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## Human As A Nurturer: Foundation Of A New Geological Era.

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### Abstract

With the invention of Steam Engine was laid the foundation for the start of a new era, Anthropocene. Unrestrained usage of natural resources for the purpose of development has wreaked havoc on the environment. Scientists contend that rising temperature and contamination of the air and water resources are the result of human-caused destruction of nature. This resulted in global warming which, in future, could make it impossible for living species to survive on Earth. Concern over the management of the remaining natural resources has grown as a result of an increase in the number of cases of forest fires, deadly earthquakes, droughts and rising sea levels. Leaders from around the world are debating how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, one of the main causes of the world's rising temperature. In the midst of this crisis, author Vinayak Varma, through his story based on Padmashree-awardee Mulai Payeng, attempts to address the serious issue of animal extinction and change in temperature. In his book for young readers, he demonstrates how even one individual can bring a significant difference through his awareness, knowledge and dedication. **Key Words:** Anthropocene, conservation, reforestation, environmental crisis

## Introduction

Vinayak Varma, a writer and visual artist from Bangalore, is the author and illustrator of “*Jadav and the Tree-Place*”. The book’s plot is based on the real-life incidences. It draws inspiration from the life of Padmashree-winning conservationist Jadav Mulai Payeng. Payeng is a resident of Assam. He started reforesting the land around his hometown in 1979 after observing the dying snakes along the banks of the Brahmaputra River. He was just 16 years old when he made the decision to preserve the forest. Over the following three decades, he transformed 550-hectares of land into a lush, dense forest that is now home to many different species of vertebrates, animals, birds and insects.

Through this book, Vinayak Varma tries to convey the idea that while reforestation is a challenging and time-consuming activity, it also yields positive results in terms of satisfaction. The main protagonist in this book is showed as a nurturer, who through his efforts brings the whole forest back to life. Which he achieved only when he himself felt united with the nature.

In this paper, I argue that understanding our ecosystem and its current state, in addition to having patience and commitment, are the primary tools needed to preserve nature. Knowing how different plant species behave under various environmental conditions helps us make right decisions. Because all creatures on earth share a home with us, they all have an equal claim to the resources that nature holds. If we acknowledge the fact that every living being on this planet has the right to exist and flourish, only then we will be able to save them.

## Anthropocene

Anthropocene is a term which is used in both science and the humanities for understanding the long-term impact of human activity on the Earth. It marks the end of the Holocene and the beginning of a new era. Anthropocene is considered as a new era where people exercise power over nature. Ongoing changes in the environment like piles of garbage, increased species extinction, ozone depletion, deforestation, radioactive fallout, changes in the nitrogen cycle, forests on fire signal a new age. »Considering these and many other major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term “anthropocene” for the current geological epoch. The impacts of current human activities will continue over long periods. « (Crutzen 2000: 17) wrote Crutzen and Stoermer in their essay "The Anthropocene" (2000).

The Anthropocene is also described as a metacrisis whose indicators are increasing industrialization, transportation, urbanization, and globalization (cf. Horn, et al. 2020: 22). With the increasing debate over the consequences of the emergence of the new age, the question related to the beginning of this new era also arose. Exactly when the Holocene ended and was replaced by the Anthropocene is still under debate, and AWG scientists will soon come to a conclusion (Zalasiewicz 2017: 59). AWG is the Anthropocene Working Group, which was founded in 2009. Its mission is to formalize the Anthropocene as a geochronological epoch. After World War II,

there was a sudden increase in land usage and population growth. Steffen et al. called this the Great Acceleration, which according to the AWG is the actual starting point of the Anthropocene.

However, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer proposed in their essay that the Anthropocene began with the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 18th century. (Crutzen, et al. 2000: 17) In 1784, James Watt laid the foundation for this with the invention of the steam engine. Crutzen and Stoermer's proposal was based on the increasing use of coal as a source of energy. Rhode and Brocke brought a new twist to the process of defining the beginning of the Anthropocene. According to them, the Anthropocene began in the early modern period with the exchange of plants, animals, people, and diseases. During this time, many forests were cleared to introduce new crops. Alfred Crosby referred to this exchange as Columbian exchange. Rhode and Brooke considered this change in agriculture, cultivation, and breeding methods as criteria for the beginning of a new era.

Not just the problem, Crutzen and Stoermer also talked about the solution to this growing environmental crisis. They recognized sustainable environmental management as the only way out of this situation. They said, »To develop a world-wide accepted strategy leading to sustainability of ecosystems against human induced stresses will be one of the great future tasks of mankind [...] An exciting, but also different and daunting task lies ahead of the global research and engineering community to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management. « (Ibid.: 18)

### Power of Knowledge

This story is all about the Jadav who, through his efforts and many years of hard work, transformed the place with no trees into one with a few trees. Jadav is the only character in this work. He cherishes the outdoors. His happiness and sorrow are demonstrated to be correlated with the wildlife i.e., regions devoid of vegetation make him sad and places with trees make him happy. The places without trees were referred to as *No-tree-places* by the narrator. These places are depicted as dead, because no trees or life of any kind exist here. These areas are hot and arid. Due to lack of precipitation, the soil is no longer productive and has instead turned into sand. Additionally, these places are referred to be inappropriate habitats for living beings to survive given the scarcity of food, extreme heat, and absence of shelter. *No-tree-places* are distinguished from *tree-places* based on the vibrancy present in the latter one. Tree-places are home to a variety of species, which is the reason that the sight of such places makes the protagonist happy. Various plant species can easily grow there because of the fertile soil owing to moisture and insects. These places also have low temperature that is conducive to the growth of insects.

The places with trees are also classified into two distinct categories based on the number of trees that grow there. The few-tree place has fewer trees, which over time transformed into a *many-trees-place* with a wide range of animals and tree species residing there. These trees are referred to as 'his' trees by the narrator, as if they belong to Jadav who planted and nurtured them. »Soon, his Arjun, ejar and gulmohar, his koroi, moj and himolu, and all his many other plants dug in, took root and started growing. « (Varma, 2016:11) Jadav is not depicted in this scenario as a ruler on whom depends the nature for its existence. Instead, he is portrayed as a friend, protector and nurturer who

gave the nature a chance to flourish and transformed an arid terrain into a fertile one. By planting trees, Jadav initiated a flow of life on a barren land. Through the lines »But what's a many-trees-place without many tree-creatures? When one came, the others followed. « (Ibid.: 12), narrator tries to demonstrate that all living things found in nature are interconnected. There is a cycle of events that affect one another. With the arrival of plants on barren land came the insects that made the soil fertile for new seeds to germinate. After then, birds arrived and gave birth to their off-springs on these trees. Birds were followed by animals like rabbits, deer, buffaloes and so on. At the very end, the snakes appeared. The appearance of the snakes denotes Jadav's accomplishment of his goal. At the starting of the story, Sight of the dying snakes on the banks of Brahmaputra River prompted Jadav to begin with the conservation of land because snakes were perishing in *no-tree-place* with scorching climate. The way they were spread out on the ground gave the impression that the soil had entirely dried up and was striped. Jadav's tears were also portrayed as snakes falling from his eyes. Swaying and sashaying of the snakes at the end of the tale indicates that the place has become suitable for them to thrive and survive. Snakes are also considered sacred in Assam. They are revered as the guardians of water and granaries. (cf. Sarma, 2017: 341) In India, particularly in North-East, they are worshipped at the Manasa (Serpent deity) Puja. In Assam and among some tribes, killing snakes is frowned upon and is thought to bring bad luck. For this reason, Jadav becomes happy to see snakes back in the jungle. This narrative serves as a good example of how nature and culture are intertwined. Local people's cultural and religious traditions influence the ecology of that region. Snakes have religious significance to Jadav that is the reason he could not bear the sight of dying snakes, so he resolved to bring them back.

This cycle of events that started with Jadav's plantation work restored the ecosystem's balance, which is crucial for maintaining the viability of life on Earth, according to James Lovelock (cf. Lovelock 1972: 16). Every living thing has a vital role to play in this process of equilibrium. The narrator attempts to show that the trees lay the foundation for all other life forms to grow in the surrounding. However, the narrator has not clearly mentioned the time it takes for a *no-tree-land* to transform into a home for these living creatures. He remarked »It was hard work, his [Jadav's] back hurt, and it took many years. The orange and blue skies turned purple and pink, and villages became towns. The wind grew laden with dust, and the river became grey. But Jadav's insect friends helped to till the soil, and his tall bamboos gave him shade and cooled the air. And Jadav kept on planting. « (Varma, 2016: 10) The narrator attempts to illustrate the passage of time figuratively here rather than providing an exact number. By doing this, he draws attention to the development that is taking place in the area. For villages to develop into towns, it requires decades. It is also true that it takes 10 to 20 years for any major change to take place in the surrounding. He also highlights the drawbacks of these changes by mentioning the rise in river- and water pollution. The narrator illustrates the two facets of development in a single paragraph. On the one side, Jadav continues to plant trees for the welfare of the planet and on the other hand, the amount of dust and garbage in the air and water is rising. The narrator attempts to demonstrate that one individual cannot save the planet on his own. Everyone must work in this direction.

Furthermore, the language used in this work is very simple and easy to comprehend. Usage of words like *no-tree-places*, *tree-places* and *many-tree-places* help readers comprehend the type of region the narrator is referring to. In addition, vernacular names for trees such as 'Arjun', 'Gulmohar', 'Ejar' etc. are used in place of their scientific names so that the reader may easily identify which tree the narrator is talking about. Also, words like feathers, beaks, wings, tails and fangs are used as symbols to avoid repetition and to demonstrate the diversity of animals in the forest.

Jadav's success was a result of his devotion, but his knowledge of surrounding and plants also played a significant role. Jadav knows that no other plant would grow in the harsh and unfertile soil except bamboo. Bamboos can flourish in barren land easily. He therefore began by sowing bamboo shoots. Usually, it takes a very long period for bamboo to grow. Despite this, Jadav persisted in attempting and did not give up despite the bad weather. After waiting for years, bamboo finally started to grow, improving the fertility of the soil and cooling the air around surrounding it. Jadav then made the decision to plant additional Arjun, Ejar, Gulmohar, Koroi, Moj and Himolu trees because the soil and temperature conditions became favorable for other species to grow. Different tree species enrich the soil with different nutrients including nitrogen, oxygen, iron, etc. Jadav's knowledge of how different trees species, soil and temperature relate to one another helped him succeed in his mission.

The purpose of the narrator's telling of Jadav's tale is for the reader to draw inspiration from him. He demonstrated the need to alter undesirable situations. One needs great willpower, like Jadav, to bring about change. He made reforestation his mission of life. Instead of waiting around for someone to help him out, he changed into the desired transformation. He also did not confine himself to his own land; rather, he started to walk across the globe, sowing the seeds of change for a green and prosperous future. This symbolizes his growing notoriety for his noble work which inspired people all across the globe. Jadav dedicated his entire life to conservation. His knowledge, intelligence, patience and positive attitude made him win in the end. The narrator also draws attention to the fact that there are still many no-tree-places on the earth. It will take a lot of time and hard work to nurture these lands so that it becomes green once again. This task cannot be accomplished by one man. Jadav's dream won't come true unless other people like him join this endeavor.

»It's going to be hard work, bringing all the old forests back.

The seas have begun rising, and the winds grow cold.

Towns have become cities, and Jadav is growing old.

But he keeps on planting. And planting. And planting. « (Varma, 2016:20)

In this passage, the narrator makes an attempt to bridge the current circumstance to potential outcomes. On the one hand, Jadav is ageing, which results in a slower pace of tree planting, and on the other hand, more cities are being built, which means that as the demand for resources rises, so does the rate of forests degradation. The narrator draws here a correlation between present levels of global warming and deforestation. However, Jadav is still determined to accomplish his mission. The efforts of Jadav are admirable, but the rate at which trees are being cut



down is significantly higher than the rate at which new trees are being planted. Through this work, the narrator invites the reader to assist Jadav in his mission to plant new trees in the no-tree-places.

## Conclusion

The narrator used a unique approach to address the issue of deforestation and environmental deterioration. This book does not address the questions like who deforested the area and why? And when and how were the forests cleared? The focus lies only on the issue of deforestation and its resolution. Jadav is portrayed as the nurturer of the nature. He started sowing seeds as a young boy very early in life. Based on the illustrations in the book, one may observe how a young child who at first wept over the loss of the snakes develops into a contented man after accomplishing his goal. At the end, he is depicted as an old man who delights in planting ever more trees. He is portrayed as being one with nature, whose fulfilment comes from seeing other creatures happy. He provided home for thousands of creatures. He enjoys the company of his new friends. The line at the end of story: »Jadav will keep on planting until the whole world is a happy, lovely lots-of-trees-place. « (Ibid 2016:21) shows Jadav's motive. For Jadav, only a world filled with forests that are home to various species of animals, birds, insects, and reptiles is a happy and beautiful place. This can only be achieved with perseverance and commitment. We must also acknowledge that we are a species too and like other organisms we also depend on nature. Any imbalance in nature will have an effect on us as well, whether directly or indirectly. We can never detach ourselves from this ecosystem, as evidenced by the growth in extreme weather-related illnesses and fatalities. Therefore, we must live in harmony with nature and respect each creature's right to live on this planet.

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