

An Ecocritical Exploration of Dhruv Bhatt's *Akoopar – The Infinite*

Dr.Purnanshu S. Dudhatra

Article Received: 19/02/2023

Article Accepted: 16/03/2023

Published Online: 20/03/2023

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2023.5.03.85

Abstract:

Eco-criticism, as a literary theory, examines the representation of the natural world in literature and seeks to understand the ways in which human beings interact with their environment. Dhruv Bhatt is a well-known contemporary Gujarati author who has been fictionalising fundamental ecological concerns. Dhruv Bhatt's novel *Akoopar* is a work of eco-fiction, which explores the relationship between humans and nature. *Akoopar* is a novel that raises important ecological concerns and highlights the relationships between humans and animals. Through its portrayal of the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of preserving natural habitats, the novel serves as a reminder of the urgent need to address environmental issues and protect our planet for future generations. This research paper aims to explore the ecological themes and concerns in *Akoopar* using the framework of ecocriticism. Through an in-depth analysis of the novel's representation of nature, wildlife, and the human relationship with the environment, this research aims to shed light on the ways in which Bhatt's work reflects and responds to contemporary ecological issues.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Coexistence, Human – nature relationship, Wildlife Conservation, eco-fiction

The reason we are confronting environmental crises on a massive level now is not due to the way that ecosystems work, but rather owing to the way that our moral system works. To make it through the crisis, one needs to have a thorough comprehension of the human influence on the natural world, but even more importantly, one needs to have a comprehension of the moral system. The environmental crisis that 21st-century humans face is created by them only. The threat posed by pollution to our environment has grown significantly in recent decades. Natural resources are being used up at an alarming rate. There is less forest now than there used to be. There are a lot of countries in the world that have failed to maintain the required proportion of forest area. Mankind has been facing threats like oil spills, deforestation, climate change, cloud bursts, environmental contamination, chemical

spills, erosion of topsoil, soil degradation, water shortages, high tides, and cyclones are all on the rise.

Only humans carry out actions in order to satisfy their greed rather than only to satisfy their needs. We've come a long way by thirstily exploring and exploiting the environment and its resources, and now there's an obvious understanding that we need to start taking care of the flora, fauna, and wildlife as well. We must understand and take action against the factors that are damaging the ecosystem, and ecocriticism is an example of such an effort.

The essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" written by William Rueckert in 1978 is credited with being the origin of the term "ecocriticism." A combination of the terms "eco" and "criticism," ecocriticism is a relatively new term. M. H. Abrams talks about the etymology of the term in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, "Ecocriticism" was a term coined in the late 1970s by combining "criticism" with a shortened form of "ecology"—the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats." (98)

Everything that we can see with our own eyes is part of an ecosystem, therefore when we say "eco," we're referring to ecology. In a nutshell, literally, everything in the universe has some kind of impact on the entire ecosystem. The word "criticism," which makes up the second half of the word, describes the process of analysing and evaluating a piece of literature through a variety of critical lenses to draw out its interpretations. It's a new area of literary criticism that's growing quickly right now. It analyses the interaction between humans and the environment in literary works.

The term "ecocriticism" refers to a literary theory that examines literature in light of environmental concerns. Ecocriticism is the multidisciplinary study of the connections between the environment and literature. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996):

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

It examines how literature, cultural, environmental ethics, and ecological issues are related. The field of ecocriticism is distinct from other theories because of its close relationship to the scientific discipline of ecology; it is concerned with issues such as the preservation of natural habitats, the importance of nurturing relationships between humans and nonhumans, and ideas such as ecology, Social Ecology, deep ecology, Ecocide, wilderness, Pollution, etc.

Ecocriticism grew out of the need to solve the ecological problem and save the planet. Ecocriticism emerged in response to the ecological crises of the 20th century, especially after the 1650s. It was the beginning of industrialization in the United States and Europe in the 18th century, and it reached its pinnacle in the middle of the 20th century. As a result, the

newly produced insecticides, machinery, and industrial pollution damaged everything. Industrious filthy water was dumped into rivers, tainting the formerly pristine blue waters. Among modern Gujarati authors, Dhruv Bhatt stands out. The author has been actively involved in process of writing about environmental problems. Environmental concern is one of the major themes in his writings. He has portrayed his observations of Gujarat's diverse culture and environment while keeping in mind the plight of extinct animals and the lives of people living in such environments. His novels are grounded on his interactions with locals and their way of life.

Dhruv Bhatt has spoken out for nature. Society is a part of the natural world. The novel's author gave a strong voice to the nature and environment and wrote about it. He has used geography and the environment as themes in the novel to show how the world is changing. He's made an effort to create a piece of green literature by integrating natural elements.

Akoopar fictionalises true experiences the author had experienced during his stay at Gir forest. The story of the novel takes place in the Gir forest, which is the only natural habitat for Asiatic lions. Considering the plight of threatened animals and people in Gir, he has offered his observations on cultural practises there. The experiences he depicts in his writing are drawn from his interactions with locals and are thus entirely authentic.

The author talks about what he had in mind for the title. The author explained why he chose *Akoopar* in his note. The term *Akoopar* is taken from the Mahabharata. The tortoise that makes an appearance in a story is referred to by its name, *Akoopar*. The author mentions that he has settled on writing about the areas of Gir forest and Ghed, which is a seaside region. The setting has a far more significant role in determining the novel's theme than the characters do.

The novel's protagonist doesn't belong to Gir. He is an outsider. However, with time, he begins to merge with the environment and become a part of it. The story is narrated by the central character, who is a painter. He has been tasked with the mission of painting the components of the earth, one of five fundamental elements, as part of a larger project. Even if this is a business opportunity, he has heard a voice within himself or inside his own spirit urging him to carry out the mission with complete and total engagement. He made the decision to remain in the Gir forest in order to paint the components that make up the earth. The artist in him sees Gir forest in all its graphic glory. To the residents of Gir forest, preserving the forest's aesthetic surroundings and life is more than simply a duty. 'Gir' emerges as one of the strong characters. Gir is the progenitor of all genders. Despite all of the natural disasters, 'Gir' has remained tranquil and has cared for the life that is still present in it as a mother would.

The story begins with a phrase said by Aima, and it sets the tone for the whole novel. "Khama Gayrne. (May the Gir be blessed!)" (*Akoopar* 7) "Khamma" is a traditional way of wishing someone wellness in the Kathiyawad region of Gujarat. Aima bestows her affection

on Gir. Aima's words reflect the understanding, affection, and care for all Gir forest inhabitants, as her words show a profound feeling of appreciation and thanks to mother earth for sustaining and nurturing all living forms. Here, Gir though being a location, is treated no less than a central character. All the characters of the novel respect and have affection for it. Since the beginning of time, man has coexisted peacefully with nature. This requires accepting all environmental entities. This is something that may be accomplished if people have gained the ability to acknowledge their surroundings and treat them with the utmost reverence. The region known as Gir is home to a huge variety of animals and even people. Everyone has become used to, and even respectful of, the other species' presence.

One of the protagonists who drives the plot is Sansai. She grew up in the Gir forest and is a native of that region. Sansai takes the protagonist to Aima's residence at the beginning of the novel. She is a part of nature and experiences all of the forest's emotions, including its animals' grief and happiness.

For Sansai, it is impossible to consider herself distinguishable from any living thing in the wild. Almost every object in the wood is familiar to her, and she meticulously maintains them. In the wild, she is never afraid to explore new territory and has even been seen cuddling with young lions. She is uncomplicated, much like Nature. Always willing to assist others, whether they be people or other animals. As a girl who isn't afraid to express what's on her mind, there is no sugarcoating what she has to say about anything. She doesn't hold back what she believes and behaves in accordance with the altruistic values she upholds. Her words are those of Gir.

Sansai understands the flora and fauna of Gir well. Since each of the lions has a unique persona, she refers to them by their own names and treats them like members of her own family. She also knows, how to calm down a lioness when she becomes upset with the presence of unfamiliar people. This is how she deals with the situation:

“The girl stood silently and spoke to me in almost a whisper, "Don't be frightened. Don't try to flee under any circumstances. If you do so you would not reach home." Then she glanced at the sitting lioness and mumbled, "Ramjānā, my mother, rest assured. I am not going to harm your cubs." As if talking to the lioness she continued her mumbling. She bent one of her legs from the knee and lifted it close to her thigh cleverly. She did it so skilfully that I felt the lioness and the standing cubs could hardly notice the movement of her jimi. “(25)

When Sansai finds out that her fiance profits from the immoral sale of cows, she is so certain that no animals should be harmed that she decides to end her relationship with him.

Similarities between Lajo and her Sansai are apparent. In the same way, she is honest and has a keen ability to see through deception. As her adored cow is attacked by two lionesses attack in front of her, she experiences a painful feeling of grief yet she allows the lionesses to carry her away. She apologises to Girvan, her cow, and prays for the lions.

“Lajo knelt down with spreading the loose end of her sari before her and said, "Mother, please forgive me. I had reasons for not saving you. Had I even saved you, you were not likely to survive and I would not have been able to put up with the suffering that you were likely to undergo." Lajo stood motionless till the lionesses pulled away Girvan into the bushes. Before moving towards her home, with folded hands she said, "Girvān, my mother, may your soul rest in peace! I will observe fast on five Ekadashis.(eleventh day of moon)" (151)

Due to Lajo's strong emotional bond with Girvan, her grief was intense and unbearable. She worships her mother. To express her grief and pry her soul, she decided to keep fast on Ekadashies. On the other hand, she doesn't feel bitterness for lions too. Everyone in the Gir knows how to co- exists. It is impossible to realise a more significant ecological existence by any other means than living together peacefully. Living in harmony with nature and wildlife means respecting and protecting the environment and its inhabitants.

Each character emphasises the need of keeping a respectful distance from the lion. Characters like Dhanu and Sonal don't hold a deep resentment against the lions, even though they were hurt by them. On the other hand, Dhanu is of the opinion that the lion had no intention of killing him in the first place.

Rava Ata is another important figure who has displayed his intense care for lions and his constant efforts brought an end to lion hunting since lions are so uncommon in Gir. Rava Ata was the blind man who traveled on foot to ask the British Lord to restrict lion hunting in order to protect the Gir. Rava Ata explained to the Lat saheb his concern for lions. If they were to hunt lions, the whole dynasty of the kings of lions will be wiped out. All of the residents of the Gir are reliant on one another for their basic survival.

"Every creature that lives in the Gayr has only one lineage. If we do not believe so, we cannot survive there," The Charan said, "We exist just because of the Gayr and they because of us. Whether you kill them or us is one and the same thing. As the lions with their tails are there in the Gayr we exist totherwise we shall not be there either." (291)

Due to his blindness and unable to do any damage by marrying a lady, he is unwilling to be married. A marriage ritual for two hills known as "Ghatlo" and "Ghantali" was also organized by Rava Ata. On that occasion Rava Ata provides a feast to his fellow foresters.

There are too many environmental issues weaved throughout the novel for a comprehensive analysis. Consider the following: conflict between humans and non-humans, lion illegal hunting, invasion of natural forests, livelihood problems in natural forests, soil degradation, reforestation, and ecosystem. The Storm of eighty-four caused large-scale devastation.

“I asked, "Did the Gir suffer such large scale devastation?"

Dhanu said, "Don't mention the loss. Several trees got uprooted and consequently the distance between the hills became conspicuous. What a terrible storm it was! No tree was spared- nothing remained safe and sound in the forests - not a single tree." (267)

The protagonists' conventional lifestyles and the ideals they uphold are the sources of protection that allow them to solve the problems on their own. The hidden knowledge that the local people possess is revealed by Aima, Sansai, and Rava Ata, in addition to other characters, and it has the power to enchant them. The author has made an effort to discuss ecological problems that are intertwined throughout the novel. Some of the issues that are discussed in the novel include conflict between animals and humans, lion illegal hunting, socioeconomic aspects in forest areas, and so on.

The natural world has long been one of the most important sources of creative inspiration. Dhruv Bhatt has shown nature and the many things that come from it in his novel. He has also explored the ways in which these things are tied to human existence. Thus the novel focuses on man's ability to cohabit with the environment rather than placing man against nature. Dhruv Bhatt praises the all qualities of Mother Nature as well as the significantly bigger personalities that choose to exist for the natural world. He connected the dots between several ecological concerns voiced on various international stages. Concerning the plight of lions in Gir, he discusses the problems that must be overcome.

Work Cited:

- Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2015.
- Bhatt, Dhruv. *Akoopar-The Infinite*. Trans. Joshi Piyush and Gathvi Suresh. Ahmedabad: Tatvam Publication, 2014.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. The University of Georgia Press, 2009.