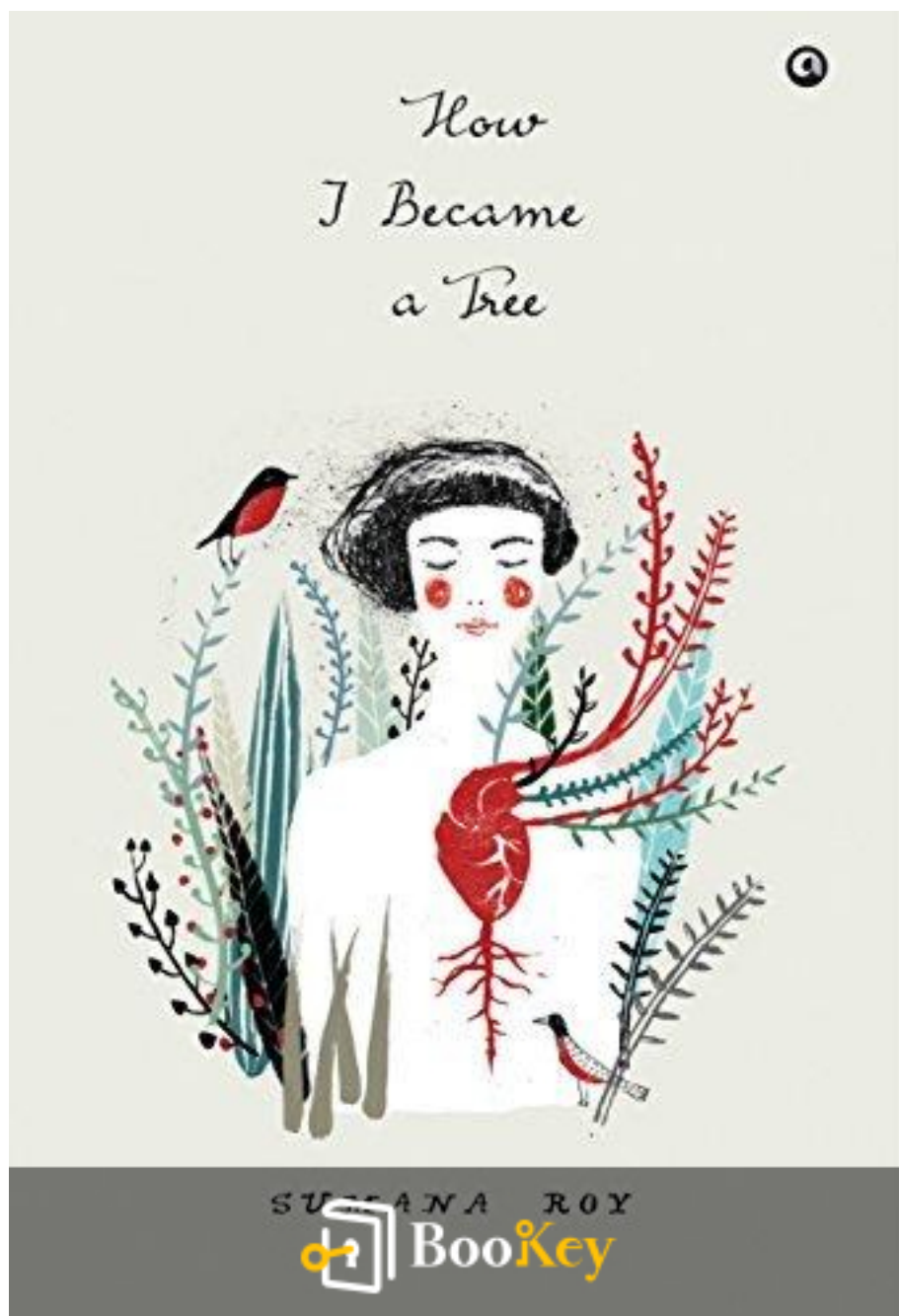


How I Became A Tree PDF (Limited Copy)

Sumana Roy



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How I Became A Tree Summary

"Embracing Nature's Stillness in a Chaotic World"

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About the book

In "How I Became a Tree," Sumana Roy draws readers into an enchanting literary exploration, weaving an intricate tapestry of introspection and nature's wisdom. This introspective journey is not merely about trees; it hinges on a profound desire to embrace the essence of slowness and to fathom the depth of what it truly means to be rooted. Peel back the layers of urban busyness and human-driven chaos as Roy invites you to delve beyond the surface of life's pace into a verdant world of contemplation and connection. With a tender blend of memoir, reflection, and literature, this work offers an evocative invitation to rediscover ourselves through the lens of tranquility and silent strength inherent in the life of a tree. Discover how the simple act of growth through seasons can parallel life's profound complexities and learn how this quiet engagement with nature refines the art of being truly alive.

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About the author

Sumana Roy is an acclaimed Indian writer known for her incisive essays, poignant poetry, and evocative fiction that deftly explore the intersections of nature, identity, and culture. Born in Siliguri, a town nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, she draws inspiration from the vivid landscapes and diverse ecosystems around her. Roy's literary voice is distinct for its quiet contemplation and deep philosophical underpinnings, reflecting her training in literature. Aside from her novel "How I Became a Tree," which beautifully blends memoir, reportage, and nature writing, her works traverse myriad forms and themes, earning her critical acclaim globally. A passionate advocate of environmentalism and mindful living, Roy seamlessly fuses personal reflection with broader ecological narratives, encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the world. With a keen eye for detail and an eloquence borne from heartfelt observation, Sumana Roy continues to enrich contemporary literature with her thought-provoking and lyrical contributions.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Part I: A Tree Grew inside My Head

In the chapters from Octavio Paz's "A Tree Within," the narrator embarks on a profound exploration of a desire to become more like a tree, sparked initially by an aversion to the constraints of human life. This whimsical but introspective journey is an attempt to escape the rigid structures of human society—time, news, ageism, superficial beauty, and societal expectations—and embrace a more natural, unhurried existence akin to 'Tree Time.' Here, the narrator is drawn to the idea of living in the present, without the burdens of past regrets or future anxieties, much like trees do: thriving on sunlight and water, unconcerned by human affairs, and moving at their own pace.

In "Women as Flowers," the narrative delves into the cultural history of equating women with flowers, highlighting centuries of literature and myths where women are often portrayed through the lens of their aesthetic appeal and passive qualities. The narrator reflects on how this cultural trope comes with a significant burden, tying beauty to stagnation and silence, much like flowers, which are often admired but not heard. This reflection leads to a deeper understanding of the narrator's dissatisfaction with human notions of beauty and femininity, sparking a desire to become a tree rather than a flower—embodying strength and presence over fragility and passivity.



"The Kindness of Plants" shifts the focus to the altruistic nature associated with trees. The narrator grapples with the notion of kindness as a fatal flaw, drawn to the idea that trees give without judgement or expectation, mirroring their own struggles with selfless giving in human relationships. Trees, standing tall and seemingly indifferent to the recognition from humans, taught the narrator lessons in acceptance and existence beyond the human constructs of success and event-driven history. This section highlights a philosophical pondering over why plant life, despite its significant role in sustaining life on Earth, is sidelined in historical narratives due to its 'invisible' contributions.

In "The Woman as Tree," the narrator finds solace in mythological tales and artistic works where women transform into trees to escape violence or societal constraints. These stories resonate with the narrator's own escapist desires, symbolizing a longing to shed the vulnerabilities of the human form and societal pressures for the steadfastness and independence represented by trees. The narrator sees strength in this transformation, viewing it as an escape from cultural misogyny and a reclamation of autonomy.

Finally, "The Silence of Trees" delves into the recurring theme of escaping noise—literal and figurative—that defines human existence. Here, the narrator relishes the possibility of adopting the quiet resilience of trees, standing unyielding against the wind and elements, yet producing a unique, understated symphony through rustling leaves that mirrors human resistance



and survival. This desire to embody the tree also becomes an allegory of rejecting the superficial hierarchies of human society, seeking a deeper connection with the world through the implicit wisdom of nature.

Throughout these chapters, the narrator's desire to transform into a tree serves as a potent metaphor for a journey towards self-realization and freedom from societal chains—an aspiration to embrace an existence that values authenticity, patience, and the untamed beauty of simply being.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Part II: I Paint Flowers So They Will Not Die

Part III: Paint Flowers So They Will Not Die—Frida Kahlo

DRAWING TREES

The narrator explores a long-standing fascination with photographing dead trees, seeking to understand the allure of their stark, leafless forms. This fascination might result from a melancholic urge or from the inherent dignity that bare trees, reminiscent of skeletons, seem to possess. In contrast to traditional human statues, trees are often neglected in visual culture, prompting a question of why they are seldom sculpted.

The author recalls learning to draw trees, with the maternal artist emphasizing three types of trees: a generic tree, a palm, and a conifer, all drawn from imagination rather than observation. The struggle to capture the dynamic nature of leaves in art lessons contrasts with a childhood spent collecting and preserving leaves, which over time become skeletal, memorialized remains. The author's childhood experiences of drawing leaves and struggling with inadequacies of form instill an appreciation for the beauty of barrenness, leading to a deep interest in the artistic portrayal of



trees.

The narrative connects to the work of Nandalal Bose, an influential Indian artist known for his modernist interpretations of village life, who offered unique insights into sketching trees. Bose's teachings heavily influenced thinkers like Satyajit Ray, emphasizing growth from the base upwards and treating trees as sentient beings seeking light. Nandalal's work challenged traditional views on roots and branches, drawing parallels between human and plant forms. His lessons reveal a deep empathy for trees, inspiring the narrator to explore this shared symbiosis in representation, from ancient art to modern interpretations, ultimately embracing a kinship with trees.

MAKING LEAVES

In a world dominated by the culture of photographs and focusing on human beauty and happiness, the author questions if plants can be part of a 'family photograph.' The idea of plants smiling for photographs humorously conveys a deeper connection with them. Jewelry like leaf-shaped earrings signifies a deeper meaning where leaves represent continuity and connection through generations.

The essay delves into creating art inspired by leaves, extending this metaphor into daily life and cultural expressions. During a school play

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adaptation of O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*, students grapple with the challenge of replicating the veins and structure of real leaves, ultimately using tin wires and cloth to recreate them. This highlights the intricate beauty of leaves and the complexity inherent in attempting to mimic nature's subtleties.

A comparison between trees and human beings emerges, with references to a eunuch's comment about leaves and roots reflecting gender roles, elevating the function and form of leaves beyond mere foliage to a cultural and artistic expression. These explorations lead to musings on artistic representation, from traditional crafts to avant-garde interpretations. It juxtaposes the innate, organic essence of leaves with their projection onto humans and art forms.

THE LITERATURE OF TREES

Trees serve as a faceless refuge, an escape from societal scrutiny and the ubiquitous nature of human-centered art and documentation. Drawings, photographs, and diagrams of trees underscore their pervasive symbolism, from Mandeville's "Book of Trees" to modern computer science representations like tree maps. These visual and intellectual frameworks portray trees as symbols of knowledge, growth, and interconnectedness, yet often fail to acknowledge their inherent unpredictability and organic variability.



The narrative critiques the Western tradition of imposing structure on tree representation and embraces an Eastern perspective, celebrating the rhizomatic model that Deleuze and Guattari highlighted, advocating for non-linear growth and diversity. Drawing from global mythologies and cultural traditions, trees are reimagined as symbols of life, syncretically merging spirituality and ecology. This exploration culminates in a personal epiphany recognizing trees not as static icons but as dynamic, evolving metaphors for life's interconnectedness.

TREE SCULPTURE

The narrator reflects on childhood games, noting the absence of trees as statues, emphasizing their inherent immobility and natural sculpture. While tree statues were not commercially available, the narrator collected dead trees and branches, appreciating their organic form as sculptural art. Sculptors like Subodh Gupta and D. H. Lawrence used unconventional materials like steel and kitchenware to create tree-inspired installations, challenging notions of permanence and ephemerality in art.

Lawrence's poetry envisioned trees as living steel sculptures, symbolizing resilience and transcendence—an artistic affirmation of life amid adversity. The idea of a tree's heart transcends the traditional notions of life and art,



advocating for an acknowledgment of life beyond visible form. The narrative considers the interplay between life and sculpture, questioning the boundaries of artistic expression, and posits that trees' innate beauty and utility constitute a form of organic sculpture.

PHOTOGRAPHING TREES

Beth Moon's portraits of ancient trees reveal them as monuments of time and history, providing a unique lens to view life's continuity. These photographs stress a connection between documenting life and engaging with it beyond the human pace. By adopting "tree time," the author finds a slower, more measured rhythm of writing, reflecting a symbiosis with nature's cycles.

The journey toward understanding and documenting trees parallels a personal journey into valuing patience, presence, and continuity, where time becomes a nurturing ally rather than a relentless adversary. The idea of 'tree time' symbolizes an aspiration towards a deeper ecological and existential harmony, fostering a meditative state that transcends the transient worries of human temporal constraints.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Part III: See the Long Shadow that is Cast by the Tree

Part III of this text delves into the intricacies of trees and their shadows, exploring themes of identity, perception, and the interplay between light and darkness. The narrative begins with a contemplation on the concept of beauty through the metaphor of a tree, as the narrator reflects on their past desire for validation through a painter's portrait. They ponder whether a tree, abstract in its beauty, can truly be captured and idealized by human perception.

This introspection leads to an exploration of shadows, which are described as fleeting and often overlooked. The narrator recounts a childhood memory involving a mango orchard, where their unique fascination with shadows becomes apparent. Instead of collecting mangoes, they gather the shadows of the fruit, illustrating their early awareness of the transient nature of beauty and existence.

The narrative then shifts to a philosophical exploration of shadows, drawing inspiration from philosopher Roy Sorensen. The author questions the tree's relationship with its shadow and considers the possibility of shadows existing independently of their source. They explore how shadows have been transformed into art and metaphor, serving as vehicles for imagination and storytelling.



The narrative also touches on the personal experience of engaging with tree shadows, shifting from fear to fascination. A childhood encounter with photographic negatives leads to an understanding of shadows as eerie, otherworldly entities. This fascination grows into a desire to see the inner lives of plants and trees through X-rays, capturing their essence in a way akin to art.

In a broader contemplation, the text reflects on the societal interaction with tree shadows, considering how they are overlooked in favor of more tangible pursuits. This examination of societal values extends to the narrator's desire for a world that recognizes the significance of shadows and the stories they tell.

The narrative ultimately arrives at the metaphorical act of becoming a shadow. The narrator embraces the idea of letting their shadow act freely, allowing for moments when the alignment of light and angles transforms them into a tree-like silhouette. Though they haven't fully transformed into a tree, becoming a shadow of a tree symbolizes a journey of personal growth and acceptance, a blending of self with the natural world.

In essence, Part III is a deep reflection on identity, perception, and the unrecognized beauty of shadows. Through personal anecdotes and philosophical inquiry, the text explores how shadows offer a nuanced



understanding of existence, bridging the gap between light and darkness, the seen and the unseen.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Exploring the Transient Nature of Beauty and Existence

Critical Interpretation: Imagine embracing the idea that beauty and existence are inherently transient, just like the shadows cast by trees. This lesson from the chapter inspires you to accept the impermanence of life and treasures around you, acknowledging that everything, even your most cherished moments, is fleeting. By learning to appreciate the subtle, often unnoticed beauty found in the shadows—those intangible moments shaping your life's narrative—you cultivate a mindset that values the ephemeral as deeply as the permanent. This perspective encourages you to live with gratitude for each passing moment, letting go of the need for constant validation and opening yourself to the artistry present in the continuum of light and shadow. Just as shadows transform with every shift in light, you are inspired to embrace change and the natural rhythm of life with an open heart and a curious soul.

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Chapter 4: Part IV: Supposing I Became a Champa Flower

The excerpt "Supposing I Became a Champa Flower" from Rabindranath Tagore's work dives deep into the intersection of nature, culture, and human emotion through the lens of the gardens at Santiniketan, the abode of peace. Tagore's familial history and personal affinity for nature are interwoven with the evolution of the gardens at Uttarayan, a collection of five houses where he spent many of his later years. The gardens reflect not only the literal transplantation of foreign and indigenous plant species but also Tagore's philosophical musings on nature as part of the human experience.

The narrative begins with a backdrop of Santiniketan's development into a sanctuary for nature and education, thanks in part to Tagore's father, Maharshi Debendranath, who initially laid the foundations of the garden. The book titled "Uttarayan-er Bagaan O Gachhpala" by Debiprosunno Chattopadhyay is highlighted as a key resource for understanding Rabindranath's philosophy of planting and nurturing diverse plant life that blossomed throughout the year.

Over time, Nath's and his son Rathindranath's influence resulted in an eclectic blend of architectural and horticultural elements being introduced to Uttarayan, which drew inspiration from various cultural influences. Rathindranath, educated in agricultural sciences and exposed to international



traditions, brought both scientific knowledge and aesthetic sensitivity to the garden's development. The importance of the caretaking and conservation of these gardens was likened to an art form by Chattopadhyay, who spent decades working in and writing about these spaces.

Central to Santiniketan's botanical narrative is the emphasis Tagore placed on trees, a symbolism of life and wisdom. His poetic and deeply personal relationship with flora reflects in the naming of trees and plants, a practice born out of affection and the necessity to comprehend and cherish their presence. For Tagore, the gardens were not mere collections of species but entities with intrinsic value and histories.

The excerpt also discusses Rabindranath's educational initiatives that sought to integrate nature into learning, through outdoor classrooms where students interacted with and studied plant life as part of their development. This nature-focused education aimed to dissolve the barrier between human and plant, portraying them as companions and equals in the natural order.

Tagore's lyrical love for plants transcends into imaginative realms through his poetry and stories, blurring boundaries between childlike fantasy and natural beauty. In them, trees become metaphors for longing, aspirations, and human emotions, vividly portrayed in poems such as "The Palm Tree" and "The Banyan Tree."



In essence, Tagore's narrative around Santiniketan's gardens and his literary works elevate trees beyond their physical presence, embedding them into the cultural and philosophical landscape. This longing for unity with nature is realized through the child's dream of transformation into a champa flower, symbolizing innocence, imagination, and the perennial cycle of connection between mankind and nature.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Part V: I Want to Do with You What Spring Does with the Cherry Trees

The chapter titled "Want to Do with You What Spring Does with the Cherry Trees—Pablo Neruda, 'Love Poem XIV'" delves into the intricate and often whimsical exploration of human relationships with trees. Through a blend of prose poetry, real stories, folklore, and creative imagination, the text weaves a narrative that challenges the conventional boundaries of love and companionship.

The narrative begins with an exploration of the metaphorical desire for a partner akin to a banyan tree—a symbol of stability and eternal support—as articulated in Sharanya Manivannan's prose poem. This sets the stage for a broader discussion on the intersection of nature and human desire, where lovers can become entwined with trees to the point of sharing their earthy characteristics and silent communications.

A series of anecdotes illustrate these unconventional relationships. Nitoo Das's poem reflects on a childhood ritual of being married to a plantain tree in Assamese culture, showcasing the push and pull between cultural practices and personal agency. Similarly, a poignant narrative from the film "Sati" by Aparna Sen reveals a woman, Uma, who finds solace in a silent tree after being muted and marginalized by society, only for her story to end tragically due to human cruelty and misunderstanding.



The text also delves into imaginative tales of tree-human romances such as Adrienne Lang's story, where a woman finds peace when her tumultuous boyfriend transforms into a forgiving fig tree. This sparks reflections on fidelity and the peculiar comfort found in tree partners who offer nonjudgmental companionship.

Real-world accounts add another layer to this exploration, highlighting individuals who have formed intense emotional and sometimes physical bonds with trees. Whether it's Emma McCabe's romantic involvement with a tree named 'Tim' or Richard Torres's symbolic marriage to a tree to raise environmental awareness, these stories underline a diverse and sometimes eccentric tapestry of arboreal affection.

This chapter also embarks on the philosophical and logistical challenges of loving something as rooted and unchangeable as a tree. Issues like non-reciprocal affection, social ostracization, and the practicalities of cohabitation or communication with a mute partner are humorously and thoughtfully considered.

As the narrative unfolds, it explores the rich cultural lore surrounding trees, such as tales of women turning into trees and vice versa, demonstrating the historical and mythical significance of such bonds. These stories challenge the reader to reassess notions of gender, memory, and the cyclical nature of



vulnerability and healing.

Concluding with introspection on how a relationship with a tree might look socially and personally, the text invites readers to reevaluate traditional relationship norms and consider the unexpected ways love can manifest. Balancing humor with profound reflection, it questions societal constraints and personal inclinations while acknowledging the undeniable, if bizarre, allure of arboreal companionship.

In sum, this chapter is not just a whimsical exploration of love that transcends species, but it also serves as a critique of societal norms related to partnership and a celebration of the complex emotional landscapes that living, breathing forests can evoke in the human soul.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Finding peace in embracing unconventional companionships

Critical Interpretation: Imagine finding solace in something as stable and silent as a tree, stepping beyond the societal norms that tie love to human-to-human connections. This key point from Chapter 5 encourages you to explore the idea that fulfillment can be found in unexpected places. Whether it's aligning your thoughts with the steady cycles of nature, or discovering a deeper understanding of yourself through unconventional bonds, the chapter urges you to embrace diversity in companionships. It challenges you to seek peace and authenticity, even if it means embracing that which is unconventional, allowing you to cultivate personal resilience and find profound tranquility amidst life's chaotic trials.



Chapter 6 Summary: Part VI: One Tree is Equal to Ten Sons

Part VI: One Tree is Equal to Ten Sons—Matsya Purana

PLANTS AS CHILDREN

The narrative opens with a personal reflection on societal expectations to have human children and the contrasting value placed on non-biological creations, like poems and plant life, as offspring. The narrator expresses frustration with the capitalist mindset that fails to recognize trees as children due to their lack of economic utility in old age. Instead, she cherishes her relationship with plants, equating their care to the traditionally valued human parenting. This perspective prompts a deeper introspection on the biological predisposition of beings to reproduce likenesses and a rejection of the unfamiliar "Other" in offspring narratives.

The struggle with societal norms extends to the workplace, where maternity privileges are exclusively aligned with biological reproduction. Amidst declining health, a chance discovery of kuleykhara—a plant with medicinal properties—offers a botanical 'blood transfusion' for her anemia, cementing her bond with her green dependents. Here, plants transition from being



passive recipients of her care to active contributors to her well-being.

THE CURIOUS BOTANIST

The narrative shifts to Darjeeling, where the botanist Jagadish Chandra Bose's childlessness leads him to perceive plants as surrogate offspring. The protagonist explores Bose's legacy, reflecting on his innovative experiments that challenged the academic orthodoxy separating physics, physiology, and botany. Bose's discoveries showed plants exhibiting human-like responses to stimuli—an analogy reinforcing the life-like qualities of plants.

Bose's sentiments resonated with the narrator, who appreciated his interdisciplinary approach and speculated that Bose, like herself, may have found solace in the silent companionship of plant life. The narrative highlights his frustration with scientific conventions and his belief in the non-commercial nature of scientific discovery, as evidenced by his refusal to patent his inventions. Despite Bose's groundbreaking work with plant life, narrating their 'silent' stories through his instruments, he shared the narrator's yearning for reciprocal communication with plants.

GARDENS AND ADULTERY

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The exploration continues into the metaphorical use of gardens in literary narratives to depict childlessness and infidelity. This section weaves through the works of Satyajit Ray and Rabindranath Tagore, using garden settings as symbolic spaces for unspoken tensions and unfulfilled aspirations. Ray's "Pikoo" uses a garden as a backdrop for a child's innocence juxtaposed against adult complexities and moral ambiguities. Tagore's novellas explore the dynamics of marriage, longing, and loss, where gardens provide both metaphorical and literal spaces for emotional and relational growth.

In "The Broken Nest," Charulata's emotional void is mirrored in the fantasy of a garden she plans with her brother-in-law. Similarly, in "Two Sisters," Sharmila's homemaking and gardening reflect her unexpressed desires and discontent within marriage. Finally, in "The Arbour," gardens stand as testament to companionship amidst childlessness, where the protagonist's connection to her husband is nurtured through shared horticultural ventures.

These narratives illustrate how gardens, much like children, are extensions of personal fulfillment and emotional labor, with their nurturing echoing the complexities of human relationships. The author draws parallels between plant care and child-rearing, unearthing a deeper understanding of how non-traditional forms of nurturing fulfill emotional and psychological needs. Through these stories, the narrative ties together the themes of love, identity, and belonging, as expressed through the care and cultivation of plant life.

Section	Summary
Plants as Children	The narrative opens with a personal reflection on societal expectations regarding having human children, contrasting this with the cherished value of nurturing plants. The author expresses frustration at a capitalist mindset that doesn't recognize plants as children due to their lack of economic productivity in old age. The narrative discusses how plants become an integral aspect of her care and emotional fulfillment, especially as one luck into the discovery of the medicinal kuleykhara plant, which aids her anemia, strengthening the bond between her and her plant dependents.
The Curious Botanist	This section focuses on Jagadish Chandra Bose, a botanist in Darjeeling, who viewed plants as surrogate children amidst his childlessness. His interdisciplinary approach challenged the separation of physics, physiology, and botany, highlighting plants' human-like responses. Bose's work resonates with the narrator, who appreciates his dedication to non-commercial scientific exploration and his desire for silent communication with plants, akin to her experiences.
Gardens and Adultery	Explores the metaphorical use of gardens in literature, especially in works by Satyajit Ray and Rabindranath Tagore, to address themes of childlessness and infidelity. Gardens symbolize personal fulfillment, emotional labor, and serve as backdrops for the complex dynamics of human relationships. From "The Broken Nest" to "Two Sisters," gardens act as extensions of personal and relational experiences, nurturing growth amidst challenges, much like parenting and matrimony.



Chapter 7 Summary: Part VII: Lost in the Forest

The narrative unfolds with the author's nephew innocently misinterpreting the term 'forest' as 'for rest', triggering a journey into the philosophical and literal interpretations of getting lost in the forest. This journey parallels the author's personal exploration and reflection on forests as more than mere landscapes but as realms of creativity, solitude, and profound education, contrasting them with the constructs of civilization like libraries and universities. The forest emerges as a symbol, a binary opposite to the structured environment of human settlement and learning.

Delving into literary traditions, the tale references the works of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and his classic "Aranyak," examining the cultural and religious significance of the forest, from ancient texts like the Vedas and the Mahabharata to modern Bengali literature. Through the lens of these works, the forest becomes both an exile and a sanctuary, echoing with spiritual traditions and intellectual contemplations found in the teachings of figures like Thoreau and Hindu epics, where protagonists like Rama and the Pandavas find exile and eventual wisdom in the forest.

Central to the narrative is the examination of solitude and creativity in the woods. The forest serves as a muse and a mentor, as in the tales of Aranyak's protagonist, Satya, who discovers an alchemical transformation in moonlit forests, invoking a mystical kinship with the environment. This

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connection to the forest's natural rhythms and the loneliness therein fosters a deep introspection and artistic awakening, mirroring the experiences of writers like Rabindranath Tagore.

Through an analysis of films like Satyajit Ray's "Aranyer Din Ratri," the narrative explores the cultural juxtaposition of urban sophistication against forest primality, embodied in the encounter between city dwellers and indigenous forest inhabitants. These narratives often expose raw human desires and the forest's ability to strip away social veneers, presenting a microcosm where civilization and wilderness abrasively meet.

As the discussion progresses, the author introduces contemporary narratives of individuals like Jadav Payeng, the Indian "Forest Man" akin to the fictional Elzéard Bouffier in "The Man Who Planted Trees." These real-life accounts underscore the transformative power of individuals who shape forests and, metaphorically, themselves through dedication and environmental stewardship.

The narrative further philosophizes on the ideological divergence between forest life and organized society, considering ideas of plant sentience, environmental politics, and the inherently non-violent, yet neglected, nature of plant life. It questions anthropocentric ethics and politics, urging a reflection on our societal structures and their impact on both human and non-human communities.



Finally, the forest becomes a canvas for existential reflection, challenging notions of identity, permanence, and belonging. It is depicted as a space devoid of temporal constraints—an eternal agora devoid of economic and societal pressures, where life is cyclical and organic. Here, the boundary between human and nature blurs, offering insights into non-material inheritance and the soul's quest for meaning.

In conclusion, the journey through the forest and literary landscapes emerges as a metaphor for personal transformation, where being lost paves the way to rediscovery. Just as historical figures and fictional characters have found wisdom and identity in the embrace of the forest, so too does the author contemplate their own evolution. The forest experience culminates in the profound understanding that those who enter are seldom the same upon exit, inviting readers to ponder their relationship with nature and self.

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Chapter 8: Part VIII: Under the Greenwood Tree

Part VIII: Under the Greenwood Tree

Sitting Under a Tree

In this reflective chapter, the narrator grapples with the desire to mark her fortieth birthday by sitting under a special tree in her bedroom. Unlike common birthday traditions and expectations, she expresses this unique wish to her husband, hoping he would understand the significance of the gesture. The tree in question is no ordinary one; it's a large, dead tree that she feels a deep connection to, akin to a spiritual bond. This tree had initially caught her attention abandoned by the roadside, and she had brought it home as a symbol of serenity and contemplation.

The husband, somewhat confused by his wife's request, agrees to the idea yet struggles to grasp the deeper implications. The wife further elaborates her wish by asking her husband to take her to the Bodhi tree, the sacred fig tree under which Gautama Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. This request perplexes the travel-averse husband, as it requires a significant journey of over 600 kilometers.



Their conversation navigates through concepts of solitude, self-discovery, and detachment from societal and materialistic pursuits, as symbolized by sitting under a solitary tree versus getting lost in a forest. The narrator reflects on the loneliness linked to aging, the diminishing circle of loved ones, and ultimately, the journey toward self-reliance as emphasized in Buddhism.

The chapter further explores the cultural significance of trees, referencing childhood memories associated with the names of places that highlight trees as central landmarks. Echoing themes from literature and poetry, the narrator draws parallels with works like Sunil Ganguly's "Gachhtawla" and D. H. Lawrence's "Letter from Town: The Almond Tree," which underscore the quiet, reflective worlds found beneath trees. Shakespeare's "As You Like It" is also invoked, celebrating the notion of finding peace and respite under a tree, free from worldly ambitions and adversities.

The Buddha and the Bodhi Tree

This part delves into the historical and spiritual significance of the Bodhi tree, a fig tree (*Ficus religiosa*), in Buddhist tradition. The narrator anticipates a visit to Bodh Gaya, sharing stories and religious histories associated with the peepul tree, a revered symbol even before Buddha. She learns from various sources, including Dipak Kumar Barua's work, about the



religious importance and historical instances of the Bodhi tree in ancient civilizations like Mohenjodaro and its association with Hindu deities.

The narrative recounts the Buddha's path to enlightenment, from his renunciation at twenty-nine to his meditative practice under the Bodhi tree in Uruvela, where he resolved to attain enlightenment. The Vinaya Pitaka, a Buddhist scripture, documents Buddha's gratitude and worship towards the tree.

Throughout the journey to Bodh Gaya, the narrator shares tales with her husband — stories that highlight why the Bodhi tree holds a place of reverence in Buddhism. These stories not only illustrate the tree as a substitute for Buddha's presence when he traveled but also as a living representation of his spiritual teachings.

Further insight is provided into the various trees historically linked to Buddha's life, such as the trees he was born under and those significant in his enlightenment and demise. The Bodhi tree's continuity since Buddha's era is mirrored in its many generations, symbolizing the Buddha's eternal presence.

The narrator goes on to explore Buddhist scriptures and teachings, emphasizing a profound connection between Buddha and plant life. This connection manifests itself through analogies of trees to describe Buddha's



teachings and enlightenment journeys, encapsulating ideals of patience, virtue, and wisdom found in the life of a tree.

The chapter concludes with reflections on the symbolic relationship between the Bodhi tree and Buddha, illustrating how trees embody Buddhist teachings through their characteristics of gentleness, resilience, and the absence of extreme desires or sufferings. This metonymic relationship highlights the intertwining of the spiritual and natural world in Buddhist philosophy.

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Chapter 9 Summary: Part IX: The Tree is an Eternal Corpse

Part IX: The Tree is an Eternal Corpse

This section delves into the intricate relationship between humans and trees, exploring themes of life, death, and rebirth, drawing from personal narratives, cultural stories, and philosophical reflections.

The Death of Trees

Trees' demise is depicted as a sudden, traumatic event, drawing a parallel with Maya Angelou's portrayal of the trauma caused by the fall of great trees. Unlike ephemeral plants with short life cycles celebrated for their fleeting beauty, ancient trees' deaths evoke a profound sense of loss. The narrative begins with a personal account of an earthquake in Siliguri on April 25, 2015, highlighting the psychological impact of natural disasters on humans and their disregard for plant life. This event juxtaposes the human tendency to prioritize self-preservation while neglecting the wellbeing of nature.

The narrative transitions into a discussion on cultural practices concerning

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death, specifically addressing the author's husband's nonconformity to Hindu mourning rituals upon his mother's passing. His rejection of traditional mourning attire and rituals invites criticisms from relatives but reflects a broader critique of society's emotional detachment from nature's demise. This section questions why no rites or obituaries exist for trees, paralleling human grief with the loss of plants.

There's an exploration of an astrologer encounter, drawn as unorthodox and revealing, concerning predictions about the health of the narrator's plants paralleling personal health anxieties. This anecdote humorously flirts with the idea of plant horoscopes as the astrologer suggests deep empathetic connections between the narrator and her ailing plants.

Mustafa Siraj's stories serve as allegories illustrating humanity's deep connections with trees through tales of trees that speak to the dying, relationships suffering societal restrictions under banyan trees, and other narratives where human and tree lives intertwine, each story reflecting on the pervasive human nature of exploiting trees while undervaluing their significance. The metaphor of trees as steadfast witnesses to human follies and inevitable mortality becomes profound.

The Rebirth of Trees

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Rebirth as trees in folk stories symbolizes escape from human cruelty and violence, with ancient texts implying a cycle of life where humans and trees are interchangeable. The Rig Veda, Upanishads, and Buddhist texts echo such metaphysical beliefs, presenting tree rebirths as both punishments and refuges.

Curious tales depict trees as shelters or punishments, with stories from varied cultures exploring transformations caused by violence—often toward women—and rebirths as trees being a kind of solace or redemption. The folklore reflects on this rebirth cycle as a way of maintaining life's continuity, hinting at an interlinked existence shared by trees and humans. Recurrent themes emphasize trees' endurance, acceptance of suffering, and their sacrificial roles in human narratives.

How I Became a Tree

This section culminates with the narrator contemplating life as a tree, reflecting on personal transformation and philosophical musings about identity and mortality. Through a deep connection with a papaya tree, the narrative reflects the idea of becoming more tree-like — patient, anchored, and silent. This transformation embodies a life philosophy where existing alongside trees teaches acceptance of life's permanence and impermanence.

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The concept of death as a passage into another form of life is explored with interest in burial alternatives like Bios Urn or Capsula Mundi, which transform human remains into life-giving trees. This choice symbolizes a perpetual cycle of life and death where trees serve as a return to nature.

The chapter closes on the narrator's desire to adopt tree qualities, inviting readers to reconsider their interactions with trees and nature, evoking reflection on life's broader connectivity.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embracing Tree-like Qualities

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 9, the narrator's aspiration to embody the qualities of a tree serves as a reminder for you to contemplate what it means to live a life rooted in patience, quiet strength, and resilience. By metaphorically becoming more tree-like, you can cultivate a grounded sense of existence, learning to weather life's storms with fortitude while staying rooted in your values and presence. Embracing this mindset encourages an appreciation for both life's permanence and its transience, inviting you to be more mindful of your connections with nature and those around you. Reflecting on life's interconnectedness with the natural world, this chapter challenges you to reconsider how deeply we are intertwined with the environment, prompting you to live with more empathy and awareness.

