had dwindled to 400. Seema confirms that the risk of infection and spread of diseases like measles is a high probability when forest-dwelling populations come into contact with sendantary, high-density population. But what puzzles Seema is the fact that the Great Andamanese or the islands feature very little in University textbooks unlike information about Fiji, Amazonia and other places.

The survey trip exposes Harish to vignettes of Jarawa life. Riding in the darkness he hears the "haunting yodel" of the Jarawas from within the dense forests which begins with unhurried pace gradually working itself to a crescendo. Comparing the natural grandeur of this place-based music, Harish compares it with the unthinking gesture of the person from AIR who had forcibly thrust the mike into the bewildered faces of the Jarawa children asking them to sing. Although the yodel sounded the same, it also sounded very different. This makes Harish come alive to the significance of the place. He feels like an outsider trying to make sense of "the ancient land of an ancient people" (Sekhsaria 129). While experiencing a profound sense of awe at their life in the forests, he admires the simplicity of the tribe who seem so knitted with the elements.

As the boat nears Bluff Island, more stories about the Jarawas and the land emerge, of the embattled place where the Jarawas, hunters and fishermen fight over resources. Harish is made aware of the multiple intrusions that happen on a daily basis like shark fishing, turtle hunting in the shallow waters, wild pig hunting in the forests and crocodile poaching for skins that fetch a handsome price in the leather market thanks to the poachers who have devised multiple channels to smuggle them out. Equally insidious are the home truths about the contact parties that are conducted periodically with the intention of ironing out the hostilities with the Jarawas. It is not only the Jarawa women who are subjected to voyeuristic looks and touches but the entire tribe that is assigned a humiliating subject position. David recalls the words of Anil Tripathy, the anthropologist working with the Tribal Welfare department who describes these goodwill meetings with great chagrin, "You drop gifts and they pick them up. It's like

throwing grain and then waiting to ensnare the birds. The Jarawas got snared…They lost their freedom. Forever" (Sekhsaria137).

David Bhaskaran's fiery encounter with Michael Ross, the journalist, who is found in prohibited Jarawa stone with a local named Shiva reveals the sordid realities of sex tourism that is prevalent in the area. When rebuked for the colonial arrogance that Ross exhibits in taking photographs of naked Jarawa women, he retaliates by saying, "For a thousand quid- your fellow Indians…will get you two nights with a Jarawa woman. Britishers don't come and screw them. Your fellow fucking Indians do" (Sekhsaria147).

The novel also offers multiple perspectives on place-based affiliation or biophilia that is expressed by non-indigenes regarding the land. Seema, for instance, is struck by the passion with which Felix, one of the settlers, defends his land after receiving a eviction notice by the government alerting him that he was living on Jarawa reserve territory. Felix claims ownership to the land because he along with others created the settlement with their sweat and labour. He criticises unthinking Government policies that change with quicksilver alacrity, "We cleared the forest, prepared the fields, constructed our houses, they even gave us the pattas. If this is Jarawa Reserve, did not know it then? Maybe this was Jarawa territory. Was…But now, it is ours. This is our land" (Sekhsaria142). Felix also deconstructs many cherished myths about the Jarawas– that they eat only the produce of the forest and the sea. He tells Seema that the people in the settlement have been giving the Jarawas cooked rice for the past four years. Felix hints at the fluidity of man-made borders and suggests that a cross cultural pollination has been taking place between the settlers and the Jarawas over the years. He tells Seema, "I sometimes go into the forests and get some honey or even kill a wild pig. In a similar manner, don't you think that the Jarawa would be interested in coming and seeing what we do and what we eat? Why should that surprise anybody? Don't people go to their neighbours for all kinds of things?" (Sekhsaria144).

Felix is also familiar with Jarawa knowledge systems that exhibit a symbiotic and non-harming attitude towards nature. For instance, he tells Seema about how the Jarawas smear their bodies with the leaves of the Tomale plant, which works as a natural bee-intoxicant, before collecting honey. As a result, the bees lose their aggression; they swarm around the Jarawa honey-gatherer in an intoxicated manner but do not sting. This indigenous method of honey-gathering is risk-free and does not cause violence to the bees.

Felix shares these nuggets of information with Seema to convice her that the Jarawas are slowly getting civilised and that the settlers can help with the civilization agenda if they are allowed to remain on the land. Seema responds with the customary argument that since Jarawas are the people of the forest who have been living on the land much before the British arrived, "They should be allowed to live the way they want to" (Sekhsaria150). Felix's rebuttal is indicative of the blending of spaces that problematizes the notion of the tribal living in pristine contact with nature. He says, "But you can't talk about the Jarawa anyomore without talking about us. Now the administration is trying to teach them agriculture" (Sekhsaria 130). When Seema wonders why people like Felix don't leave the land and migrate to civilisation, Uncle Pami, the local guide, explains to Seema that it is difficult for settlers to leave because the land has a strange hold on them: I know what it takes to create land from the forest. The land will give you your food, but not before it takes your blood and sweat" (Sekhsaria156).

Uncle Pame's personal history is intertwined with that of the Jarawas. As a boy, he was witness to his parents being killed by the Jarawas during one of the fishing trips that the family made in a dungi near the Jarawa reserve. Three months later he takes his revenge by entering the Jarawa forest with his father's old gun and venting his fury on a Jarawa which had come in a group of five to drink water from a pool. In spite of his negative experiences with the tribe, Uncle Pame gives an unbiased account of them to Harish. He calls them a proud race of people, "the real people of the forests….they deserve respect…The Jarawas fight only for what is rightfully theirs, and in this they will not yield an inch" (Sekhsaria164-165).

Harish's conversations with Uncle Pame lead him to the understanding that a situated bioregional understanding of place is necessary to make conservation policies truly effective. Uncle Pame gives him the example of the Karen tribe of the Andamans who have traditionally hunted crocodiles using spears and rope. This helped meet the tribes' subsistence needs since "the meat was food, the fat medicine, and the hide a good source of income" (Sekhsaria168). When laws were passed in distant New Delhi to protect the declining crocodile populations which happened as a result of the cutting down of the mangrove forest, the Karen tribe's livelihood pursuits were at stake. They were forbidden from diving for shell, or trapping birds or hunting pigs and deer. Many of them were not even aware that they could not hunt the crocodile anymore. As a result, "Hunting became poaching, and getting food and income a criminal activity…From hard-working people eking out a living from the land and the waters, the community had now come to be branded as a band of poachers" (Sekhsaria 168).

Harish's meeting with Dr. Kutty popularly known as SK, who works with David at the Institute of Island Ecology offers a gestaltic view about the misguided environmental practices followed in the island. He challenges the Andaman Canopy Lifting Shelterwood System that was practised for more than half a century. Drawing on a report submitted to the Department of Enviroment in 1983, SK points out that the entire floral composition is altered by this system and "is not congenial for species conservation in an evergreen biotope" (Sekhsaria185). Mourning the loss of a "priceless" evergreen forest of the islands, SK laments at the myopic Andaman Canopy Lifting Shelterwood System has tragically changed the character of the forest, forcing it to become deciduous, dry and brown like a forest in Central India. SK tries to prove his theory using the instance of the orchid, papilionanthe teres, which blooms in profusion on trees along certain stretches of the Andaman Trunk Road. The orchid, SK points out, is a sunlight-loving plant and an ecological indicator. The orchid is not to be found on the Jarawa side of the Andaman Trunk Road but on the other side on the tarred road, where there was a profusion of the pink orchid flowers suggesting the immensity of the logging operations that had taken place in the past. The replantation measures ushered in teak trees alien to landscape which eroded the soil leaving it dead and sterile. SK eloquently laments the death of the landscape, "This is where PT flourishes, even running riot in an eerie manner, hundreds of these delicate, pink flowers swaying gently, very beautiful, but it's like an offering at a funeral" (Sekhsaria189). Harish understands SK's anguish when the latter leads him into a small clearing from where a path leads into a forest. He declares to Harish that what he sees before him is a remnant of the ancient rainforest−"mysterious disordered world that will soon be no more (Sekhsaria 194). Harish is also witness to the felling of a tree in that ancient forest by the Forest department workers. Harish registers with shock, the sight of a giant tree that reaches more than a hundred feet into the sky being felled down with two men hacking away at the trunk with their pickaxes. The tree comes down with a huge crackling sound that conveys the power and violence of the act to the onlookers. SK declares that the felling for timber operation is illegal, even if it by the Forest Department, because the tree was inside the Jarawa reserve territory. SK wearily reiterates that "This is recorded as a virgin forest even in the records of the Forest Department, and see what they do to it" (Sekhsaria 196). SK goes on to establish connections between the Jarawa sightings and the dwindling forests. He notes. "As long as the forest is there, they'll manage, but what when the forests are gone?...They are changing too, behaving like brats, getting used to toabcco, alcohol, to what have you" (Sekhsaria190). He further elaborates

that the remnant of the rainforests exist in the Andamans due to the Jarawas and not the administration or the settler population. However, this was in the past when there was a widespread fear of the Jarawas. SK remarks that this fear which protected the Jarawa forest space had eroded with the materialistic symbiotic relationships between the settlers and the Jarawas. Large hunting parties from the settlements invaded the forests upon receiving an invitation from the tribals and the hunts were conducted together. In return for rice, dal and salt, the Jarawas bartered honey, crab and timber with the settlers. JK ominously predicts that this marked only the beginning of the decline and prophesies that, "they'll sell out their land and everything they have" (Sekhsaria 199). JK's harangue also extends to the illusory nature of boundaries between the Jarawa territory and the settler land– these boundaries are merely lines on paper and mean nothing much to both the parties involved. The Jarawas have no notion of these boundaries since everything is the forest to them. To JK, the boundaries are equally fallacious as far as the admininstrators are concerned since they create boundaries but don't respect them: "The Forest Department logs inside the Jarawa Reserve, policmen go hunting inside the Jarawa Reserve and an entire goddamned road, the Andaman Trunk runs right through it- what boundaries…" (Sekhsaria 200). JK challenges Harish with the unsettling question as to why he was studying the fringe areas of the Jarawa reserves. When Harish says he has no answers to that, JK persists with a deep question, "What is it that you want to find out? (Sekhsaria 201). The question unsettles Harish but starts resonating within him deeply urging him to see the Jarawa situation in its many-sidedness.

The narrative deliberates on how all discourses try to reduce Jarawas to monodimensional entities. For instance, Samaresh Basu, a former MP who has a record of high personal integrity in the islands, greets the Kolkata High Court Judge with a cheery question about 'good' Jarawa sightings. Harish, who is privy to this conversation is reminded of the image of wild animals sighted in a forest safari. Basu tries to impress on the judge that the naked Jarawas who choose to wander on the roads are a corrupting influence on the public. Basu, goes on to suggest that the life of the tribe in the forests is precarious since they have no proper homes or food and are forced to adopt a nomadic lifestyle and depend on activities like hunting, fishing and foraging to stay alive. Basu feels that the solution for the problem lies in civilizing the savage: "We need to teach them how to live proper lives, wear clothes, make houses, do some agriculture, maybe bagicha, bring them into the mainstream so that they can live normally, enjoy the benefits of civilization and modernization" (Sekhsaria 215). Basu's

suggestions for Jarawa improvement verge on a giant myopia. He sincerely believes that the tribe should be rounded up and relocated to some other island, since "there are only about three hundred of them anyway" (Sekhsaria 215). Basu invokes the terra nullius concept of inert land when he speaks of relocating the Jarawas to the many vacant islands in the Andamans, similar to the strategy that was followed regarding the Great Andamanese tribes. The pro-development arguments are well articulated through this minor character. When the minister asks Basu if the Andaman Trunk Road status under law is suspect since cuts into Jarawa reserve territory, Basu replies that the road is the "lifeline of the islands" and a "vital defence need" which connects three islands and thousands of people.

The narrative gives an insight into the 'Jarawa tourism' that had become "a new category of tourism" in the islands, an "Enchanting Islands package" that was blatantly advertised and promoted in local pamplets and internet sites using catchy slogans like–"A once in a life time opportunity of meeting primitive naked people". Hand in glove with the local police, the tour operators had fine-tuned the whole package into a lucrative enterprise where the consumers were given not just the opportunity to photograph the Jarawas but also the chance be photographed with them. They could play the role of the Good Samaritan and give the "poor, uncivilised people" coconuts, bananas and biscuits. Only when it was found out that booze and tobacco were being given to the Jarawas, that the administration came up with an elaborate list of do's and don'ts.

Harish's ethical dilemma arises from his question whether he could do anything for the Jarawas . He realises that what he knew about them was from the "fringes of their lives". The world which surrounded them at the fringes comprising of settlers and outsiders was changing at a dizzying pace and was in its own way trying to engage with the ancient, primordial world of the Jarawas which did not lend itself to scrutiny. "Two words existed alongside each other, but they inhabited time zones and realities so distinct, they could have been on different planets. There was little, if anything at all, in common" (Sekhsaria 27). Harish realises that the other original islanders, the Onge and the Great Andamanese, who had inhabited the forest worlds of the Andamans along with the Jarawas had disappeared into oblivion–a path along which the Jarawas were also being dragged. Harish realises that the annihilators from the mainstream world who were pushing this ancient world into oblivion were doing so because they knew no better. Harish's best solution for the Jarawa problem is the closing down of the Andman Trunk Road because "the road represents everyting that is wrong for the Jarawa" (Sekhsaria 240).

The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 marks the climaz of the novel. Harish and Seema set out for the turtle camp at Galathea Bay where they are mesmerized by a close encounter with the Giant Leatherback turtle which comes on shore to lay her eggs. Seema is overwhelmed by the whole event of having witnessed this "ancient creature" enact its renewal of life on the white sands of the beach. Seema and Harish linger on the beach watching the turtles when they feel the strong tremors of an earthquake and very soon they see a wall of water building up with amazing ferocity, entering the forests, uprooting trees and altering the landscape. Seema is sucked into the grey vortex of the twirling water whereas Harish has a lucky escape and is taken to the special ward of a hospital located behind the cellular jail to help his broken bones heal. During his hospital stay, he is surprised to find the room partitioned for a patient whom he assumes is some VIP who has been hit by the Tsunami. But he is surprised to hear the nurse tell him that the patient is a "junglee" from Kadamtala who had caught measles. She hesistantly volunteers the information that the Jarawas were not washed out but a few of them had contracted measles which could be deadly for the tribe. Harish's mind goes back to the memory of the Jarawa running a fever with a rash whom he had seen in Kadamtala a few months ago. He realises that the person had been sent back to the forest and must have infected more from his community. It seemed to him that "the story of the Great Andamanese was being replayed here, with criminal callousness" (Sekhsaria 276). Seema's letter which arrives posthumously alerts him to her unspoken love for him and also provides him with a perspective to the Jarawa problem. In her last letter Seema uses the Andaman Trunk Road as a metaphor for a line which keep on going but offers no crossroads. She alerts Harish: "You have no choice but to keep moving, going where the road takes you. Even if you turned, what lies ahead is probably no different from what you have gone by" (Sekhsaria 277).

The epilogue of this novel inches towards a compassionate albeit imperfect understanding of the other. When the fierce looking Jarawa man in the common ward comes to meet Harish, he covers in fear. As if recognising his fear, the man smiles and pointing a finger at himself introduces himself as 'Erema' and asks for Harish's name in broken monosyllabic Hindi. He points at the empty space next to Harish in an attempt to ask Harish if his wife has been washed out by the great tidal wave. When Harish stammeringly utters Seema's name in response, Erema responds consolingly that his daughter had been washed away by the water and that his son was down with the "garam bukhar"–measles. This moment of contact liberates

Harish from the burden of his grief at Seema's loss because he realises that it can in no way equal Erema's losses– of his family, people and way of life.

The novel ends with Harish's firm resolve to stay on the islands despite people advising him to go to the mainland. This decision is spurred by the realization that there is nowhere to go for Erema and his people. As an act of solidarity, Harish decides that "He would stay-at these crossroads, in these islands. So, he hoped, would Erema's people" (Sekhsaria 282). This decision comes out of an informed understanding of the networks of connection in which the Jarawas, non-human nature and the islanders are imbricated.

In conclusion, this narrative suggests that understanding the indigene condition of dislocation in the Anthropocene calls for ananamorphic aesthetics– the art of using multiple perspectives and disparate measurements to represent a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The multiple, mutual interweavings of Sekhsaria's narrative point to climate trauma-what Timothy Morton refers to as 'hyperobjects'– entities of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions, that it is not possible for the human mind to grasp them in their entirety although it is possible to be experience them in their local manifestations since hyperobjects can 'permeate' our lives in an uncanny and striking manner like the tsunami in the climactic part of Sekhsaria's narrative. With hyperobjects like global warming and rising sea levels, we can no longer rest in the comfortable notion of nature being 'out there' – as a backdrop for the human drama to evolve. Hence the Anthropocene ethic that underlies *The Wave* is that our troubled times call for a new thinking which connects the fissured colonial history of the islands with its contemporary history of uneven development caused by a postcolonial state. By connecting the dots between the Jarawas, the giant Leatherback turtles, the vanishing forests, the settler-indigene disputes and the tsunami using multiple anamorphisms, the narrative gently urges the reader to see the web of inter-connections and became aware of their uncanny proximity and participation in our own lives.

Works Cited

Aufschnaiter, Claudia. "Reconsidering the Andaman Islands in anthropology and history." *Social Anthropology*, 2018, pp. 1-6. doi:10.1111/1469-8676.12560. Accessed 5 June 2020.

Bandyopadhyay, Nibedita. 'The Green Sleuth': an analysis of environmentalism in the selected detective fictions of Sunil Gangopadhyay." *Green Letters*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2018, pp.

1-11. doi: 10.1080/14688417.2018.1431142. Accessed 5 June 2020.

Christensen, Miyase. "Slow Violence in the Anthropocene: An Interview with Rob Nixon on Communication, Media, and the Environmental Humanities." *Environmental Communication*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp.7-14. doi: 10.1080/17524032.2017.1367178. Accessed 5 June 2020.

Collu, Gabrielle. "Adivasis and the Myth of Independence: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti the Bountiful.'" *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 43-57. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236121998.pdf. Accessed 5 June 2020.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Duke University Press, 2019.

Dutta-Asane, Sucharita. "The Last wave, A Million Mutinies." *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, vol. 25, 2014, https://www.asiancha.com/content/view/1855/115/. Accessed 5 June 2020.

Guha, Ramachandra and J. Martinez-Alier. *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*. Earthscan, 1997.

Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals and Environment*. Routledge, 2010.

Krishnakumar, M. V. "Andaman Islands: Development or Despoilation? - The Andaman Islands under colonial and postcolonial regimes." *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2009, pp. 104-117. https://www.shimajournal.org/issues/v3n2/j.-Krishnakumar-Shima-v3n2-104-117.pdf. Accessed 4 July 2020.

McGrath, Ann. "Deep Histories in Time, Or Crossing the Great Divide?" *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, edited by Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb, ANU, 2015, pp. 1-33.

McKibben, Bill. *The End of Nature*. Penguin Random House, 1989.

Mukherjee, Madhushree. *The Land of Naked People: Encounters with Stone Age Islanders*. Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Pandya, Vishvajit. "Hostile Borders on Historical Landscapes: The Placeless Place of Andamanese Culture." Asian Studies Institute Working Paper 9, 1999, pp. 1-25. http://hdl.handle.net/10063/4290. Accessed 6 May 2020.

Pugh, Jonathan. "Relationality and Island Studies in the Anthropocene.*" Island Studies Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2018, pp. 93-110. https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.48. Accessed 5 June 2020.

Rangarajan, Swarnalatha. "Women writing Nature in the Global South: New Forest Fictions from India." *De Gruyter Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, edited by Hubert Zapf, De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 438-458.

Said, Edward W. "Orientalism." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 162-206. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41397448. Accessed 31 July 2020.

Sen, Uditi. "Developing Terra Nullius: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Indigeneity in the Andaman Islands." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2017, pp.944-973, doi:10.1017/S0010417517000330. Accessed 5 June 2020.

Sekhsaria, Pankaj. *The Last Wave: An Island Novel*. HarperCollins, 2014.

Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Materialism*. 1980, Verso, 2005.

[i] Swarnalatha Rangarajan is Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. She is the founding editor of the *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism* (IJE). Her academic publications include *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* (2018) and co-edited works titled *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development* (2014) and *Ecocriticism of the Global South (2015)*. She is the co-translator of *Mayilamma: The Life of a Tribal Eco-Warrior* (2018). She is one of the series editors for the *Routledge Studies in World Literatures and Environment* and the co-editor of the *Routledge Book of Ecocriticism and Environmental*

Communication (2019). She is the co-editor of the forthcoming *A Handbook of Medical-Environmental Humanities* to be published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2021.