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# A comparative study of utopian ideals between 'Moyna Dweep' and 'Pala Island'

**Samia Islam**[1] & **Md. Mijanur Rahman Bhuiyan**[2]*

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**Abstract:** The current study aims to depict the comparative utopian ideals in the Moyna Dweep in Manik Bandopadhyay's Bengali classic novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* and Pala Island in Aldous Huxley's novel *Island*. *Padma Nadir Majhi* (Translation: The Boatman of the Padma River) was published in 1936, and Huxley's utopian manifesto *Island* was first published in 1962. Though there are cultural and social dissimilarities between the two classics' publishing contexts, the philosophical and transcendent aspects of the two novels have analogical dimensions. The authors used a qualitative approach with textual and document analysis to present a comparative scenario of utopian features in these writings. The analysis reveals that Moyna Dweep's inhabitants have eternal socio-economic and hedonistic pursuits for material prosperity, and the natives of Pala Island mostly seek spiritual and intellectual fulfillment.

**Keywords:** Utopian ideals, escapism, hedonism, spiritual dimension, cultural influence

## Introduction

In literary studies, utopian settings frequently function as powerful metaphors for human aspiration, representing the enduring quest to transcend the limitations and hardships of reality to achieve an idealized state of existence. A utopia presents an ideal toward which people strive by reducing the discrepancies between the ideal state and the current state of society (Fernando et al., 2018; Higgins, 1987). These settings often embody the collective dreams and desires of characters, offering a glimpse into worlds where societal, economic, and spiritual issues are resolved. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of two such utopian settings: Moyna Dweep in Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* and Pala Island in Aldous Huxley's *Island*. Both locations are portrayed as paradisiacal havens, providing characters an opportunity to escape their immediate struggles and envision a more fulfilling life. By exploring these contrasting literary constructs, this study aims to elucidate the deeper themes of escapism and hedonism, examining how these idealized settings reflect broader human desires for transcendence and fulfillment.

The portrayal of utopian settings in *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Island* is deeply influenced by their respective cultural and historical contexts. Bandopadhyay's depiction of Moyna Dweep is rooted in the socio-economic struggles of rural Bengal, highlighting the harsh realities faced by the boatmen and fishermen along the Padma River (Chakrabarty, 1989). Moyna Dweep serves as a critique of the socio-economic disparities of the time, offering a vision of hope and possibility amidst systemic oppression.

In contrast, Huxley's Pala Island reflects his critique of contemporary Western society and its materialistic and mechanistic tendencies (Smith, 1962). Pala represents a synthesis of Eastern and

***Corresponding Author's Email: mijan196@gmail.com

[1] Executive Assistant, Center for Academic Research and Development (CARD), Hello-Teen, Dhaka, Bangladesh & Editorial Assistant, *Journal of ELT and Education* (www.jee-bd.com)

[2] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Asian University of Bangladesh (AUB), Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Western philosophies, offering a model of a society that has achieved a harmonious balance between technological advancement and spiritual well-being. This utopian vision critiques the shortcomings of modern civilization, proposing an alternative way of life that prioritizes holistic development and inner peace. The philosophical underpinnings of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island are crucial to understanding their role as utopian settings. Moyna Dweep can be seen as a metaphor for an earthly paradise or a promised land, reflecting the characters' spiritual and existential quests for redemption and renewal. The journey to Moyna Dweep mirrors a pilgrimage, symbolizing the characters' search for meaning and fulfillment in a world tainted by suffering and deprivation. Similarly, Pala Island embodies a philosophical ideal where the pursuit of knowledge, mindfulness, and community well-being are paramount. Huxley's vision of Pala is deeply influenced by his interest in Eastern spirituality and human potential, presenting a model of society that transcends the materialism and individualism of the West. This paper also aims to shed light on the diverse ways in which literature explores themes of escapism and hedonism, reflecting the enduring human quest for a better, more fulfilling existence. Through the lens of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island, we can gain deeper insights into the complex interplay between human desire, societal critique, and the pursuit of utopian ideals.

## Literature Review

Utopian literature has long fascinated scholars for its ability to critique contemporary society and propose alternative ways of living. Thomas More's Utopia (1516) laid the foundation for this genre, presenting an idealized society that starkly contrasts with the flawed real world. Kumar (1987) notes that utopian literature provides a unique space where authors can experiment with ideas of perfect societies, free from the constraints of reality.

According to Levitas (2013), utopian literature serves not only as a tool for social critique but also as a space for envisioning possibilities beyond existing societal constraints. These narratives offer a vision of hope, a sanctuary where the ills of society are addressed, and human potential is fully realized.

In both *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Island*, the utopian settings of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island serve as literary devices to explore these themes. These settings provide a backdrop against which the characters' struggles and aspirations are highlighted, allowing the authors to delve into the complexities of human desire and the pursuit of an ideal life.

The socio-economic and cultural contexts in which *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Island* were written significantly influence their depiction of utopian ideals. Bandopadhyay's novel is deeply rooted in the socio-economic struggles of rural Bengal, highlighting the harsh realities faced by the boatmen and fishermen along the Padma river. Chakrabarty (1989) demonstrates how Bandopadhyay uses Moyna Dweep as a critique of the socio-economic disparities of the time, offering a vision of hope and possibility amidst systemic oppression.

Conversely, Huxley's *Island* reflects his critique of contemporary Western society, particularly its materialistic and mechanistic tendencies. As Smith (1962) notes, Pala represents a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies, offering an alternative model of a society that balances technological advancement with spiritual well-being. This utopian vision critiques the shortcomings of modern civilization, proposing a more holistic and integrated approach to human development and happiness.

Escapism and hedonism are central themes in the depiction of utopian settings in literature. Escapism is not merely an evasion of reality but a critical response to it, offering alternative perspectives and solutions to real-world problems. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Island*, where the utopian settings of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island serve as sanctuaries from the socio-economic and existential struggles faced by the characters, providing a vision of material prosperity and security.

In Bandopadhyay's depiction of Moyna Dweep, the island represents a tangible escape from poverty and deprivation, providing a vision of material prosperity and security. Similarly, Huxley's Pala Island offers a holistic escape, integrating physical well-being with intellectual and spiritual

enlightenment. As noted by Frye (1957), such literary escapism allows readers and characters alike to explore new possibilities and reimagine their realities.

Hedonism, on the other hand, involves the pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence. Hedonism can manifest as the quest for sensory, intellectual, or spiritual fulfillment. In *Padma Nadir Majhi*, Moyna Dweep represents a hedonistic ideal where material prosperity and comfort are attainable, reflecting the characters' desire for a better life free from poverty and hardship. Conversely, in *Island*, Pala embodies a more holistic form of hedonism, integrating physical well-being with intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. This dual pursuit of pleasure underscores the characters' deeper yearning for a harmonious and fulfilling existence.

The literature review underscores the multifaceted nature of utopian settings in *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Island*, highlighting their roles in reflecting and challenging socio-economic and cultural realities. Through the themes of escapism and hedonism, Bandopadhyay and Huxley offer powerful critiques of their respective societies while providing visions of hope and transformation.

## Methodology

This study employs a combination of thematic exploration, symbolic interpretation, and contextual analysis to examine the roles of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island in their respective narratives. Thematic exploration involves identifying and analyzing recurring themes of escapism and hedonism within *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Island*, utilizing literary theory and criticism to understand how these themes are articulated (Frye, 1957). This includes detailed textual analysis and comparative analysis to highlight similarities and differences in how Bandopadhyay and Huxley portray their utopian visions. Symbolic interpretation focuses on the imagery, metaphors, and symbols used by the authors, drawing on semiotic and structuralist theories (Barthes, 1977; Bachelard, 1964). This method involves recognizing key symbols in the texts, analyzing the deeper meanings, and considering their resonance with other works in the utopian literary tradition. Contextual analysis situates the narratives within their socio-economic and cultural contexts, informed by historical and cultural studies (Chakrabarty, 1989). This includes examining the historical and cultural backdrops of rural Bengal for Bandopadhyay and mid-20th-century Western society for Huxley, analyzing cultural impacts, and exploring how socio-economic conditions shape the characters' perceptions of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island.

## Findings and Analyses

### Analysis of Moyna Dweep

#### *Utopian Ideal and Socio-Economic Context*

Moyna Dweep, in Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi*, is depicted as an idyllic utopian island that promises material prosperity and escape from the socio-economic hardships of rural Bengal. The island is presented as a haven where the impoverished boatmen and fishermen can find refuge from their relentless toil and poverty. This vision is grounded in the socio-economic struggles faced by the characters, highlighting the stark disparities and systemic oppression prevalent in their society (Chakrabarty, 1989). Bandopadhyay uses Moyna Dweep as a critique of these disparities, offering a vision of hope and possibility amidst the characters' daily struggles.

#### *Symbolic and Spiritual Representation*

Symbolically, Moyna Dweep represents the characters' hedonistic desires for material prosperity and a better life. The island is depicted as a land of abundance, contrasting sharply with the deprivation they endure daily. Moyna Dweep encapsulates the dreams and aspirations of the novel's characters, providing them with a mental and emotional sanctuary. The journey to Moyna Dweep mirrors a pilgrimage, reflecting the characters' deeper yearning for spiritual fulfillment and peace.

#### *Impact on Characters*

Moyna Dweep significantly impacts the characters in *Padma Nadir Majhi*, each of whom embodies different facets of hope and skepticism. Hossain Miya, the visionary behind the island,

symbolizes hope and determination, inspiring others with his grand vision of a better life. He is a symbol of hope and determination, embodying the aspirations of those seeking escape from their harsh realities. Kuber, the protagonist, is driven by the promise of escaping poverty, seeing Moyna Dweep as a chance for a prosperous future for his family. His longing for the island is driven by the desire to escape the relentless poverty and suffering that define his existence. His affair with Kapila, his sister-in-law, adds complexity to his character, highlighting his moral conflicts and human vulnerabilities. Kapila reflects skepticism about the promises of Moyna Dweep, highlighting the tension between idealism and practicality. While she dreams of a better life, her practical concerns about the feasibility of such a utopia underscore the complexities of human aspiration and the challenges of achieving idealized visions. Anondo, a young and hopeful character, represents the optimism of the younger generation, contrasting with the older characters' cautious perspectives. His enthusiasm for Moyna Dweep contrasts with the older generation's skepticism, highlighting generational differences in the perception of utopian ideals. This dynamic interplay of characters underscores the varied human responses to utopian ideals, reflecting both the allure and the challenges of such aspirations.

## Analysis of Pala Island

### *Utopian Ideals and Holistic Lifestyle*

Pala Island, in Aldous Huxley's *Island*, is portrayed as a society that has achieved a harmonious balance between technology, spirituality, and nature. The island represents a utopian vision where the inhabitants live in a state of enlightenment and well-being, free from the socio-economic and political struggles that plague the outside world. Huxley's depiction of Pala Island serves as a critique of contemporary Western society, highlighting the potential for a more integrated and holistic way of life (Smith, 1962). The island's society is structured around principles that prioritize mental health, spiritual growth, and community welfare, embodying a holistic approach to human fulfillment. Further in a study, Schermer (2007, p. 122) stated that "sexuality in Pala is very free and closely connected to a spiritual view of life".

### *Symbolic and Spiritual Dimensions*

Pala Island symbolizes a spiritual utopia where mindfulness, meditation, and holistic medicine are integral to daily life. The island represents a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies, offering a vision of spiritual and intellectual fulfillment. Huxley's vision incorporates elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Western scientific thought, creating a unique cultural and spiritual environment. This spiritual dimension critiques modern society, emphasizing inner peace and enlightenment. The island's practices and rituals, such as the use of 'moksha-medicine', a form of psychedelic therapy, reflect Huxley's interest in exploring human consciousness and potential. Moksha medicine is a tool that to use "in a process of discovering and developing oneself" (Elliott, 1998, p. 186).

### *Impact on Characters*

Will Farnaby, the materialistic protagonist, arrives on the utopian island of Pala after a shipwreck. Will undergoes a profound transformation as he immerses himself in the island's way of life. The spiritual and intellectual enlightenment he experiences on the island contrasts sharply with his previous existence. His journey on Pala allows him to confront and overcome his inner turmoil, leading to a deeper understanding of himself and the world around him. This transformation highlights the island's potential to heal and revitalize those who embrace its values. Susila MacPhail, a resident of Pala, plays a crucial role in guiding Will through his transformation. Her character embodies the island's ideals of mindfulness and emotional healing. Dr. Robert MacPhail represents the island's commitment to integrating modern science with traditional spiritual practices. His character illustrates the potential for a harmonious coexistence of technological advancement and spiritual well-being. Finally, the crown prince of Pala Murugan Mailendra symbolizes the tension between the island's utopian ideals and the external world's temptations. His attraction to power and materialism highlights the challenges of maintaining a utopian society in the face of external influences.

## Comparative Discussion between 'Moyna Dweep' and 'Pala Island'

Davis (1983) regarded utopias as solutions to a fundamental collective problem of satisfying human desires within the boundary of resources. In both Moyna Dweep and Pala island, the inhabitants are found seeking peace and solemn life with material or spiritual solutions. Moyna Dweep represents a socio-economic escape, promising material comfort and economic stability. In contrast, Pala Island offers an intellectual and spiritual refuge, emphasizing mindfulness and holistic living. The escapism in Moyna Dweep is tangible and practical, driven by immediate needs, while Pala's escapism is abstract and metaphysical, focusing on spiritual enlightenment (Chakrabarty, 1989; Smith, 1962). The hedonistic pursuits in both works differ in nature. Moyna Dweep's characters seek material prosperity and relief from hardship, reflecting socio-economic aspirations. In contrast, Pala's inhabitants pursue intellectual and spiritual fulfillment, seeking a deeper connection with themselves and the world around them. Both Moyna Dweep and Pala carry rich symbolic meanings. Moyna Dweep symbolizes socio-economic hope and spiritual renewal, while Pala represents a holistic utopia, integrating spiritual practices into daily life. These symbols critique contemporary societal issues and explore the potential for human transformation through visionary leadership and holistic practices (Smith, 1962). The cultural and contextual backgrounds of the two works significantly influence their portrayal of utopian settings. Moyna Dweep reflects the socio-economic struggles of rural Bengal, while Pala critiques contemporary Western society. These contexts shape the characters' aspirations and the nature of their utopian visions (Chakrabarty, 1989).

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Moyna Dweep and Pala Island highlights the diverse ways in which literature explores themes of escapism and hedonism. Moyna Dweep serves as a symbol of socio-economic hope and spiritual renewal, while Pala represents an intellectual and spiritual refuge. These utopian settings critique contemporary societal issues and reflect the universal human quest for a better, more fulfilling existence. By examining these idealized settings within their respective cultural and contextual frameworks, this study provides a deeper understanding of the multifaceted roles that utopian visions play in literature.

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