

Chapter-VI: Conclusion

‘What You Do to the Environment, Ultimately You Do to Yourself’

The Environment is [with]in us,
 Not outside of us.
 The trees are our lungs
 The rivers our bloodstream
 We are all interconnected,
 And
 What you do to the environment,
 Ultimately you do to yourself
 Ian Somerhalder (qtd. in Dalek Faerie)

This poem, written by the well-known American actor and environmentalist Somerhalder (b.1978), echoes the ecological wisdom contained in ‘Chief Seattle’s Letter to All’ (1854)- with whose words the first chapter of this thesis has begun.

Such texts continue to remind us about the existential urgency to constantly scrutinize the changing paradigms of man-nature relationships. Clearly, they contain the essence of the ecocritical precepts in light of which I have attempted so far to explore some dimensions of the select works by Bhatt and Mohanty.

The present thesis endeavours to espouse what Somerhalder’s poem says. Each of its chapters attempts to underscore the fact that humans are not in a position to ignore any longer the multiple implications of the reciprocities that

exist among the internal and external environments that lie within and outside of us.

Somerhalder's eco-sensitive poem and Chief Seattle's letter appeal us to look back and take a stock of our approach towards nature so that lessons learnt from the past could guide our present actions and enlighten our future path.

I also propose at this juncture to take a backward trip into this thesis, while I will try to reiterate some details which can give glimpses of the present environmental scenario. On one hand, that would help me crystalize the ecological lessons embedded in the texts studied; and on the other, it will allow me to spell out the significance of identifying and appreciating nature-sensitive texts and actions in the future.

So, in this concluding chapter, before referring to the limitations of the present study, in order to place ecological positions of Bhatt and Mohanty in proper perspective, firstly I will go back to the closing comments of the previous chapters to juxtapose them with some of the recently-emerging Indian/global ecological realities, and with the green efforts being diligently carried out by some eco-activists.

6.1 A Small Rewind

The first chapter has thrown light on the exceptional techno-scientific and industrial growth the mankind has procured within last five decades. But, during the same time, as the second chapter has shown, the role played by humans in devastating environmental scenario, has also remained exponentially deplorable.

It can be observed that along with the increase in material advancement, comfort levels in lives of the common man are of course rising- but that seems to be happening at the cost of human happiness and ecological health of the globe. No one

can deny today that despite all stories of human development, the splits- between nature/culture, between man/animal, between the rich/the poor and between humans and their environment- are being pathetically widened.

The interlinks explained in this study among the rising pollution indices, environmental victimization of the poor and the dreadfully declining biodiversity assuredly impel one to think sincerely about the global urgency of re-calibrating human relationships with the physical environs.

To de-accelerate the speed of ecosuicidal march of the mankind, as the themes of the select texts have indicated, humans across the globe will have to internalize the extreme significance of protecting the planet earth and her resources from anthropocentric aggressions. Considering the aesthetic, ethical, spiritual and material significance of Nature, re-harmonizing man-Nature relationships has indeed become a global imperative, and the onus of repairing the disrupted ecobalance of the planet earth solely lies on the mankind.

First two introductory chapters of this thesis that refer to the observations of the natural scientists, predictions of the ecologists and the statistical data of social scientists do imply that if the human world continues to remain complacent about its obvious role in environmental destruction, the umbilical cord of life- which connects all earthlings with the planet earth- can be inexorably severed in very near future.

The draft of the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) of 2020 introduced by the UMEFCC (Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) has considerably escalated anxieties of environmentally-conscious communities across India. Most of them consider it being pro-industry and therefore against the guidelines laid down by the NGT and the Supreme Court of India.

This recent controversy exhibits the perennial battle that goes on globally between economic forces and ecologic interests. That is why as the time passes, voices of Bhatt, Mohanty, Somerhalder or the Chief Seattle- who uphold timeless and priceless ecological values- are incrementally assuming importance in the glocal environmental discourse.

In this scenario, as it has been discussed here, although Bhatt and Mohanty have adopted different narrative strategies and recommended different philosophical routes to reach this collective goal, both of them have categorically reminded the readers that in order to realize creation of a happy and peaceful co-existence for all- which is the ‘*summum bonum*’ of all human aspirations- man will have to keep each of his activities under close scrutiny.

6.2 Flashforward through the Flashback

Ecocritical reading of the texts suggest that although neither Marxist optimism about the earth having unlimited natural resources, nor the cornucopian faith in our techno-scientific abilities could redress our existing ecological conundrum. For example, India, in spite of having sufficient natural resources, is facing a daunting challenge of extracting adequate amount of drinkable water from the earth to quench the thirst of her huge population. Political machineries, while facilitating industrial sectors to receive the huge amount of water they require, will have to sincerely see that economically marginalized sections also get sufficient and hygienic water for their domestic use.

It is a good sign for India that in the recent years people have started becoming aware about celebrating eco-friendly religious festivals. Incidents of drowning of the huge effigies of Gods and throwing flowers into the rivers and seas during religious rituals are fortunately being voluntarily minimized. In spite of these

facts, as *Oceanside Blues* indicates, the biggest challenge that lies before India today is to rescue her water bodies from the colossal amount of the toxic wastes being discharged into them by the chemical industries. The same issue also draws our attention to handle the enormous amount of digital waste and plastic sludge that significantly devastate the marine life today. The text mentioned thus points to the need of carrying out intense studies to see how the mass production of digital gadgets and their unrestrained usage will dramatically accelerate resource depletion, electricity consumption, and the amount of carbon-footprint into the climate.

The good news about the Indian green cover is that compared to 2015, India has been able to increase it by a little over 0.5%, according to ISFR-2019. But it is important to note that while India is still quite far from reaching its 33 % target, the present rate of deforestation is horrific, and it needs to be immediately controlled. Quoting these afore-mentioned data declared by the Environment Ministry of India, the title of a report from Vinit Upadhyaya suggests that “Tree felling almost doubled between 2016-2019 in India.”

In this context, pinpointing the official figures of tree-felling, K.M.Pavithra also reports that under the FCA (Forest Conservation Act) of India, “more than 1 crore trees” were permitted to be cut by the government authorities between 2014 and 2019, following the new policy of EoDB (Ease of Doing Business). In tree-felling operations, Odisha and Gujarat- from the soils of which the select texts originate- are also quite ahead, among their other counterparts.

In this scenario, the present study definitely spotlights the need to strengthen the political will and improve the bureaucratic systems of India, which are legally empowered to implement the well-drafted environment protection policies.

Since the marine and terrestrial systems of the entire earth are interlinked, besides throwing light on the Indian situation, the stories we have studied also highlight the global environmental conditions. For example, lives of the forest-dwelling communities of *Paraja* and *That Thou Art*, and those of the seafarers of *Akoopar* and *Oceanside Blues* form microcosm of the macro realities. These stories ask the humanity not to disturb lives of around three hundred million people across the globe, and an unaccountable number of non-human species, who live in forests, and the green covers of these forests provide livelihood to around 1.6 billion people.

Yet, it must be noted that, every year, we lose 18.7 million acres of forest covers- which is “equivalent to 27 soccer fields every minute.” Due to the phenomenal loss of the Amazon forest during last five decades, the planet earth has already lost 17 percent of her green lungs. On the other hand, the situation of the marine biodiversity is equally deplorable, since half of the coral reefs and mangroves have already gone; and on account of overfishing and the unbridled hunting of marine mammals, seabirds, sea turtles, and sharks- marine biodiversity too face a serious threat (“Forest Habitat”, “Oceans” in WWF) in India and abroad.

On account of an inexorable instrumentalization of nature for commercial purposes, since British Raj era, Indian biodiversity has already faced severe losses. But in the independent India, besides keeping an eye on the environmental damage being done by the industrial waste, what the people of India needs to do is to remain constantly vigilant against the violation of environmental laws perpetrated by the socio-economically and politically powerful celebrities. Like the olden kings and British lords, they still continue to disrupt floral and faunal biodiversity in order to quench their financial thirst and satiate their egos in various ways. Two examples- one from religion domain and the other from Bollywood-will suffice to support this comment.

Sri Sri Ravishankar has been considered a religious celebrity in India. Disregarding warnings from ecologists, his organisation called Art of Living arranged in 2016 a three-day-cultural-festival on the banks of Yamuna. Shinjini Ghosh writes that in December 2017 that the NGT (National Green Tribunal) had to fine them for severely damaging Yamuna river's ecosystems. Due to that event, the Yamuna flood plains have lost “almost all its natural vegetation” like trees, shrubs, tall grasses, aquatic vegetation, including water hyacinth that provides habitat to a large number of animals, insects and mud-dwelling organisms” (“NGT Holds Sri Sri's Art of Living Responsible for Damage to Yamuna Floodplains”).

On the other hand, as mentioned in chapter IV, India has also seen the 1998 case of the killings of two black bucks in Rajasthan. In fact, from the view point of a deep ecologists who acknowledge the intrinsic rights the non-human animals to their life, they were cold-blooded murders committed just for safari thrill and sadistic fun. It was a classic case that allegedly exposed flaunting of ecological laws by economically and politically powerful figures like the Bollywood actor Salman Khan. It was because of the Bishnoi tribe under whose pressure the case was filed in the court, and Salman was convicted for this crime by the lower court.

It is indeed not beneficial in any way for the Indian people to forget that it was the deep ecosensitivity and a sense of repentance which stimulated the Rishi-poet Valmiki to write first lines of *Ramayana*, in which he refers to the killing of a ‘Krauncha’ bird (possibly an extinct Indian ‘Saras’ Crane) he witnessed at the bank of ‘Tamasa’ river. Majority of the Indian psyche who considers Lord Rama as his God must remember how Rama was affectionately related with his non-human counterparts like trees, creepers, birds (Jatayu), monkeys, bears and squirrels.

Reflecting the Indian ecological consciousness, Umashankar Joshi (1911-1988), in his well-known Gujarati poem “Vishva-Shanti” (i.e. ‘Universal Peace’), sings thus:

Immense expanse of the planet earth
 Exist not only for us humans to dwell:
 The beasts and birds and flowers
 And the tall trees of the forest unbound
 Live here as well!
 Countless flowers are pierced
 And ravaged are the wings of lovely birds
 Mute creatures are butchered
 And wounded are the forests dense
 With a doleful heart, the Mother Earth sobs
 Alas! All her honey cannot satiate her cruel sons
 Who have splattered her blood all over her bosom

 Unique songs of the Almighty sparkle in the eyes of the birdies
 Tweeting playfully in the lap of Nature
 Can humans dream even of a glimpse of peace
 If they hurt these playful children of Nature in the least?
 Let a loving stream of compassion flow from the depths of our hearts to
 bless all the little ones of the Mother Earth, and
 To blend the heart-strings of all these earthlings
 Let us play our inner ‘ek-tara’ in unison

....

Humans and the Nature! To you all I bid:

“Entire earth constitutes a single family”

....

And “Whole earth is but a single nest”

(Own translation. *Samagra Kavita*. 18-19)

Like Joshi’s poem, Mohanty and Bhatt also argue that when the Indian cultural psyche, Indian constitution as well as the Environmental Laws of India imbibe these all-inclusive elements, Indians cannot overlook the damage being done to their biodiversity and to the poor either by politically powerful individuals or by the heavy-weight corporate tycoons. The present study indicates that India needs to be wary about the damaging impact of the industrial activities on her rich biodiversity, as well as on the disappearing eco-sensitive indigenous cultures and their linguistic diversity. As findings of the chapter-IV reveal, India needs to deal cautiously with those capital-intensive operations that damage common men’s local occupations, rural economy and quality of the fertile soil which constitute economic backbone of India.

In Chapter-III, environmental stance of ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva and eco-historians like Ramchandra Guha has been considered; and in the following chapter, the money-lender is shown confiscating the poor farmer Sukru Jani’s land. He uses it to extract profits by sowing ecologically harmful non-indigenous crop into the soil. The stories discussed in both these chapters justify the opposition of activists like Shiva and Guha against the predatory strategies of the global corporate houses that pressurize or persuade farmers to sell their lands so that those fertile

lands can be utilized for the profit-yielding, non-indigenous, mono-crop agriculture which remarkably damage soil fertility.

Characters of the select texts who live in small forest hamlets or coastal regions represent more than sixty percentage of Indian population, who live in villages, and who depend for their subsistence upon the cottage industry, fishery, agro-economy and forest produce. It is the responsibility of the socio-political systems that their self-reliance and dignity are preserved and maintained under the global economic pressures and their profiteering stratagems.

Discussion on *Paraja* indicates how feudal tyrants in old days and industrial tycoons of the modern world are not at all different so far as their predatory gaze on the land and on the cheap labour are concerned. In order to multiply their profits thorough mass-agriculture and mass-production, firstly they bully the local land owners and invest huge capital in land acquisition. Their exclusivist economic goals aggravate exploitation of the natural resources as well as the poor communities who sweat and toil for them.

Paraja turns our attention to the impact of industrial expansions on the self-reliant class of farmers in the present times. It succeeds in connecting us with the realities of the slums being mushroomed around industrial hubs and cities. Following their expulsion from their native lands, the unemployed farmer families, leaving their peaceful forests and village life behind, turn to the industrial centres and join the cut-throat competition to make their living; and these new modes of modern life bring in a pathetic metamorphosis in their vision of life and in their inter/intra relationships with other humans and Nature herself.

Deforestation makes room for industrial expansions, but it usurps natural habitats of numerous non-human species and of the forest dwellers. When village farmers turn into industrial workers- as we have seen in cases of Jili and Bili in

chapter IV- all aspects of their participation in the production processes undergo a paradigm shift: their work place change (open air farm/closed workshops); their tools change (hands/machine); their traditional values and objectives of work change (work for self/ work for the employer); their relationships with their fellow workmen completely change (cooperation/competition); their bonds with the product they produce change; and so changes their relationship with the Nature herself. These changes, according to Marxist followers, deepen their sense of alienation. Violation in the human sense of belongingness to the land they cohabit isolates them from ecological issues of the soil as well.

Sukru's expulsion from his ancestral forest soil in *Paraja* exhibits how forced disassociation of a poor farmer from his land impoverishes him in multiple respects. It not only delivers economic blow or undermines an individual's sense of dignity by shattering his self-confidence; but it also entrenches in him a sense of alienation - which ruins him completely.

The tragic living conditions of the 'gotis' in *Paraja*, turns our attention the existing bureaucratic inefficiency and the greed of the industrial giants due to which environmental ethics and human rights are grossly violated. They make us conscious about the kinds of human-sponsored industrial tragedies which cause irreparable socio-environmental loss in the independent India. The infamous Bhopal Gas leak of 1984 and the more recent Vizag Gas Leak of 2020 exemplify how the Indian human and natural resources are still allowed to be colonized, exploited and brutalized by foreign companies.

Ecocritical Voices: Breaking the Boundaries

Instead of bringing into focus the man-centered environmental rights, as Chapter-V points out, the deep ecological platform promotes the moral need to

respect the environmental rights of the non-human world as well. Deep ecologists do not respect the utilitarian strategy to carry out biodiversity preservation campaigns for the sake of protecting human existence. They argue that the ecological interests of the non-human animals must be respected just because, like humans, their non-human counterparts, also possess equal Natural rights to exist on the planet earth.

The previous chapter has shown that deep-ecologists do not approve of the ecosocialists' human-centred solutions to resolve ecologic issues. Encountering their stance, as mentioned in chapter IV, conventional voices among ecosocialists, label deep-ecologists as misanthropists for the latter's ideas of holding human demography responsible for resource depletion as well as for the extinction of non-human entities. Ecofeminists, on the other hand, as explained in chapter III, blames the masculine aggressions on the earth and her resources for the environmental degradation.

In spite of the ideological differences noticed among the varieties of ecocritical schools, it should be noted that that they are now transcending their previous conceptual orbits to solidify their collective green goals. For example, as pointed out in the chapter III, besides fighting to liberate the earth and the women from the patriarchal exploitation, the platform of ecofeminism today takes into account, like the deep ecologists, the environmental rights of the non-human beings; whereas, ecosocialists supports ecofeminists' demand to procure economic equality for the womenfolk.

6.3 Limitations of this Study: Scopes of Further Explorations

Limitations of this study are obvious as out of a remarkably wide range of ecocritical strands, I have borrowed only a few insights from ecofeminism, ecosocialism and deep ecology to interpret the select texts. Considering the huge research scopes the platform of ecocriticism is opening today, at this point I must

clarify that this thesis offers just a bird-eye-view of only the three varieties mentioned. I also need to admit that I have not been able to even touch upon the remaining varieties that this expanding platform holds.

For example, the select texts have not been examined through the lenses of ‘ecotourism,’ ‘eco-spiritualism’ or ‘eco- psychology.’ The unique spiritual bonds that fictionally connect Nature with characters like Gandu Fakir (*That Thou Art*) or Bangaali Baaba (*Oceanside Blues*) could offer important scientific insights if studied in light of the scientific observations offered by Jagdish Chandra Bose. In fact, attempts may be made to understand such characters by comparing them with spiritually advanced Indian figures whose actual encounters with the non-human world could be found encased in their autobiographies, biographies, travelogues, and other non-fictional writings. In this context, in Gujarati literature one may refer to books like: ‘Mari Narmada Parikrama’ by Narmadanandji, ‘Jivan Mukta ni Jivan Yaatra’ by Dr. Kamal Pathak, or ‘Yogi Harnaath na Sanidhyama’ by Makarand Dave, to name a few. *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Yoganandaji offers rich scopes to study the spiritual interlinks that connects the human and the nonhuman.

Though Bhatt’s stories contain episodes that highlight cordial bonds and unique understandings among humans and animals like lions, leopard, cows, buffalos, horse, scorpion, whales etc., these bonds have not been interpreted from the view point of ‘Animal Studies’- which itself is a huge area of study, requiring an independent research on the topic. For the same reason, in chapter-IV, though I have tried to understand the environmental victimization of the economically marginalized voices living in urban and rural India, the same issue remains to be explored from Dalit point of view. In fact, it may be noted that Bhatt has dealt with this particular issue in another novel entitled *The Pilgrims of Darkness* (2019), in

which he has portrayed the tragedies and challenges faced by the de-notified cast known as ‘chhara.’ This novel sympathetically explains as to why this community had to take recourse to the art of stealing on account of their extreme poverty, illiteracy and their extreme, socio-economic marginalization.

Since there were no direct references in the select texts to the drastic change the man-Nature relationship is going to take in future due to the exponential growth the mankind has achieved in artificial intelligence (AI), I have not looked at the given texts from the dimensions of ‘post-humanism’ or ‘trans-humanism.’ However, it is pertinent to mention that Bhatt’s latest Gujarati scientific fiction *Na Iti* thematizes both the afore-mentioned concepts. Characters of this new novel are cyborgs, whose minds and bodies are controlled by electronic chips being inserted into their brains at their births. Having an in-built reason-based intelligence system, their lives have a fixed expiry date. They follow the technical commands given by the encrypted computer language since they have lost touch with human languages. As the climate of the earth has been totally contaminated by their earlier generations, they live in a closed transparent dome which isolates their world from the black-smog that looms around their dome.

Another limitation of this thesis is that it lacks the ‘lived experience’ of Nature. By ‘lived experience’ I refer to the direct experience of living amid forests, in the river valleys, on the mountains and on the sea coast. Living in close connection with nature and the people portrayed in the fiction to be studied certainly helps the researcher in developing deeper understanding of them. So, to know about the prospects and procedures of getting permission to stay in the Gir forest when I contacted a Gir forest official, he said that only the researchers working on pure sciences are likely to get such approvals. However, he of course telephonically

resolved some of my doubts regarding the amiable behaviour of the leopard depicted in Bhatt's *Akoopar*.

Although not all literary figures are supposed to be eco-reformers or environmental preachers, I suppose their opinions on the links among literature, Nature, ecological issues, and the role of society and politics in mitigating the same could surely add more clarity to the ecocritical reading of their texts.

So, in order to enrich my understanding of the interconnections among the author's works, creative processes and some of the sensitive socio-environmental issues which were taking place around the times when he was writing his fiction, when I approached the author (Bhatt), perhaps due to his simplicity or due to his personal preferences, I could not gather considerable information about the afore-mentioned issues and points.

6.4 Bhatt and Mohanty: Different Routes, Same Destination

Bhatt's vision of life often echoes Gandhian vision of creating an ideal state which is expected to take into account welfare of the last man of the society. In their appeals to protect natural environment as well as local cultures and their languages from the aggressive, self-centric modes of modern life, Bhatt's texts exhibit their faith in the Gandhian ideas about sustainable growth, self-reliance, cautious adoption of industrial technology, simplicity and non-violence.

Like Bhatt, as Mohanty also pleads to protect the eco-culturally rich tribal cultures and their natural rhythms, as discussed below, they do share striking similarities in certain respects. However, as the further discussion will show, they significantly differ in many ways in their approaches to defend the case of the downtrodden.

Although Bhatt uses first person narrative and Mohanty uses the technique of omnipresent voice, their proximity of the natural milieus they depict does make them sound authentic in both cases. So far as the literary depictions of the changing seasons, of flora and

fauna, of rivers and valleys, of the contours of the landscapes, and of the people living in the lap of nature are concerned- the poetic prose of both the authors do reflect their Romantic sensibilities.

Protagonists: Natural World from Insiders/Outsiders' Perspectives

In case of Bhatt's fictions, narrators are anonymous and they are outsiders who, having been invested with authorial powers, are technically able to narrate the lives of the people and Nature from an outsider's perspective. Bhatt's imaginative canvas gives pivotal positions to the specific geo-cultural locations, and the settings of his fiction belong to the natural milieu. So, the presence of the forest or river or ocean predominates his narratives.

However, it may be pointed out that what primarily stimulates Bhatt's protagonists' entry into the natural milieus is their professional compulsions; and not their ardent love for nature. For example, in *Akoopar*, the protagonist enters the Gir forest to paint elemental forms of the earth. In *That Thou Art*, the protagonist is instructed by his professor to live in the Narmada Valley to study its tribal culture. In *Oceanside Blues*, the protagonist arrives at the coastal village as he is to carry out a government order to survey that arid region so that it could be declared as chemical industrial zone afterwards.

Secondly, compared Bhatt's other characters, his protagonists hold authorial positions in different contexts. The painter of *Akoopar* has the creative authority to paint the pictures of the Gir forest according to his discretion and imagination. The engineer of *Oceanside Blues* is himself a representative of the government, who is empowered to determine future of the eco-cultural landscape he is supposed to survey. Perhaps it is for this reason that Bhatt's critique on the ecological

insensitivity of the power structures, except in the *Oceanside Blues*, is not as vigorous and as forthright as one finds in Mohanty's critique of the same.

Bhatt's fiction and his protagonists, as if following Gandhian non-violence, prefer to adopt rather a persuasive tone and indirect strategies to make an appeal to understand the need to protect Nature and the people whose economic and ecologic interests hinge absolutely on environmental preservation; whereas, Mohanty's protagonists take a Marxist stance and adopts an aggressive and direct approach to fight the unabashed exploitation of the downtrodden. His fiction boldly presages the gruesome consequences of ignoring the socio-environmental necessity to break economic hegemonies.

In other words, in Bhatt's stories, subalterns never speak, to borrow words from Gayatri Spivak's famous essay. But Mohanty, by showing the bloody murder of the money lender at the hands of the tribal trio in the end of *Paraja*, is committed to remind the humanity about what kinds of horrendous turns human history might take if the subalterns are not allowed to speak.

After entering the natural milieu of the story from the outside world, Bhatt's protagonists have of course been able to erase the Nature/Culture dichotomies to a great extent at the end of all his stories. However, it may be pointed out that despite the remarkable growth of ecosensitivity they achieve, a transparent wall between them and the natural world they portray seems to exist all the time. On the other hand, Mohanty's omnipresent narrator, who portrays Nature and his people with a remarkable objectivity, sounds like an insider of the forests from the very beginning of his stories.

If one looks at the advantageous aspect of the portrayal of Bhatt's protagonists as being outsiders, it should be noted that readers easily identify

themselves with Bhatt's protagonists as they represent modern culture which has significantly disassociated man from Nature. The physical journey of Bhatt's protagonists from the outside world into the inside world of Nature, and the simultaneous growth of their ecosensitivity and emotional maturity establish the environmental significance of minimizing the deep psycho-physical splits that lie between the so-called dualisms created between city/village, literate/illiterate, man/women, human/nonhuman, culture/nature, emotion/reason, hard science/ local wisdom etc.

Other Characters: Idealising Humans and Humanizing Ideals

In *Paraja*, by depicting the deep-rooted rivalries between the 'Parjas' and the 'Dombs', Mohanty insists on not ignoring the cast-based socio-political hegemonies that also used to haunt the illiterate tribal world; and the extensions of which could be seen even today in cases of environmental victimization of the socio-economically marginalized masses by the wealthy industrial houses. Mohanty shows how the tribal people can be threatened, bribed and persuaded to speak absolute lies even against their own fellow men and neighbours. In Bhatt's stories one seldom comes across the clash between the exploiter and the exploited. No one from the marginalized communities in Bhatt's stories raise voice or betray the other even while crushed under intolerable penury.

Due to their in-built flawlessness, Bhatt's dramatis personae undoubtedly represent an ideal world; but because of the same reason they are often found mono-dimensional. On the other hand, Mohanty's characters, due to their common human follies and foibles, possess multi-dimensional dispositions.

Saboor, in Bhatt's story, is a destitute young man, whom we always find struggling exceptionally hard to eke out his meagre living. He has seen in his childhood his parents dying of starvation, and still the shadow of abject poverty looms large over his

life. Both past and present together crush him materially and psychologically. Owing at least a tiniest piece of even barren land is inevitable for him to continue his and his wife's survival. This youth possesses such an incredible physical strength that he can break stony rocks and turn fallow land into fertile soil. He is honest to the core. Yet neither his moral integrity nor the extraordinary physical might invigorate this youth to express even the slightest sense of irritation against his marginalized position. Nothing incites Saboor that can divert his path from moral appropriateness. Even extreme poverty cannot make him take any action which might be considered unlawful in the social eye. Contrarily, in Mohanty's fiction, while fighting against their unbearable poverty, Sukru's sons Mandia and Tikra, who are physically and mentally as strong as Saboor, fall prey to the temptations of brewing liquor illegally.

In Bhatt's fiction, Aval is not interested even in claiming her possession of the land and the haveli she has legally inherited from her in-laws; but in Mohanty's tale, Sukru Jani is found daydreaming about possessing more stretches of the uncultivated, collective forest lands to strengthen his family's financial position. Mohanty does not hesitate in portraying the animalist aspiration of expanding one's own territories that govern dreams of even the innocent tribals- who are away from the modern, consumerist culture which tempt the citified people to gather more and more of what they have.

In Bhatt's fictional world one scarcely comes across people whose conduct we may at once disapprove. Bhatt's literature seems to be insulated from villains, but Mohanty's literature includes people having dark dispositions. Perhaps that is why, Mohanty's text sounds more natural because, like nature and the life itself, it embraces brighter as well as the darker shades of human propensities. It helps us directly connect with the socio-ecological issues happening around us.

Bhatt's forest guard Nur Mohamad is an ideal forest guard, whose love for the wildlife is matchless. He nurtures wilderness along the coast even after his retirement; whereas, in Mohanty's fiction the Forest Guard is shown egoist, womaniser as well as revengeful. Mohanty uses capital letters to satirize the imagined authority of the petty official like the Forest Guard, who takes revenge on Sukru for not sending his daughter Jili to warm his bed. Equally lecherous are the Moneylender (Sahukar) and the supervisor of the road construction project, who ruthlessly misuse their socio-economic positions to entrap and seduce the innocent daughters and wives of the poverty-stricken tribals. Sahukar epitomizes the brutal aspects of a crude human mind which tends to ravish the land he owns as well as the helpless, illiterate and poor people who sweat for him.

Looking at Facts about Farmers through Fiction

The fictional world of tribals, forest-dwellers and small farmers depicted in Bhatt's *Akoopar* and *That Thou Art* is not perturbed by questions of land-grabbing; Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues* does conclude with a hint as to what would happen to their world if their land is procured by the government in order to plant chemical factories. But, Mohanty's *Paraja* which emphatically voices that issue impels us to connect the dots between fiction and facts.

Sahukar's method of land-grabbing, and his insistence on taking a single, profit-yielding, non-indigenous crop which destroys Sukru's dreams and fertility of his land is not very much different from the mono-agricultural methods imposed upon farmers by the modern multinationals.

Big corporate companies nowadays extract profits by privatizing food-grains and by patenting even the traditional seeds. Due to all their profit-intensive agricultural strategies, small farmers come under heavy debts, and the suicide rate of

farmers has dramatically increased in recent years for the same reasons. Monoculture methods yield more crop and offer more profit for a select few, but they definitely impoverish the quality of the land, seed-diversity, farmers' families and ultimately the ecobalance of the earth. Womenfolk who depend on the earth for their daily food, fodder and fuel become the worst-hit victims when the quality of the soil is compromised, and when their land is grabbed by others.

Since ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva and Maria Miles and others, as discussed in chapter-III, hold the exploitative masculinity responsible for the ecological destruction of the earth, they insist upon replacing the aggressive and competitive patriarchal power structures with ecosensitive, cooperative, and caring matriarchal management systems.

Women and Ecology

The all-embracing ecological concerns of Rani and Sansai in Bhatt's *Akoopar*, and the pathetic socio-economic positions of Jili and Bili in Mohanty's *Paraja* underscore the two major branches of ecofeminism offering opposite stances on socio-environmental issues. As chapter III observes, although all ecofeminists find close links between exploitation of the earth and subjugation of women, they differ in offering solutions to resolve this interrelated issue.

Position of women in *Paraja* could be interpreted in light of the more aggressive branches of Socialist or Constructionist ecofeminisms, which oppose the traditional, masculine tendencies of equating women with nature and the earth to degrade them both. Contrary to this approach, portrayal of female characters in Bhatt's fiction favors the women-nature analogies as proposed by the Cultural/Spiritual ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva.

When one thinks about the relation between woman and ecology, it seems important to note that when feminists are claiming to recover gender balance by occupying power positions in the fields like military, science and politics-ecofeminists need to remain extra conscious about the environmental impact of certain kinds of services which empower them socio-economically but emasculate their ecosensitivity to a great extent. They need to remain aware about the fact that grand narratives of women emancipation or economic development often succeed in subsuming the metanarratives of environmental preservation.

Ecofeminist argument is based on the theory that it is the devaluation of feminine sensibilities in the socio-political power systems that has aggravated ecological plights of the mankind. So, in order to claim their equality, when the women force is being encouraged to fly bombers or fighter planes, women must think seriously about accepting such aggressive roles that can significantly damage their sensitivity for Nature, and make them ultimately aid and abet the androcentric tendencies, which have historically accelerated the environmental destruction of the planet earth.

Considering the motherly image of the earth in global religious contexts in general, and the Mother-Goddess-image of holy rivers and the forest deities in the Indian cultural contexts in particular, Shiva, being a physicist and the founder of the RFSTN (Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy), opines that humanity must benefit from those archetypal women-nature comparisons which lie so deep in our cultural consciousness. It is in this context that the attributes of Bhatt's women characters, as mentioned before, drawn in motherly images are very close to Shiva's idea of women's role in the present environmental discourse.

Like Shiva, Bhatt also seems to suggest that instead of disassociating women from the image of the earth, it is good to appreciate their superior and unique powers of giving birth to lives and their natural instinct to protect lives on the earth.

It is pertinent to note how attitudes of parents and proximity with natural surroundings play vital role in instilling environmental consciousness into children as one sees in case of Vandana Shiva herself. Shiva's father was a forest conservator; and her mother, a farmer. Like Sansai, Shiva has imbibed her ecological wisdom straight from the forests of the Himalayas. "The songs and poems our mother composed for us," Shiva notes, "were about trees, forests and India's forest civilizations" ("Yes!"). Shiva's active participation in the world-known Chipko movement in her youth, and her subsequent, life-long engagement with ecological issues pertaining to organic farming, biodiversity conservation, seed-diversity campaign, and sustainable growth establish the critical importance of offering exposure to Nature to every citizen during their formative years.

Preservation of Eco-sensitive Cultures and Human-Nature Bonds

So far as the question of preserving the eco-sensitive indigenous cultures are concerned, both authors have shown genuine concerns. Mohanty's books on tribal languages and grammar reflect his active involvement in preserving the vanishing tribal cultures of Orissa, and Bhatt's attempt of capturing dialects of the 'Maldharis' in (the Gujarati version of) *Akoopar* is a good linguistic experiment to preserve the local, eco-protective cultural ethos in written form.

Although ecocritical reading of the select texts of both the authors makes one realize significance of environmental conservation, as it is explained, both of them significantly differ in offering their individual modes of harmonizing man/nature relationships.

Bhatt assesses the bonds between man and Nature from spiritual and moral point of view; Mohanty examines the same from the materialist point of view. Bhatt focuses more on the role of human emotions and intuition in developing healthy ties among human beings, and their relations with the natural world; whereas Mohanty concentrates more on the role of economic hegemonies which break interrelationships among humans, and then disrupt the bond of man with the land and the forests they belong to.

By taking us into a Romantic past when the idyllic human-nature bond as well as their rhythms with their natural surroundings were healthier than they are today, Bhatt's stories succeeds in establishing the perennial significance of biodiversity preservation; whereas, besides depicting the olden human-nature harmonies, Mohanty does not hesitate to lay bare the necessity of excavating the darker corners of the feudal history. As we have studied, Mohanty boldly unmask the harmful socio-environmental impact of the forced expulsions of forest-dwelling communities from their native soil.

Bhatt's characters successfully draw our attention to the possibilities of protecting natural ecology through participatory democratic management of forest resources. They collectively attempt to preserve the sanctity of oceans, rivers, forests and their grass lands, and offer their active contribution in protecting birds, lions, leopards, tigers, and the shark whales.

Although Mohanty's *Paraja* is also set in the thick forests of Orissa enriched with rich biodiversity, as pointed out earlier, Mohanty stresses more on the fact that since economic equality and ecologic welfare go hand in hand, for a peaceful co-existence among man-man and between man-Nature, what is necessary at first is to dismantle economic hegemonies and their repressive strategies.

6.5 Being Down to Earth: Putting the Texts in the Present Contexts:

According to Glotfelty, ecocritical praxis has its one foot in literature and the other on land. Therefore, before concluding this thesis which has attempted to discuss Indian texts in ecological contexts, it would be pertinent to spotlight a project called ‘Rewilding of the Aravalli Biodiversity Park’, which was realised in India and which represents the endeavours and work carried out by green activists for the land they cohabit, and the challenges and problems faced by them.

Importantly, like the stories of the select works, the story of Aravalli park also enables the humanity to realise the gravity and urgency of repairing and re-establishing its harmony with nature.

The texts studied here state the obvious: Unbridled exploitation of any natural or human resources in any corner of the world is bound to aggravate ecological imbalance of the entire globe. For any community, the best way to encounter the negative impact of such activities, as the following discussion on the above-mentioned project will show, is to appreciate and energize eco-protective activities that support afforestation, water preservation, sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, or adoption of renewable energy resources.

It may be noted that the huge sight located near Delhi where the Aravalli Park stands today used to be ravished by heavy mining operations that went on between 1980s-90s. Although the ban to stop mining in that area had been issued by the Supreme Court of India in 2002, the mining activity was finally halted in 2009.

Today, that old infertile pits of the mining site the stone-crushing zone have turned into a tropical dry deciduous forest. Sprawling over 153 hectares, this public park boasts of 300 native plants, 185 bird species and numerous species of mammals and reptiles- which is a result of a decade-long collaborative efforts put in by

general public, school children, college students who worked under the guidance and mentorship of eco-activists like Vijay Dasmana (“Aravali Biodiversity Park, Gurgaon”).

This park serves as a symbol of peoples’ victory against their own ecological and political complacency. It has proven the paramount importance of the reforestation to be done with the help of indigenous plants- which is the easiest, cheapest and surest tool for developing economies like India to expand its carbon-sink, minimize its air pollution levels and stop land erosion. This project has enriched its stakeholders with an understanding that even an infertile patch of earth possesses extraordinary power to recover its balance if humans take a little care and then allow it to develop further on its own without interference.

Being located near the capital of India, this park could also serve as a beacon light for the political machinery as well as the social psyche of the nation on which the onus of ameliorating the environmental scenario for the posterity is rested.

By throwing light on the efficacy of sustainable growth, and egalitarian politics, though the Aravalli park project has prepared a road map to navigate the environmental future of the country, the news about the road construction project proposed recently by the government has saddened Dasmana, the curator of the Aravalli park, and many other green activists who were happy to witness the green outcomes of their decade-long campaign.

In a public lecture (“Rewilding a Mining Cite”), Dasmana says that this park, which has become a home to numerous floral and faunal biodiversity, releases around 7 % of oxygen required in that area, and it has also developed 30-crore-litre-annual-water-recharge-capacity. Although existence of this park is vitally crucial for all life-forms and the people living around Gurgaon and Delhi, without conducting a

proper traffic-study, the government authorities have decided to construct a six-lane-express-road which will cut through the park. Being fully aware about the destruction of the wilderness and the ecobalance the new project will bring in its wake, in 2018, the people living around the park of course demonstrated their protests against execution of such so-called developmental plans (32:18). But, after being shelved for about a year, in 2019, again the proposed road project has been revived. Commenting upon human definition of progress, Dasmana gravely points out that we have of course been able to improve our health systems and life spans, but looking at what we have done to our surroundings, there are more chances that we will perish. We do everything for enhancing what we call ‘quality of life’- which is actually an issue of subjective thinking. Referring to the dead-pan-like faces one comes across in metros and in the corporate cultures, he says that the smiling faces of villagers still remind us what we have lost in running aimlessly after what we think is valuable for us (“Rewilding a Mining Cite. Creation of the Aravali Biodiversity Park”).

According to Cris, another environmental activist Priya Pillai accepts that a shift from fossil fuel to solar energy is of course necessary for preservation of natural resources; but she says that huge patches of land will be required if large-scale solar plants are approved. To avert land conflicts and the harmful impact such huge plants are likely to create on the local ecologies, public hearings and Environmental Impact Assessment reports should be completed before such plants are approved. Referring to the land grabbing done by the multinational Adani Group’s Kamuthi Solar Power Project (Tamil Nadu), she recommends that approving small-scale and decentralised renewable energy projects could be an apt solution to address the socio-ecological issues mentioned (“Years After the Spotlight Shifted”).

Dasmana's and Pilla's above-cited observations, like the themes of the select texts, clearly highlight the urgency to expose the socio-environmental impact of human-centric and money-centric models of progress. Since they have been confiscating the chances of survival of the non-humans and bringing down the happiness indices of human communities since post-industrial times.

Ecocritical reading of the select texts thus help us hear the voices of the authors and activists loud and clear. They urge us to impartially examine our every thought and evaluate each of our action in light of their potential to enhance the beauty and balance of this planet earth- which is- from the aerial view- a cute, marble like, pale-blue oasis pulsating with life- to use poetic depictions of the earth given by eminent astronauts.

Drake Nadia in her National Geographic article quotes the Russian cosmonaut Gennady Padalka, who has spent longest cumulative time in space during his five space missions, reminding us that humans are ““genetically connected to”” the planet earth, as it is ““unique in its ability to support life as we know it.”” Like an ecocritic, he rightly adds that ““our tangled web of geology, ecology, and biology makes this strange rock the only one in reach that’s just right for humans. There is no place like home.”” Nadia states that there’s no doubt in Padalka’s mind “that the planet will endure, even if it is significantly altered by humanity. But he wonders if we as a species will survive our more selfish actions” (“They Saw Earth From Space. Here's How It Changed Them”).

Padlka's opinion that our unique ‘eiko,’ should be saved because it is the only place “that’s just right for humans” may sound a bit narcissistic at first, but his reference to the earth being a “tangled web of geology, ecology and biology” directs

our attention to the existential necessity to remain considerate about the ‘others’/our co-earthlings even if we want to save ourselves.

It is therefore extremely pertinent to internalize essence of Rachel Brinker’s message quoted below which substantiates the essential argument of this thesis. Before concluding his discussion on Vandana Shiva’s ecofeminist vision, sharing his own ecocritical vision of life, Brinker says:

We must acknowledge that we are part of the larger web of life that provides for our survival, and therefore it is imperative that we protect that fragile web of life, not as dominators—men over women and humans over nature—but as partners with every other life form on the planet. (“Dr. Vandana Shiva and Feminist Theory”)

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