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## CONSTRUCTING A DECOLONIAL ECOLOGY: RESISTING MATERIAL MODERNITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN ORIJIT SEN'S GRAPHIC NOVEL *RIVER OF STORIES*

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### Abstract

The research paper examines ecology as a form of resistance in Orijit Sen's graphic novel *River of Stories*. The paper attempts to highlight the regressive ideas of development and modernity as an embodiment of coloniality. The paper investigates the undermining of the local knowledge of the tribal communities in Rewasagar Valley and the prominence of the Western knowledge system that justifies and protects the existing structures of coloniality in postcolonial India. The paper utilises Scott McCloud's theoretical framework of iconicity in graphic novels to further understand the cohesive relationship between tribal communities and ecology. Bridging decolonial theory, graphic narratology, and postcolonial ecocriticism, the paper demonstrates how Sen's graphic novel attempts to bring humans and ecology into one unifying existence that resists and rejects the demarcation of nature and wilderness propagated by coloniality. The paper highlights how Sen challenges the material and discursive violence inherent to capitalist modernisation and extractivism. The paper demonstrates the different ways through which ecological struggles and philosophy of indigenous communities in Rewa Valley find similarities with ecological struggles in South America and the ecological philosophy of Ubuntu in Africa.

Keywords: Decolonial, Ecology, Coloniality, Modernity, Indigenous.

### Introduction

*River of Stories* by Orijit Sen situates itself in a post-colonial India, highlighting the urban-rural tensions that eventually become binary frameworks of development and backward regression. An urban lifestyle is often associated with modernity and development, and the rural populace is perceived as underdeveloped due to a lack of materiality, consequently determined by technocracy. The

graphic novel contextualises forced indigenous displacement to pursue development and social justice that not only demands justice for the people but also highlights ecological degradation and capitalist expansion. The graphic novel entails the narrative of Vishnu, who attempts to cover the story of the Rewasagar Dam Project and the displacement of indigenous communities. Thematically, the graphic novel entails another narrative in which, through the voice of village singer Malgugayan, the

readers are presented with mythic stories and knowledge of the community. Therefore, Malgugayan and the journey of Vishnu simultaneously personify the binaries of urban, which schematically pertains to reasoning, knowledge, development, technological advancement and modernity and the rural underdevelopment state, which showcases non-knowledge, non-reasoning, unscientifically operating communities. However, Vishnu covering the injustice of the dam project breaks the binaries and a just consciousness emerges not only for justice but for acknowledgement where an urban voice, which is perceived to be developmental and equipped with tools of modernity and rationality, is purposefully assimilated into a local knowledge system, thus making the context of Vishnu decolonial.

*River of Stories* moves beyond the boundaries of constructing decolonial ecology and the struggle against modernity. In contemporary times the expansion and an emergent race to become a first world nation through development has contributed to the destruction of the ecology and cultures of indigenous communities worldwide. For instance, the extraction of the Amazon Forest in Brazil has displaced indigenous communities. Similarly, graphic novels such as *River Stories* become an artistic tool for preserving indigenous groups' cultural and historical memories. Different climate treaties worldwide are a testament that there is a need to construct a relationship between humans with ecology which is distant from the capitalising and expansive behaviours of mere profit. The research paper explores the structures of colonial modernity that reside in postcolonial context through the journey of Vishnu and structures that protect and safeguard the principles of modernity, interlinking the process, epistemology and knowledge system together, making it impossible to think beyond the structures of coloniality. Meanwhile an alternative decolonial ecology is presented in the graphic novel, which functions as an assimilating force that unifies humans and nature.

Orijit Sen's graphic novels are characterized by their intricate narratives, vibrant artwork, and

profound explorations of contemporary issues. His works have consistently challenged dominant narratives and given voice to marginalized communities, often drawing inspiration from his own experiences and observations of Indian society. A prominent aspect of Sen's work is his engagement with themes of decoloniality, a critical approach that challenges the lingering effects of colonial power structures and advocates for the recognition and empowerment of marginalized groups. In his graphic novel *River of Stories*, Sen delves into the impact of colonial exploitation on indigenous communities and the environment, highlighting the interconnectedness of social and ecological justice.

The concern of ecology becomes evident in the graphic novel through its content division and Chapterisation. The spring, The River and The sea, the subsequent naming of the sections in itself, highlights the gradual progression pertaining to patterns observed in immediate nature. Simultaneously, it also captures the content of the graphic novel in which Vishnu's exposure gradually shifts and the voice of the indigenous community becomes a resistance movement. The voice of the indigenous community through the figurative language upholds the characterisation of a sense of ecology and habitat. Orijit Sen's division of the graphic novel stems from the figurative language of nature and ecology, which consequently inclines towards creating an ecology immune from uncontrolled capitalisation. The *River of Stories* stems from nature itself, 'I was really trying to look at everything and understand it through a visual language. I had to categorise types of trees, plants, agricultural landscapes, water bodies, architecture, layouts of villages and houses, placements of things, objects, everyday life, etcetera' (Sen 2023) Orijit Sen's emphasis alludes to the body and ecology attempting to create an equilibrium where humans and nature form a coexisting- correlation and the body along with biodiversity identifies the naturalness of its equilibrium. 'Wherever you see the building of roads, railways – they're not done in order to make life better for local people. The local people never asked for it. It is done in order to take the resources from that place.' (Sen 2023)

Coloniality and modernity fuse and become the same side of the coin, as elaborated by Mignolo. Similarly, the technocracy imbues itself along with modernity to sustain its power structures. According to Torress (243), Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged due to colonialism but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. As elaborated by Sen, the tools and technologies operating and functioning in these structures rarely provide for the indigenous communities; the technocratic approach that has become a perceived prevalent solution for every problem contains a side of coloniality that has consequentially emerged from modernity. Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) appropriately demonstrates the idea of capturing and domination of nature through technological metrices. Bacon's vision was not free of ambiguity regarding the relationship between power and knowledge, he conceived of a new social order dedicated to the expansion of modern science and progress in human achievement through dominion over nature. Therefore, coloniality, modernity, and technocracy aid in a regressive and depleting ecological state; hence, the indigenous resistance against developmental ideology also becomes an alternative to illustrate a different state of living that includes ecology more than modernity.

### **Knowledge Systems of Coloniality and Developmental Depletion**

The opposition of modernity at the cost of human life is one of the central themes in *River of Stories*. The narrative uses various character voices to highlight the structures that govern and protect modernity and, at the same time, provide enough scientific probability that could trade humans for profitable statistical outcomes. During his travel journey to Ballanpur to cover the protest against the dam construction, Vishnu undergoes conversations, discussions and debates regarding the dam construction in Rewa Valley. The unnamed character eagerly asks Vishnu about the Rewa Valley dam construction. Consequently, both the characters indulge in a long conversation where the arguments against the dam construction and the exploitation of

humans are equally presented. Vishnu argues that 'people in the past have not received fair compensation during migration, and they have merely moved in urban areas in search of a living' (Sen 34). However, the fellow traveller debates with Vishnu that this time, the government has elaborated a rehabilitation programme, which is more than enough as he sees the dam construction as an integral part of government developmental policies, which is statistically, mathematically has the probability of helping millions. The conversation between Vishnu and the unnamed traveller highlights the knowledge system created through modernising missions to regulate and substantiate the discourse of development.

Mignolo (361-427) highlights the problem of binary opposition created in knowledge systems where one form of gaining knowledge and predicting future is given superiority to other forms of knowledge. The estimation of Rewa Dam providing water and irrigation facilities to millions utilises the methods of scientific discourse which overpower the benefits of the Dam through numbers and mathematical certainties. Therefore, the knowledge system, through numbers and probabilities, constructs a narrative that aligns in harmony with the developmental narratives of modernity. Contrarily, the same knowledge system becomes absent when the estimation and cost of migration of indigenous communities come into play. Throughout the novel, the figures and facts, which are backed by modern scientific and technocratic methods, are utilised to measure the benefits and functionalities of the modern structure. The measurement of the dam and the project centres around numbers, cumulatively aiding in profit and loss statements for the corporations and contractors.

For instance an unnamed protestor highlights the corporate-driven argument after Vishnu attends the protest in Ballanpur, 'why things will not happen in an alternative way is because contractors want profits and politicians want to line their pockets' (Sen 47) The train journey of Vishnu in itself derives various metaphorical and symbolical associations as, during the journey, Vishnu and fellow traveller argue about the pros and cons of the

Dam project meanwhile, travelling in the train which for many reasons became an integral symbolism of modernity and technological advancement during the industrial revolution in Europe as well as a litmus test to measure the civilisational progress during colonialism. 'The train, with its perpetual forward motion, functions as an emblem of progress, a concept often rendered in artistic form through the image of the journey' (Aguilar 66-85). Therefore, Vishnu's debate with his fellow traveller on dam construction provides an inert contradiction and structural oppression where Vishnu can oppose the developmental and regressive developmental-driven policies but somehow needs to adhere to the conveniences and advancements provided by modernity.

A form of resistance and an alternative knowledge system emerges in the narrative when Vishnu undergoes a similar discussion after reaching Ballanpur and attending the village protest. This time, however, village people provide an alternative and comprehensive rationale for the traditional form of irrigation and its effectiveness (Sen 47). One of the characters highlights that indigenous people are not as foolish as the government thinks; their knowledge is based on real-life experiences and history. Characters do not attempt to discuss the importance of the river through figures and numbers. Rather, the importance of the river is situated in their history and living experience. Compared to the discussion Vishnu undergoes in train, the discussion on the preservation of river highlights an alternative where a discourse and debate on the preservation and juxtaposing views can be negotiated without any structural interference such as police officers and governmental officials. The knowledge system that is based on living experiences resists the knowledge system where numbers and figures are constructed and manipulated to strengthen a narrative.

The superstructures created by colonial modernity which operate in a manner that never allows an opposition of corporatism, which later capitalises through exploitation. When Vishnu and his fellow traveller reach the end of their discussion, a police officer arrives in their compartment for ticket verification, it again reverberates the

structural imposition that protects and safeguards corporatism, capitalism, technocracy, developmental policies and modernity altogether. Discussing an opposition against developmental principles inside the symbolic engine of modernity results in forms of checks and balances where one structure of modernity (train) is protected by another (police officer)

A similar instance in the graphic novel is illustrated when Anriyo, Relku's father, files a police complaint against Rathore Saab, the alcohol distributor, for encouraging Anriyo's brother Maaru to consume as much alcohol as he wants on credit, trapping him in a cycle of debt. The officers (bribed by Rathore) beat Anriyo, who is unaware of his wrongdoing, and Relku's house is destroyed by fire the next day, forcing the family to relocate. to work in the city. Ghosh describes it as voice and visibility, 'Voice and Visibility are markers that acknowledge the presence of a human being. Still, when the concerned human is deprived of both, there is a regression towards a sub-human stature where the choice of identity itself is snatched and controlled by materially developed humans, referring to the bureaucrats in the present context. However, they use the economy to claim mastery and control over the non-beings (Ghosh 9-10). The overconsumption of alcohol becomes integral in the contextualisation of materiality and development. The consumption of alcohol rejects the assumption that materiality involves anxiety of technological and modern sustenance, however, the anxiety and excessive need hides in the most available materiality's. Colonial modernity and its structures reside within it and protect the structures of colonial modernity and imperialism; these similar structures safeguard each other's existence while modernity, technocracy, imperialism and scientific knowledge system interacting with each other creates materialistic pervasiveness as an integral aspect in the postmodern condition. These structures consequently attempt to project development and modernity as a progressive step meanwhile hiding the self-consuming and parasitic nature of excessive materiality.

The significant argument for colonial modernity and viewing development and structure

transformation as a progressive idea is propagated by specific systems in place. Foucault (1961) dissects the controlling nature of discourse in the context of madness and insanity. Social structures and knowledge systems around modernity breed material rewards which might be used as obfuscation and as a defence to protect the institutions of modernity. The role of journalists and media in *River of Stories* comprehends and comments on the institutions around the discourse of development and modernity and whether these institutions realise the impact of ecological loss or propagate the colonial discourse of modernity. Therefore, social activism not only appears to question the institutions but also sees institutions in a decolonial light where institutions can dictate and refurbish their roles regardless of the superstructures above them. When Vishnu publishes the articles bringing the voices of the marginalized in front, the institute of media metaphorically moves away from the structural hegemony. Therefore, the structure of media discourse becomes decolonial through the vocalization of indigenous voices.

The village of Ballanpur becomes a space of alternative knowledge systems, where experience and myths are equally significant. After arriving in Ballanpur, Vishnu's exposure towards the Rewa river becomes less about mathematical potential of the river and more about the experience of the communities. Ballanpur becomes a form of resistance as it incorporates the many silent voices and stories. The readers showed an alternative side of modernity and development in the form of ecological awareness, sustainability, and humanitarian sentiments. (Ghosh 13-15) The village in itself provides an alternative through the individuals. Therefore, the monolithic and universal form of knowledge, as argued through developmental policies, is opposed to the experiences of individuals living in the village. The universal measuring tool of science and mathematics fails to measure the experiential knowledge of individuals living in Ballanpur. For instance, a poor weaver receives Vishnu and narrates the problems faced by the villagers due to the government official's aggressive stance (Sen 35-

36). He describes the importance of Rewa Valley through the same mythical story elaborated by Malguyan. Thus, illustrating the importance of the river through experience, memory and myths instead of numbers and mathematical figures.

Anand elaborates to Vishnu the journey through which he ended up in Rewa valley as an activist. Anand describes that he observed himself becoming a 'thinking machine' where he realised the exploitative methods of capitalism and corruption overpowering his individuality. (Sen 36-37) Anand's realisation and the ability to willingly remove himself from colonial modernity elucidates an example of a decolonised mind. Gandhi formulates a similar argument against the machinery where the individuality is often overtaken by the machinery, only producing more needs. The involvement of machine should stop where it poses a thread over individuality. 'The machine should not be allowed to cripple the limbs of man' (Gandhi 4-5). During the Protest demonstration, another unnamed character calls for an opposition against capitalist economy and government regulation of those economic conditions.

'The planet is seriously endangered, yet development continues to be based upon economic system that regards all forms of humans and resources as goods that can be bought and sold. It continually seeks to transfer resources from poor to rich' (Sen 46)

Through the narrative, Sen illustrates the exploitative economic condition that has been presupposed to be natural and common, where a commodity needs to be traded for capital; meanwhile, everything from humans to natural resources could be traded. The following economic condition rests upon colonial modernity that has naturalised this economic condition. The economic condition yet again rests upon the knowledge system that regards profit and loss outcomes as the most logical of the approaches. These conditions consequently allow for the dominance of modernity and technocracy that demand certain economic conditions, and these conditions can only exist with conditions of colonial modernity. Antoni Gramsci's



emphasis on cultural hegemony demonstrates the naturalisation of knowledge which reduces the resourcefulness of humans into mere commodities while making this exploitative condition appear like a common sense.

Anand (Sen 42) demonstrates to Vishnu an apparent similarity between the occupation of the land and marginalisation of indigenous communities and the Australian colonisation of the land. The dam project and displacement of the communities propagate Western ideas and methods of environmental narratives. A binary between nature and wilderness is constructed to purposefully eradicate and capitalise the land by labelling it as wild. The British administration introduced the concept of forest reservation, which rationalised the process of taking over the land, and Indian politicians and governmental policies continued the same process. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (98-102) elaborates that Bolivia implemented liberal reforms after the creation of the modern state-nation, but they did not have liberal practices in the economic and political sphere, instead, the governor elite created an oligarchical group that in the practice was more coloniser than Spaniards before.

Colonisation and modernity in its essence change its shape and form and conceal itself. Coloniality, being the dark side or con of modernity, "exists as an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernisation, and being good for everyone. (Mignolo 6) The economic system combines with the western knowledge system and its universal aspect of civilisation and definition of development. The nature of economic condition and materialistic association with modernity establishes an exploitative and aggressive principles of development, technocracy and materialistic pervasiveness. Therefore, the colonial modernity and economic condition treats the resources and humans as something that can be captured, expanded or needs to be civilised. Hence, modernity's principles contradict the concepts of sustainable ecology and finds a way to bend and capitalise on resources, humans and ecology.

Sen attempts to establish the artificiality constructed lives of local people in the name of modernity which later translates to occupation and forced migration unveiling an unjust approach to ecology; removing an integral equilibrium element such as humans from ecology and forming structures exemplifies a capitalising approach that hides colonial understanding of ecology that separates nature and wilderness consequently justified by the knowledge system. The argument for the extraction of resources in the context of corporate law becomes evident; the premise rests upon what conditions and circumstances indigenous communities can claim the resources that belong to the nation their own. However, the extraction and exploitation of resources, such as in the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam, elucidates the rejection of a harmonical state of affairs with the indigenous community and extreme emphasis on capturing the resources. Therefore, the unjustifiable approach, even if it does not agree with corporate laws, is still unjust because of the imposition and forced destruction of the existing ecosystem.

#### **Unification of Humans and Ecology as a Decolonial Approach**

The graphic novel initially begins with an elaborative and comprehensive mythological telling of the birth of the universe. Malgugayan sings the mythological tale by stating that the universe laid on Kujum Chantu, and the original humans lived on the back of Kujum Chantu. However, it occurred to her that if she ever got up, everyone would be killed. Therefore, she rubbed the dirt and out of dirt and gave life. She created all living creatures with enough resources for all.

Trisos and Katti (1205-1212) suggest five practices for anti-oppressive and ethical ecological practice, which contain practices of knowing one's history and decolonising the material needs. Knowing one's history becomes significant in the context of *River of Stories* in two thematical instances, primarily the tribals are forced into displacement where loss of ecology will erase the familiarity of their history from their memory, which subsequently takes place because colonial modernity has successfully forced and manipulated

people such as government officials, contractors and police officers to disregard and forget their history in pursuit of material gain. Therefore, forgetting the history of one's ecology paves the way for more exploitation and capitalist expansion.

Resistance to development becomes an alternative, with ideas of myths and histories being central aspects against the notions of progression and development. The mythological telling demonstrates the relation of ecology, knowledge, history and memories. The relation between the indigenous community and ecology highlights a consciousness regarding other living creatures and consciousness towards others existence. Kujum Chanta being conscious about creatures living on her back and regard towards other existence is evidently translated in the ways of living of the indigenous community. The consciousness for a sustainable ecology emerges as a resistance against the exploitative and capitalising nature of colonial modernity and resisting developmental policies that cater to only few.

Colonial modernity for its expansion and dominance rests upon an anthropocentric view of the world. Bera and Singh (536-553) contend that Sen's narrative reflects the Anthropocentric worldview, which perpetuates the exploitation and marginalisation of indigenous communities and ecosystems. They further argue that the narrative's posthumanist elements and themes juxtapose diverse temporal frames, allowing it to capture the crises of the anthropocene and highlight the interconnectedness of all life forms, thus fostering consciousness and posthumanist perspectives among readers. Therefore, the anthropocentric worldview is portrayed as the view with little or no consciousness towards the other forms of living beings and the consciousness of Kujum Chanta emerges as a primarily alternative that constructs a

decolonial ecology that demands a consciousness that refuses to disregard the interconnectedness of the all living forms. Therefore, a paradigm of resistance is created, where certain philosophies regarding the ecology fuse together and demand a holistic understanding of the world rather than materialistic and developmental praxis.

The iconicity in the graphic novel aids in a construction of ecology that attempts to illustrate a positive assimilation and integration with the ecology rather than a division between wilderness, nature and development. The philosophy draws similarities with the philosophy of Ubuntu, African idea of Ubuntu is 'being human through other people'. It has been succinctly reflected in the phrase 'I am because of who we all are' Mathew Bukhi (92-102) elaborates that the African philosophy of ecology of Ubuntu makes humans an integral part of the ecosystem instead of creating boundaries between humans and nature. The iconicity in the graphic novel attempts to break the boundaries between human and nature, the village singer Malgugayan and the visual iconicity aids in the construction of ecology that promotes integration of humans and nature.

According to McCloud (36) iconicity is based on the physical similarity between the image and the object it represents. For example, a cartoon drawing of a dog with floppy ears and a wagging tail is highly iconic because it resembles a real dog in appearance. Iconicity is based on a conceptual similarity between the image and the object it represents. It is also based on a shared understanding between the creator and the viewer of the image. For example, the red stop sign is iconic because it is a universally recognized symbol of danger. Through iconicity, McCloud creates a triangular framework moving from abstraction to reality and towards meaning formation.



Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1 illustrates the level of iconicity moving towards the hyper real visuals but the it remains in the middle. The deployment of the level of iconicity demonstrates an important philosophical understanding, the character of Malgugayan and the surrounding nature does not appear to differentiate from one another. The character of Malgugayan and the figures of birds and sky appears assimilated with the ecology, in complete harmony with each other. In the graphic novel, the darker monochromatic colours are used to portray the ecological and terrain of the indigenous region, attempting to illustrate a level of confusion, lack of exposure and lack of understanding that is associated with the land and ecology of indigenous community. However, the level of iconicity which seems to move towards the hyper real plane moves back in the upward direction primarily in the paradigm of abstraction. Fig 1.2 illustrates the iconicity moving towards the right side of the triad. The iconicity It draws similarities with Joe Sacco's graphic novel Palestine which undertakes a similar method of graphic journalism to bring forth the voices of victims, however, Sen's utilisation of the monochromatic colours allows for a space that provides selective importance in the



Figure 1.2

visualisation of the indigenous community and the ecology.

Malgu Gayan, the village minstrel in the graphic novel plays a pivotal role in mediating the temporal continuum, safeguarding oral traditions, and amplifying the voices of the marginalized within the narrative. Throughout the novel, Malgugayan's musical renditions function as a conduit between historical epochs, invoking communal recollections and upholding cultural legacies. His melodic expressions transcend mere artistic performance, emerging as a potent mechanism for social critique, providing an articulate discourse on contemporary issues, and affording resonance to those traditionally marginalized within the community. In his inaugural appearance within the novel, Malgugayan is emblematic of the custodian of the village's oral heritage. His rendition of an archaic folk melody prompts a narrative divergence, unveiling the genesis of the song and the historical epochs it memorializes. This narrative maneuver accentuates Malgugayan's integral role as the archivist of knowledge and the conduit for the transmission of cultural memory.



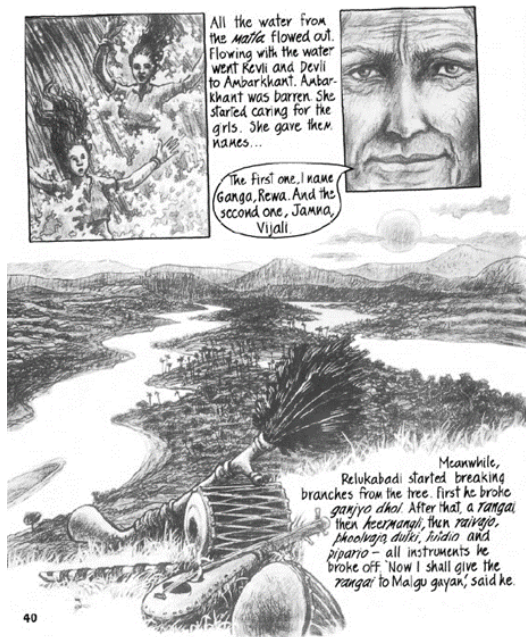


Fig 2.1



Fig 2.2

The resonance of Malgugayan's musical compositions extends beyond the aesthetic realm, acting as a catalytic force for societal transformation. His lyrical narratives often interrogate prevailing norms, articulating the grievances of marginalized factions within the village. A poignant example of this transformative potential is evident when Malgu vocalizes a composition detailing the tribulations faced by marginalized communities, thereby instigating a communal dialogue. This musical intervention prompts a collective confrontation of injustices, galvanizing the community towards a more equitable social order. Malgugayan's musical oeuvre, beyond its societal impact, exerts a transformative influence on individual psyches. In a particular juncture, a young villager wrestling with isolation and despondency finds solace and rejuvenation through the melodic strains. The harmonious resonance of communal history and the collective resilience of the village community, encapsulated in Malgugayan's music, becomes a catalyst for the individual's psychological convalescence and the renewal of a sense of purpose.

The visual construction of Malgugayan assimilates with the terrain and ecology represented in the graphic novel. Fig 2 illustrates Malgugayan's

musical equipment visually being in complete harmony with the landscape that is constantly being capitalised. Malgugayan's absence from the frame elucidates the movement of philosophy away from the anthropocentric view towards ecological consciousness and harmonical view of the world. Meanwhile fig 2.2 demonstrates the complete harmony that indigenous community manages to establish with ecology. Agarwal (413) advances a pivotal argument centred on the imperative deconstruction of the schism that has historically separated Indigenous knowledge systems from their scientific counterparts. The central contention underscores the necessity for bridging this epistemic chasm to facilitate a more harmonious and equitable coalescence of these two cognitive frameworks in service of advancing sustainable development and addressing multifarious contemporary global challenges.

Vishnu, Anand and Malgugayan represents an assimilation of two knowledge systems, these characters provide an alternative where local knowledge system can be integrated within the dominant paradigm of economical modes without causing harm to indigenous ecology and the indigenous community. Characters of Vishnu and Anand highlight the argument where the existence of a minute possibility of people rejecting the

materialistic pervasiveness of modernity and power structures of coloniality can lead towards a decolonial process. A future where individuals can understand the knowledge of indigenous community that form the meaning of their surroundings, environment and ecology through unification instead of categorization.

### Conclusion

*River of Stories* posits the long struggle of marginalized voices against the power structures of coloniality. The novel's narrative uses multiple perspectives to emphasize on the importance of understanding diverse viewpoints and experiences. By presenting the story through the eyes of various characters, including humans, animals, and the river itself, Sen breaks down the human-centered narrative and invites readers to consider the broader ecological context. The novel however, because of excessive utilisation of unnamed characters appears to be becoming a mouthpiece of the author. However, this gross theoretical simplification which appears polyphonic is deployed to highlight the unknowability and the distance that urban populace is at with the suffering of the marginalized voices. Furthermore, Sen ensures to never name the politicians, contractors and police officers as well which elaborates the loss of individuality in the structures of coloniality that undertakes everyone, from people that adhere to these structures to people who refuse these structures, a sense of individuality is always at a loss due to modernity. It also highlights the journalistic utilisation of narrative of ensuring the anonymity of the characters.

The characters in the novel present alternative as well as decolonial thinking and approach, however, the ecology becomes decolonial through the assimilation of Rewa river's history, its habitat, mythology and memory. The resistance movement which appears a leftist propagandist tool, moves away from ideological formulation of a classless or capital-less society and economic system. The deconstruction of river as a living entity that incorporates the needs of everyone acts as a force of unification, that remains immune from ideological, political and capitalist categorisation. The resistance movement in itself becomes an act of

decolonial praxis due to its attempt to not only preserve the river but also preserve the memories of the indigenous community, memories that hold the pot of knowledge systems, eco-consciousness and immunity from materialistic perversions.

The decoloniality that reverberates in the visuals of the graphic novel establishes ecology and humans as an integral aspect of each other, which colonial modernity and capitalist exploitation attempts to overlook. The importance of Malgu Gyan's songs establishes a form of resistance that brings forth the history and memories of communities past meanwhile the poetic tradition that equates with living experience of the community resists the western scientific knowledge system that is established to expand and conquer the wilderness of the nature. The ecology under threat from developmental and modernity driven structures and policy becomes a force that restricts and segregates humans from ecology and wilderness from nature. Sen's critique of material modernity extends to the notion of progress itself, which is often associated with economic growth and technological advancement. The novel challenges this linear narrative, demonstrating that progress at the expense of the environment and the displacement of communities is not true progress.

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