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## De la forêt, de Bhibutibhushan Banerjee

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► **To cite this version:**

| Anne Castaing. De la forêt, de Bhibutibhushan Banerjee. 2022. hal-03906467

**HAL Id: hal-03906467**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03906467>**

Submitted on 19 Dec 2022

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## France Bhattacharya's translation receives a prize

On November 5<sup>th</sup>, France Bhattacharya was awarded a literary translation prize in Arles for her Bengali to French translation

*De la forêt*, Bhibhuti Bhushan Banerji, Zulma press, 2020.

Anne Castaign tells us a bit about this work and its translation:

Bhibhuti Bhushan Banerji is best known for *Pather pāncālī*, a novel that was translated into French as *La Complainte du sentier* (1969) and which Satyajit Ray made into a film in 1955, a work as moving as it was unforgettable. The beauty and mystery of nature were revealed to Apu, a seven-year-old child, who was in the end torn away by economic necessity from the landscapes he had made his own. Published nearly 10 years later, *De la forêt (Āranyak)* strikingly explores the vastness of the Bihar forests where the main character, a penniless young man belonging to Calcutta's educated bourgeoisie, accepts a position as estate manager. Plunging deep into the heart of a vast forest estate, his task is to make the land productive by entrusting it to local farmers on a sharecropping basis, thereby eradicating the forest whose complex ecology he gradually discovers with wonder.

The “wooded solitude” (*āranyabhūmir nirjjantā*) of Satyacharan—who presently becomes a benevolent figure reigning over an exuberant universe populated by trees and intoxicating flowers, by beasts as wild as they are prodigious, by iconoclastic populations, by children and old men, by lakes and mountains—progressively transmogrifies into melancholic rapture in the face of the programmed disappearance of this ecosystem, which promises nothing more than precariousness, injustice, and desolation. An ecological novel before its time, *De la forêt* does not simply describe the—violated—beauty of the wilderness and its tragic destiny in a world dominated by consumerism; it tells the unwritten story of a complex ecosystem, where animal, human and plant, material and spiritual, luxuriance and misery live together in harmony as well as in discord.

France Bhattacharya's translation of this captivating story, a veritable spiritual, botanical and ethnographic plunge into the Bihari lands of the Purnea region, is as magnetic as it is refined. In these lines, one senses both the author's fascination for the world of plants (the novel is actually based on autobiographical elements) and the translator's attachment to this particular ecology, where formidably documented and detailed descriptions of vegetation or peasant rituals give way to the narrator's

wonder—which, in turn, undoubtedly arouses that of the reader.