



Development and its Ambiguities: A Critical Study of K V Akshara's *The Sahyadri Saga*

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Abstract

This present paper tries to explore the themes of development and its ambiguities in K V Akshara's play The Sahyadri Saga. The play portrays the conflict between technological progress and environmental preservation, highlighting the perspectives of different societal groups. While activists resist the atomic power center, fearing ecological destruction, laborers see it as an opportunity for economic survival, this was shown through the characters of Naika and Motya. The research opines that the play critiques government policies, corporate interests, and grassroots resistance. Using a qualitative textual analysis, the study draws parallels between literature and real-world environmental struggles. The research paper also reflects on the themes relevant to contemporary issues, emphasizing the need for sustainable and ethical development. By analyzing the characters' dilemmas and socio-political conflicts, this study provides insights into how literature engages with developmental discourse. Ultimately, the research highlights the play's critical position on modernization and its impact on marginalized communities, urging a balanced approach to progress.

Keywords: development, environmental activism, industrialization, labor struggles, sustainability, modernization, resistance

Introduction

KVAkshara, a renowned playwright and theatre director, presents *The Sahyadri Saga* as a compelling narrative set in the Western Ghats. The play highlights the conflict between development and environmental conservation, particularly focusing on the establishment of an atomic power center in a small village. Through a varied set of characters, including scientists, activists, villagers, and political

figures, the play explores the deep-rooted conflict between tradition and modernization. The setting of the play, Maripete, represents both the beauty of nature and the looming threat of industrial progress. The play integrates folklore, history, and contemporary issues, making it a powerful commentary on the socio-political dilemmas of development.



This research paper aims to analyze how *The Sahyadri Saga* portrays the ambiguities of development. It investigates the conflicting perspectives of different characters, ranging from environmentalists and scientists to common villagers, who either resist or embrace progress. The paper also examines how the play critiques government policies, corporate influence, and the displacement of marginalized communities. By examining these themes, the study highlights the ongoing struggle between economic growth and ecological balance. The analysis will center on how the development was projected as both a necessity and a destructive force. By showing the benefits and consequences of the progress, the play questions the real meaning of it. The atomic power center symbolizes industrial advancement but also raises concerns about environmental damage and the displacement of society. The characters express conflicting emotions, while some see development as an opportunity, others fear its impact on their land and ways of their life. The government's role in pushing modernization, often at the cost of the poor, reflects real-world power struggles. Through protests, debates, and dramatic incidents, the play exposes the fragile balance between economic ambition and social responsibility.

Literature Review

T.P. Ashok, considers *The Sahyadri Saga* as a dramatic representation of the conflict between development politics and environmental activism. The play highlights how development projects, such as the atomic power center, create both hope and fear among local communities. Characters like Naika and Motya embody the struggles of daily wage workers who see industrial projects as opportunities for economic survival. (*Smruthi Mattu Kruthi*)

Similarly, Ramachandra Guha in his *Environmentalism: A Global History*, discusses how industrialization often leads to ecological destruction, despite promises of progress. Guha highlights the role of grassroots movements in resisting environmentally harmful projects, a theme evident in *The Sahyadri Saga*, where activists oppose the

atomic center. Vandana Shiva in her *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, critiques how large-scale development disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Shiva argues that, the exploitation of nature and the displacement of indigenous groups parallel the concerns raised in Akshara's play.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on textual analysis of *The Sahyadri Saga*. The primary method involves close reading to examine themes of development, resistance, and labor struggles. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books on environmental literature, will provide critical insights.

Development in *The Sahyadri Saga*

The narrative presents the transformation of the Sahyadri region with the introduction of modern development projects such as dams, factories, and railway lines. These advancements bring both opportunities and disruptions. Villagers seek employment in new industries, but traditional livelihoods and the natural environment suffer. The arrival of the atomic power center represents the peak of this modernization, promising energy but raising concerns about displacement, health risks, and the loss of cultural heritage. The atomic power center serves as a powerful symbol of industrial progress and its hidden costs. It is depicted as an imposing structure that looms over the Sahyadri hills, overshadowing the region's cultural and ecological identity. The project is praised as a solution to energy shortages, but critics argue that its benefits primarily serve urban elites while local communities bear the brunt of its adverse effects, such as displacement and radiation hazards. The conflicting views on the center highlight the larger debate on whether technological advancement truly benefits everyone or if it mainly serves powerful interests. The story questions the very meaning of progress. While some characters see industrialization as a necessity, others challenge the idea that development should come at the cost of nature and local communities. The text



contrasts the traditional values of the region with the aggressive push for modernization. Protesters, environmentalists, and locals engage in debates about the true cost of development, revealing the tensions between economic growth and ecological preservation. Ultimately, *The Sahyadri Saga* portrays development as a double-edged sword—bringing both progress and destruction. It raises crucial questions about who benefits from such projects and whether true advancement should include the well-being of all, not just the privileged few.

Ambivalence Towards Development

In *The Sahyadri Saga*, characters are often torn between preserving their heritage and embracing modernity. Madhav Hegde, an environmental activist, struggles to define his stance on development. While he opposes the atomic power center, he acknowledges the necessity of infrastructure like railway lines and factories. This contradiction reflects a broader societal dilemma—whether to resist change for cultural preservation or accept it for economic growth. Similarly, Vasudha, another activist, views the project as a threat to nature and community well-being, highlighting the resistance of traditional values against industrial expansion. Protagonists in the play experience deep personal struggles regarding development. Raman Suri, a scientist at the atomic center, is torn between his professional duty and moral concerns. Although he recognizes the technological advancements brought by nuclear energy, he is disturbed by its potential consequences. Vasudha's hunger strike symbolizes the extreme internal conflict—she risks her life to protest against development but faces isolation when her allies fail to fully support her cause. These conflicts underscore the emotional and ethical turmoil individuals experience when faced with irreversible societal changes. The narrative vividly portrays the clash between cultural heritage and modernization. The Sahyadri region, historically tied to religious and environmental sanctity, is disrupted by the arrival of industrial projects. Swamiji, a spiritual leader, argues for the preservation of tradition, while the government and

developers push for progress. This divide mirrors real-world debates where economic policies often disregard local identities. Even within activist groups, there is no unanimous stance—some demand complete resistance, while others seek a middle ground, revealing the complexities of development in culturally rich regions

Politics of Development

The narrative highlights how state policies, introduced in the name of progress, often result in the forced relocation of communities. The construction of an atomic power plant leads to concerns about environmental hazards and the loss of traditional livelihoods. Vasudha, a central character, voices the fear that future generations may suffer the consequences, questioning whether industrial expansion is worth the risk. Government officials, such as Inspector Gaonkar, acknowledge these fears but insist that halting development is impossible. The resistance movement is driven by environmentalists and local activists, who challenge the expansion of projects that threaten their land. Vasudha's hunger strike represents a form of passive resistance, echoing the Gandhian approach. Meanwhile, larger protests, led by Sharma and Madhav, emphasize public mobilization through demonstrations and awareness campaigns. However, internal divisions weaken the movement, as different leaders propose contrasting strategies, from non-violent marches to direct action.

The story exposes how bureaucratic hurdles and dishonest practices hinder genuine progress. Officials attempt to pacify dissenters with empty assurances while ignoring core demands. The resistance movement also faces infiltration by those with political ambitions, diluting the sincerity of environmental advocacy. This reflects the broader theme of development being shaped not by community needs, but by political and economic interests. Through these perspectives, *The Sahyadri Saga* critiques how development policies, though promising economic growth, often disregard environmental and social costs.



Effect of Development on the Poor

The novel highlights how large-scale projects like atomic power plants and dams force rural communities to leave their ancestral lands. The villagers, mostly farmers and laborers, lose their homes and means of survival when industries take over. In one instance, people protest against a dam project that threatens to submerge their village, but their voices are ignored. This displacement not only uproots families but also breaks cultural and social ties, leaving them struggling in unfamiliar urban areas. The novel portrays the destruction of nature due to industrialization. The Sahyadri region, once lush with forests and rivers, turns into barren land due to mining, deforestation, and pollution. The traditional way of life, which depends on nature, is threatened. Water bodies are polluted, affecting the livelihoods of fisherfolk and farmers who rely on clean water for crops. The local flora and fauna suffer, leading to a loss of biodiversity. The narrative also hints at the dangers of radiation from atomic plants, which can cause long-term health issues for nearby communities. The story reveals how modernization benefits only a select few while pushing the poor into deeper misery. Urban elites enjoy the advantages of electricity, transport, and industry, while rural populations face joblessness and poverty. The book describes how an atomic plant provides energy for luxurious lifestyles in cities, while the village next to it suffers from frequent power cuts and radiation risks. Moreover, workers from lower-income groups often get only menial jobs, while wealthier outsiders take up higher-paying roles, widening the economic gap.

Interconnection of Themes

The narrative highlights the tension between political motives and development. Some characters see progress as essential, while others view it as harmful. Madhav questions whether development projects like atomic power plants and railway lines genuinely benefit local communities. Political figures such as Sharma use environmental concerns to advance their ambitions, while others like Vasudha struggle with personal convictions. The ambiguity in decision-

making reflects how development often creates conflict rather than consensus. The novel presents multiple perspectives on progress. While industrial expansion is seen as necessary for modernization, it also leads to environmental and social disruptions. The discussions between Raman and Madhav emphasize this dilemma, showing how different social groups have contrasting views on development. The villagers hope for better infrastructure, yet they fear displacement. This mirrors broader societal issues where progress benefits some but marginalizes others, creating divisions within communities. Resistance plays a crucial role in shaping development in *The Sahyadri Saga*. Vasudha's activism emerges from a deep personal fear rather than ideological commitment. She feels that protests are necessary to protect the environment, yet she is also aware of the divisions within activist groups. Different factions propose separate strategies—some favor peaceful demonstrations, while others prioritize awareness campaigns. This fragmentation reflects real-world challenges in community-led resistance, where unity is often difficult to achieve. The novel critically examines how politics, societal needs, and activism shape development, leaving no clear solutions but highlighting the complexities involved.

Conclusion

The play highlights the tension between development and environmental preservation. It presents a conflict between scientific progress, represented by the atomic power center, and the ecological concerns of activists fighting to protect the Sahyadri region. The narrative also explores the socio-political implications of industrialization, touching upon themes of displacement, exploitation, and resistance. Through characters like Vasudha, Madhav, and Raman, the play reflects on individual and collective struggles, emphasizing the moral dilemmas surrounding modernization. The concerns raised in *The Sahyadri Saga* remain highly relevant today. The debate over development versus sustainability continues in various parts of the world, where industrial expansion threatens ecosystems and traditional livelihoods. The play mirrors real-world



environmental movements that resist large-scale infrastructure projects, causing deforestation, pollution, and social unrest. Issues such as corporate influence, government policies, and the role of activism in shaping public discourse are central to both the play and contemporary society. *The Sahyadri Saga* presents a nuanced perspective on development. It does not outright reject progress but questions its costs. The play suggests that true development should balance technological advancement with ecological and human well-being. Through its characters and conflicts, it urges a reconsideration of what constitutes progress, advocating for sustainable and ethical solutions. Ultimately, it leaves the audience with a thought-provoking question: Can modernization coexist with nature without irreversible damage?

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