

Chapter-II

‘If the Sky is Clear’: Shifting Conceptions of Nature

In this chapter, to have a glimpse of the environmental implications of the shifting conceptions of Nature, I will be appreciating a poem entitled *Pavagadh* by Mehul Devkala. Since Bhatt and Mohanty’s nature-centric stories are also set in the laps of forests, hills, oceans and rivers, appreciation of this mountain-centric poem will also help me place the select works into their proper eco-historical perspectives.

Throughout this chapter, I will turn to different parts of this poem to juxtapose the changes which have come across in human approaches to Nature during different time zones. I anticipate that this method will help me understand and explain as to why ecocritics today intend to look at the conventional genre of nature-writing in a different light, while continuing to follow some of the traditional techniques. For the same reasons, before concluding this chapter, I will also discuss Stephen Alter’s seminal essay (“Writing Outdoors”) as a touch stone to understand the different modes of nature writing I have come across in the select works.

It will be interesting to see how *Pavagadh* takes us on historical, mythological and anthropological journeys. This poem definitely opens imaginative scopes to look at the ways in which human cultures, along with the evolution of the mankind, have registered paradigm shifts in their attitudes towards natural entities.

2.1: Thinking Like a Mountain: Trekking the Journeys of Civilizing the Wild

The ‘Pavagadh’ is the name of a mountain which has stood on a volcanic cone situated in a historical city called Champaner, which is a part of the tribal-dominated Panchmahals district of Gujarat. It is 13 km away from Halol, and 44 km from Vadodara city, which is an important industrial center of the state of Gujarat.

The title of this poem itself indicates that it represents a non-anthropocentric expression. The protagonist here is not a human being - who, in the conventional nature-writing practice- might have been placed at the center- looking at Nature perhaps from a high pedestal. Instead of that, the 2600 ft-high-mountain ‘Pavagadh,’ with a temple of Goddess Kali at its top, is witnessing follies of modern man- who is digging his own grave by not honoring environmental ethics.

In Hindu traditions, the afore-mentioned temple is considered to be one of the ‘Shakti-peeths.’ ‘Shakti’ means the dynamic primordial motherly strength and power of Nature due to which the entire universe moves, and ‘peeth’ means the place where the ‘shakti’ seats graciously. So, any piece of human misbehavior with the mountain on which she seats would ensure ecological doom for the humanity.

In the third chapter, it will be seen as to how one school of ecofeminists content that it is the colonial gaze of the males that has portrayed the earth and the female gender as passive but permanent sources of fertility and productivity. So that both can be exploited under one or the other pretexts by the male world which intends to accumulate more and more economic and political powers. This male-centrism in fact still validates unabashed industrial extraction of the natural resources even at the cost of environmental health of the planet earth.

According to an article entitled “Champaner”, the city mentioned was founded by *Vanrajsinh Chavda* in the 8th century. In the 15th century, as the select poem relates, *Mahmud Begada*, a young Sultan of Gujarat, sieged the territories around *Pavagadh* for twenty months and captured Champaner. In the post-independence era, the American company like GM (General Motors-between 1996-2017) and the British car-manufacturing company like MG (Morris Garages-since 2017) have procured territories around the Pavagadh to plant their car-manufacturing factories.

It is important to note that Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues* highlights the eco-cultural dangers of setting industrial units along the sea coast of Gujarat in the post-independent times; and Mohanty's *Paraja* shows how during the colonial British Raj in India, feudal economic hegemonies used to dominate the territorial politics in the forests of Orissa.

It will be interesting to see how the poem under consideration encapsulates the essence of the glocal debates on market economy against natural ecology. The poem also encourages one to think about the Eastern and Western conceptions of Nature, and their environmental backlash suffered by the previously colonized nations. It also points towards the fact as to how the all-inclusive Eastern cultures are being influenced once again by the mechanistic interpretation of Nature under the capitalist forces which have provoked them to join the race of economic growth.

The position of Pavagadh on a volcano incidentally implies ecologically explosive situation in which the entire world has been placed today. Anthropologically also, Champaner is an important site, being once a part of the Indus Valley Civilization, which had been once extended up to Mohenjo-daro- one of the world's earliest cities founded around 2500 BCE during the Harappan civilization. So, Pavagadh also symbolizes the universal, evolutionary culmination of human cultures ("Indus Valley Civilisation").

It can be deduced from the details accessed from the Wikipedia articles on Harappan civilization that the reasons behind its long-lasting existence was its ecosensitivity- which reflected in their de-centralized, egalitarian social governance, sustainable agro-economy and their eco-friendly sanitary and water-preservation systems. The floral and faunal diversity displayed on their seals and on the terracotta-figurines show how their culture respected the non-human world. In the

Ancient History of Encyclopedia, Cristian Voilatti opines that two among the most probable reasons for the decline of the Indus Valley civilization was “drying up of the Saraswati River” and “great floods.”

Rivers that sustain life force on the earth may change their course or dry up due to climatic upheavals. Nonetheless, as we will discuss in Bhatt’s *That Thou Art*, it is human responsibility that man must not aggravate such disasters by polluting natural resources like the Narmada river that they paradoxically honor on account of their religious faith.

By comparing the mountain of Pavagadh with a yogi sitting in a lotus posture in the beginning of the poem, the poet draws our attention to the earlier religious influences on human cultural consciousness and its impact on the socio-cultural constructs of nature- which have obviously continued to reflect in literary expressions, in scientific discourses, political systems and in formation of economic systems from time to time.

Opinions of scholars may differ on the question whether some figures sitting in yogic postures found during the excavation of Harrapan sites resemble Pashu-Pati-Nath (Shiva-the lord of all animals), Buddha or some Jain Tirthankara; but what is common among the stories of these figures is that all of them have taught the humanity to acknowledge spiritual equality among all entities- whether they are humans or non-humans.

All of them have taught lessons to maintain Nature-culture harmony. *Pavagadh* exhibits this reality. As the poem given below would suggest, the poet remembers how once he was also able to enjoy watching the mountain with a sense of inexplicable love and adoration, who looked like a “yogi” or like the “blue-God” (i.e., Lord Vishnu). However, from the sands of times, as the poem explains, how

cultures like Harappa disappears; and how our ecosensitivity also die down along with the fading away of such cultures. The select works of Bhatt and Mohanty also thematize these issues in their engrossing stories.

Besides narrating the political, material and scientific progression the mankind has attained in different temporal zones, look how the poetic binocular gradually scans the mountain from top to bottom to symbolically chart the gradual, ethical down fall of man, and the corresponding corrosion that has been taking place in man-Nature relationships.

***The Pavagadh* - by Mehul Devkala**

If the sky is clear-

In the morning,

From the balcony of my bedroom

The *Pavagadh* could be seen.

In the backdrop of the saffron hues of the skies

Like a Yogi seated in the meditation posture

Resembling the blue-God, its dark figure slowly becomes unshrouded

It is said that

Before the time immemorial

It was a volcano exhuming the earth's insides

Aeons passed

It cooled down

Epochs flew past

Out of the earth, man came into being

From the caves, he went to dwell in the plains

Settlements were formed and so were the towns

A gorgeous town called *Champaner*
With its borders in the North extended up to Delhi
To conquer the same, for months together
Badshah *Humayun* besieged the city
It is said that
The kingdom then belonged to *Mohammad Begda*
It is said that
At a time
He could consume two hundred bananas and ten hens
It is said that
He could not be subdued, and the Badshah returned with a sullen face
It is said that
Years and years passed
Gone was *Champaner*, and only its ruins remained
Bigger and gigantic cities were established
And besieged were the foothills of the *Pavagadh* by the companies,
manufacturing thousands of cars
Thousands of cars began to be ejected out of its mouth
And they started running with full speed
on the National Express highways
Dredging up from the earth's insides, man began to fill up the
bellies of those thousands of cars
As the night falls
These fast-paced cars enter into
The particular destinations of their own

Into the cities and the colonies and residences
 Cinema halls of the cities show
 Films bearing the titles like *Mohenjo-Daro*
 Films about the cities existed before thousands of years
 About the times before the Buddha, Krishna or the Christ
 In those teeny-weeny houses
 Of the teeny-weeny settlements
 Teeny-weeny families
 Light the flickering lamps in their drawing rooms
 In the rainy nights of heavy showers
 Put out the lights in the bedrooms
 On the next morning-
 From the balcony
 The *Pavagadh*
 May not be seen
 Or
 May be
 If the sky is clear. (Own Translation)

The poem begins as well as ends with the lines “If the sky is clear.” “If” in the first line of the poem is loaded with the factual weather conditions that jolts the modern mindsets out of their environmental ostracism -which is the effect of the too-busy schedules and professional pressures the industrial communities usually go through; whereas the “If” in the last line poetically reflects the mounting anxieties of the environmentalists and the weather-experts who keep on warning the humanity to minimize its role in environmental deterioration.

The opening scene of the bright-lit morning indicates the dawn of human understanding of Nature in the pre-historic times. It also shows how pristine the environment must have been in those times when the humans had not yet learnt to isolate themselves physically and psychologically from Nature for commercial motives.

For the cave man, the sacred force of Nature was a fearful, all-pervasive, overpowering and invincible entity. To cope up with the collective anxieties of self-protection against the colossal forces of Nature, in the animistic human imagination Nature became an object of adoration, which could be propitiated and pleased by offering different kinds of sacrifices. Fictionalization of such tribal rituals in Bhatt's and Mohanty's works could be helpful in diluting the human vanity by reconnecting us with the heritage of the ecological insights left to us by the rishis of the 'Aranyak' Sanskriti.

In the Rig Veda (10.146), the deity of the forest is called 'Aranyani.' The rishi offers his prayers to her, singing:

Aranyani. Aranyani. Timorous spirit of the forest, elusive goddess
who vanishes amidst the leaves ...

I hear a chichika bird echoing the crickets,
the alarm cries of animals. Could it be a hunter?

....

At twilight your presence fills the forest...

Aranyani, gentle spirit who threatens no one...

You don't lie in the ambush like a bandit...

Mother of wild creatures, your untilled forests are full of food,

Fragrant incense and sweet herbs- Aranyani, accept my prayers,

Sheltering goddess of the trees.

(qtd. in Stephen Alter, "Writing Outdoors" 01)

In fact, the concept of respecting the sanctity of nature remained an essential aspect of tribal traditions located in different parts of the world. Nature could not be exploited as man used to feel moral compunction whenever his daily needs forced him to take anything from Nature.

Many Indian cultural rituals like watering Tusli-plants, and doing puja of Pipal and Arjuna trees reflect extension of the tribal wisdom that Nature, which sustained life on the earth, should not be contaminated. However, it must be noticed that there is a basic difference in the perception of Nature in the Indian and non-Indian religious domains; and this difference has played a decisive role in the accelerating mass exploitation of Nature.

2.2 Nature in the Eastern and Western Religious/ Poetic Philosophies:

Narsinh Mehta, the ancient bard of the Gujarati literature, sings in one of his poems that in the entire cosmos only the oneness of God prevails (“Akhil Bhramandma Ek Tu Shree Hari”). Narsinh reiterates that in the Indian imagination, since Nature and God are not treated as separate entities; there be no hierarchical positions among human and non-human entities in the cosmic design.

In India, with little variations, majority of the Indian religious philosophies accept that the Nature (i.e., ‘prakruti’) is made up of five basic material elements (‘Panch Tatva’). Namely; ‘Bhumi’/earth, ‘Agni’/fire, ‘Gagan’/ether, ‘Vayu’/air, and ‘Nir’/water. Acronym of all these five elements would be: BH/A/G/VA/N (God). This God resides in the form of ‘Atman’/Soul who unifies all the elements of Nature.

One also comes across similar expressions in Bhatt’s Gujarati poems collected in a book entitled *Gaay Tena Geet* (i.e., *Songs Belong to Those Who Sing Them*). In a title-less poem, Bhatt questions how can he attempt to remember God when God and himself are not separate entities? Celebrating his oneness with God,

the poet says if he is water, the God is the limitless ocean; if he is a green leaf, the other is the greenness itself. If one is a bird's wing; the other is a feather of the wing (68).

On the other hand, the references to the stories of Creation discussed in a scholarly article entitled "Image of God" suggests that in Judaism, Christianity and Islamic traditions, God has bestowed special "honor unto humankind, which He did not confer unto the rest of Creation," and, in the Hebrew Bible, in Genesis 1:26-28, it is pronounced that : it was God who said; " Let us make man in our image....and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth."

Man being portrayed in the God's image gave sufficient room for the philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment era to legitimize human hegemony over the non-human world. On account of this perception of nature, at first monarchs, then the colonial rulers, and now industrial capitalist forces have continued to exploit Nature without any moral constraints.

Even Isaac Newton (1643-1727), the well-known English natural scientist and mathematician, who had discovered the laws of motion and gravitational force, saw God's hand in cosmic organization. According to Martin Schönfeld and Michael Thompson, an important turn was noticed in this thinking when the German Philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) "eliminated any need for divine interference" in the workings of cosmic realities. it was Kant who "sharpened celestial mechanics to a secular and dynamic cosmology, while replacing Newton's Christian view of natural design with non-anthropocentric and naturalistic teleology" ("Kant's Philosophical Development" Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). In a way, Kant

thus rejects the idea that the telos (i.e. the ultimate purpose) of Nature is to serve human culture and its goals.

If one thinks about the root cause of the dramatic downfall in the man-Nature relationships during the last three centuries, s/he will at once notice that ultimately it is the ‘summum bonum’ which always determines the course of man-Nature relations. According to Mariam Webster, ‘summum bonum’ is a Latin expression for “the supreme good from which all others are derived.” It is the ultimate goal on the basis of which social and scientific cultures formulate their values, determine goals and set priorities of human life. In the societies wherein only human-priorities dominate the crux of their summum-bonum, ecological balance is bound to be upset.

John Keats’s famous Romantic dictum he has stated in *Grecian Urn* that “Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, —that is all.... all ye need to know” explains human goal of achieving perfection through three inter-related concepts: Truth/Goodness/Beauty. In Sanskrit, these three concepts are known as ‘Satyam’/ ‘Shivam’/ ‘Sundaram’. In fact, these three concepts have respectively influenced the ideologies of philosophers, political systems, religious figures and literary minds throughout evolution. Therefore, Keats’s philosophical lines have stimulated never-ending debate about the nature of art and literature, and the significance of Nature in art and literature.

Nature in Poetic and Philosophic Imagination

Poets like Narsinh or Bhatt, as mentioned earlier, have seen Nature as a cosmic reality. For Wordsworth, Nature is the best moral teacher. For poets like Blake and Coleridge, Nature is a mystical phenomenon. In the pastoral poetry of Robert Frost, just as we will find in Mohanty’s texts, Nature remains a neutral force without any malignant motives for man. Like Frost and Thomas Hardy we will also

find Mohanty using images of Nature to symbolically portray psychology and struggles of simple farmers.

In a research article, Yuanli Zhang considers Wordsworth a “pantheist who believes that God exists everywhere in nature,” and in Emerson’s eyes, Nature is “symbolic of spirit” (26). Zhang observes that Frost’s realistic view of Nature is “dialectic” which is different from the Romantics’ emotional excesses and post-Darwinian’s gloomy stance towards Nature. Romantics “have a tendency to overestimate nature’s love and benevolence.” However, on their realisation about the “transience of beauty and the harshness of reality, they often become sad and disillusioned.” Wordsworth and Emerson who praised nature’s beauty and benevolence highly in their early poetry, according to Zhang, had themselves “turned gloomy in their late years with the recognition of nature’s evil”. Post-Darwinians poets “emphasize the coldness of nature and the helplessness of man before the grim facts of nature.” Therefore, in Thomas Hardy’s Nature-lyrics, one often comes across “the bleakness of landscape, coupled with the tragedies of those withered flowers and frustrated people.” In Hardy’s expressions, a juxtaposition of “good and evil in nature” can be seen as “an intermediary” between Romantics and post-Darwinians; whereas Frost enjoys “nature’s poetry, but he is always aware of nature’s terror” (29).

From ethical viewpoint, Nature has also been interpreted as a unifying moral governor; whereas some atheists have defined Nature as a self-organized sublime system without any external transcendental observer in which each element is organically united from rational point of view. In philosophical domains, Nature has also been seen as a limitless metaphysical substance which is a curious combination of constructive as well as destructive forces.

A cursory flashback in history of the material progress achieved by humanity exhibits the spectacular intellectual growth humans have procured. The Western world undoubtedly made dazzling advancements in the fields of cosmology, physical science, technology, transportation and communication before and during the first wave of Industrial Revolution (approx.1730-1840). Their supreme confidence in the human intelligence was founded on their capacity to comprehend the Natural laws through scientific experimentations, rational thinking and material progress- the qualities which could be found reflected in the movements like Renaissance (1300-1600) Humanism (1400-1650) and Enlightenment (1650-1800).

‘Nature’ in Scientific Philosophy

Coming out of the medieval darkness, European science witnessed radical proofs about heliocentrism from Copernicus in 1543. Galilean telescope was discovered in 1609, and Kepler’s Laws of Planetary Motion were explained in 1619. Instead of intuition, tangible scientific proofs and reason began to guide the course of material and intellectual progress. Deism was a product of Enlightenment, which was based on a belief that God permits the universe to work according to Natural Law without any supernatural interference.

With his emphasis on the practical power of scientific knowledge, Empiricism was supported by the English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon [1561-1626]. With his proposal of applying mathematical principles and methodology of doubt into philosophy, the French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes [1596-1650] pioneered Rationalism. Depending upon their geographical sources of origins and influence, in the philosophical domains, these philosophical methods are respectively referred to as British Empiricism or Continental Rationalism.

For Descartes, Nature was just a mechanistic structure without soul, having an assemblage of different parts which can be dissected and scientifically studied.

Descartes believed that except humans-who possess rational power- all other non-human living things in nature were nothing but ‘automata’- i.e. mechanised robots (Sreekumar Nellickappilly).

Nature is/was the source of survival as well as of the struggle for existence. So, complications in man-Nature relationship were bound to multiply along with the development of Nature-culture dichotomy. At the same time, man’s curiosity to disentangle the enigmatic aspects of the mysterious bond was also elevated during his scientific pursuits.

Isaac Newton was another most important figure who radicalized scientific thinking in the seventeenth century. In 1660s, as the popular story goes, seeing the fall of an apple, Newton paradoxically overruled the celestial forbiddance of tasting the apple of knowledge, and discovered the Natural laws of motion and gravitation- which were going to provide a firm base for the English industrial revolution that started around 1720s- during which the entire non-human world was brought at the disposal of the crown creation of God.

So, Nature became a mere object of scientific study for the rationally developed animal called man. Soon, Nature began to be conceived an inferior entity, which could to be known, colonized, tamed and exploited by the technologically powerful man.

2.3 Materialistic Conceptions of Nature: Industrial Revolution

(Approx.1730-1840)

Industrial Revolution which at first brought phenomenal transition in the European and American manufacturing methods and ways of life also significantly modified social and natural environments of the colonized countries afterwards. Machines began to replace human hands in production processes. Initially, most of

the inventions came from the British scientists and engineers. England had sufficient geo-political and human resources of gaining enough raw materials, bigger consumer market and cheap human labor from their own country as well as from her colonies.

Dazzling speed was achieved in fields of transportation and communication till 1900 in the Western world, and its traditional agro-economy went under remarkable modifications due to which man quickly began to disassociate himself from Nature.

It can be noticed that *Pavagadh* epitomizes the development of physical as well as psychological isolation between man and Nature by showing the shift of the poet- from open space to closed space- i.e. from the balcony to the bedroom. As the earlier lines of the poem suggests, the panoramic view of the mountain from the balcony used to give the poet a direct access and experience of Nature, but bedroom walls obstruct the same.

Then, as the poem progresses, we know how car companies besieged the mountain, and how the earth's bosom must have been drilled and dried up to fill up the bellies of thousands of cars with petrol to make them run with "full speed" on the "national express highways" of progress. Road-making processes take its toll on green covers; and by adding significant amount of Co₂ in the atmosphere, it blackens the skies and minimizes the possibility to see the mountain clearly.

Ecocriticism opposes this trend by critiquing the environmentally insensitive cornucopian vision of life. It is well known that a cornucopia is a magical, decorative symbol of an animal's horn overflowing with copious amount of fruits, flowers and vegetables. Like the capitalist corporate houses, as Jo Arney suggests, the cornucopian also do not welcome any legal norms to delimit environmental exploitation. They do not accept the theory of the depletion of natural resources.

They believe that the rising demands of all kinds of commodities could be fulfilled with the help of industrialization and its technological innovations- which will mobilize the supposedly infinite resources reserved in the earth's belly. But ground realities contradict their contention.

It must be admitted that the empathetic bond which humans previously used to cherish with Nature is certainly being quickly corroded. Profit-oriented chase in the industrial set-ups of urban milieus is one of them, as it blurs the collective human vision as well as individual's ability to see the environmental outcomes of one's own actions.

It may be noted that although the classic literature of India reflects ecologically rich Indian cultural consciousness; and although America is a country from where movement of environmentalism as well as the praxis of ecocriticism itself has emerged; today India as well the USA are among the top five carbon-emitters in the world. The first being the leader among the developing economies; and the other being the leader among the developed ones.

In *Pavagadh*, the giant-looking mountain typifies the colossal strength of Nature- which is being constantly undermined on account of the limitless economic pursuits of the teeny-weeny humans. If they continue to exploit Nature due to their unbridled ecopolitics, humans are sure to invite an ecological boomerang.

The poem graphically charts the his/story of man-Nature relationships along with an evolutionary diagram indicating human journey from innocence to self-centeredness- from green woods to urban ghettos- from agro-economy to industrial capitalism.

The end of the poem coincides with the fall of the night when we see small families switching off their bedroom lights, preparing to slip into their cozy

bedrooms. This scene reminds us of two important and interlinked issues: increasing eco-insensitivity of an exclusive social class who can afford to enjoy a cozy life style- which intensifies depletion of the collective natural resources; and secondly it also highlights the increasing economic gaps between the rich and the poor and their corresponding effect on ecological balance of the earth.

Discussion on ecosocialism in the fourth chapter will imply as to how industrial growth has undoubtedly enriched a very tiny mass of humanity. The wealthy class influences the political and economic systems to appropriate the collective natural wealth in order to secure their own benefits. All that has been done at the cost of the poor people, who form major part of the human world, and whose poverty prevents them to have access even to the basic facilities of life.

The end of the poem has the potential to disturb the nonchalance of the mankind towards the ensuing ecologically dark future. On the other hand, the dim lights of the bedrooms in the last lines also reflect the poet's flickering hopes of being able to watch the mountain next morning. It categorically warns the mankind that if it wants to save this planet earth for the future generations, he has but to impartially probe into the possible causes which has made man so much insensitive towards his present contribution in environmental destruction.

Colonization and Commercialization of Nature: Indian Biodiversity

Industrial revolution in England, colonial economics and their lust for power proved dramatically drastic for the Indian ecology. The English needed to expand cultivation on the forest lands they had colonized to feed their own population growing around the industrial hubs of England. They also needed huge amount of timber and other raw material to build their Navy ships, mercantile cargos as well as railway lines to import the cheap raw material lying in the colonized countries.

Hunting of the ferocious animals like tigers on the Indian subcontinent was therefore encouraged by the British, which could smoothen the de-forestation and agricultural processes. Hence, hunting expeditions, besides being a tool for a wild entertainment, also became commercially beneficial exercise for them. Their acts of offering rewards for killing animals under the pretexts of protecting people from animal ferocity, and of civilizing the colonized communities dramatically intensified the human/Nature splits. As a result, besides 80000 tigers, according to “Forest Society and Colonialism,” 150000 leopards and 200000 wolves were killed during 1875-1925.

Sharon Gaynup is a National Geographic explorer and an ardent environmental activist, who studies ecological crimes like wild-trafficking. In *A Concise History of Tiger Hunting in India*, she writes how in the 16th century India, i.e. in the times of the Emperor Akbar, the intrepid predators like tigers, whose kingly presence regulates ecological cycles of the entire forest regions, began to be hunted mercilessly. In those elaborate hunting expeditions called ‘Shikar,’ which was actually a pastime for the Emperors as well as for the Maharaja of the then princely states, fearless tigers were killed by the royal hunters. While killing the tigers, these ‘brave’ hunters used to sit safely on elephants’ back, being protected and accompanied by large parties of servants and body guards. This cruel practice of satiating masculine fancies and egoistic thrills continued by the English lords and generals during the British Raj. In the post-independent scenario, supporting the tiger expert Valmik Thapar’s view, Gaynup notes that it was Indira Gandhi, who should be recognized as the “India’s greatest wildlife savior,” who outlawed export of animal skins in 1969, and introduced the Project Tiger in 1973.

Undoubtedly, before India procured her freedom, natural ecology of India had continued to be exploited in many ways for centuries by non-Indian rulers, whose predatory gaze had been lured by the natural wealth of the Indian subcontinent. However, it may be pointed out that the conscious or unconscious concerns shown for the protection of nature by some of the non-Indian scholars and naturalists have still been able to encourage the activists, political leaders and forest officials of India even today- who are expected to play a decisive role in conservation activities in the present times.

Giving a bird-eye-view of the Natural history of India, in his essay “Writing Outdoors,” Stephen Alter refers to the sense of adoration and enchantment the Greek historian Megasthenes had felt for the rich biodiversity of India, who had entered India, following the footsteps of Alexander the Great. Like the Greeks, the Mughals, who entered India after crossing the Hindu Kush mountain ranges, were also utterly impressed by the Natural abundance of India. *Baburnama* and *Tuzk-e-Jahangiri*, the imperial memoirs of the Mughals, have recorded detailed accounts of the numerous species of Indian birds and creatures. Mughal paintings and scribes also vividly delineate the Indian flora and fauna. Alter says that among all invaders, the British were the “most enthusiastic naturalists.” Numerous varieties of birds, plants and animals were studied and cataloged by amateur scientists and Botanists like J.D. Hooker, and the books like G.P. Sanderson’s *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beasts of India* exemplify how an image of a hunter-naturalist “with a rifle in one hand” but “a pen in the other” had become quite popular during the Raj. Mentioning Jim Corbett’s prestigious position as a hunter-naturalist, Alter remarks that Corbett “approached nature with sympathetic and observant eye,” who was “among the first to voice concern about dwindling populations of the wildlife, particularly tigers.” He

adds that “unlike many of his contemporaries, Corbett was acutely aware of the fragility of nature and its vulnerability to human encroachment” (2-3).

Corbett’s deep-ecological love for the royal animal is analogous to the love for the tigress shown by a tribal character in Bhatt’s novel *That Thou Art*. It also reflects the love for the lions and the whales and the leopard exhibited by Bhatt’s characters in his another novel *Akoopar*.

The statistics displaying an inexorable amount of the annihilation of the biodiversity that had taken place in the pre-independent India do exhibit a sheer lack of environmental sensitivity on part of the invaders and rulers who had colonized India. Juxtaposition between the dark sides of the ecological history of colonized India with the ecosensitivity embedded in the themes of the selected works certainly draws our attention to the danger of the contemporary phenomenon of the glocal green terrorism- which has indeed paused a formidable challenge before all countries within and outside of their national borders.

Ecopolitics in Indian Contexts

When nations are prioritizing protection of their own economic interest at the cost of the global environmental health, they can no longer afford to ignore the fact that the so-called local/global or national/international boundaries are illusive- so far as environment is concerned.

No one is in a position to deny the fact that in this close-nit global ecological networks, ecological harm done in one corner of the world will certainly harm the other corners of the world in due course of time. However, as the history of colonization shows, the colonizing gaze of the sound economies are often found still directed towards the natural resources of the financially poor countries. Besides

exploiting the natural resources of the poor countries, in the neo-colonial era, they continue to use the same locations to dump their nuclear and chemical waste.

Demands of domestic commodities in the market are bound to rise along with the growth of human population. Economically powerful nations on international platform, and wealthy class within national borders validate commodification of nature to empower their economic status and to maintain their luxurious modes of life.

Spread of industries, road construction activities, transportation services and urbanization around the industrial hubs require clearance of green covers which harm agro-economy on one hand; and on the other, these factors pollute air and water and soil. Stories of Bhatt and Mohanty show how the unhygienic concentration of poor people into slum areas of the urban centers severely disturb social and natural ecologies.

While the vicious circle of population, poverty and pollution perpetuate environmental decay in many parts of the world, as the thematic study of the selected works would suggest, India is in a position to guide herself as well as the global communities by unfolding and appreciating the ecological wisdom that informs her socio-cultural heritage.

2.4 Ecological Relevance and Inspirational Sources of Ecocriticism in India

King Ashoka (304 BC-232 BC), the third monarch of the Mauryan dynasty of India, ruled almost entire Indian subcontinent. History considers him to be among the greatest kings in the world history for many reasons. It is said that following his victory over Kalinga (present day Orissa), on witnessing the colossal destruction of human lives the war has brought, Ashoka turned to Buddhism and began to put its

pacifist teachings into practice by recommending his ministers and subjects to follow non-violent and simple lives so that peaceful co-existence with human and non-human entities could be established.

For an ecocritic, the prime reason for Ashoka's greatness lies in his exemplary environmental conservation mission and policies- which have been found inscribed- as Ven. S. Dhammika writes- on the rock-edicts and pillars discovered in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal. In Ashoka's times, cruelty to domestic and wild animals was banned. At regular intervals along the roads, he got water-wells and troughs dug, mango groves nurtured, banyan trees planted, and medical herbs grown so that these collective natural resources could be utilized by his subjects as well as animals and birds. Ashoka himself used to pay surprise visits to different parts of his massive kingdom and he had also instructed his ministers to go on official tours every five years to see that his policies are effectively implemented ("The Edicts of King Ashoka").

India has accepted the Lion Capitol of Ashoka as her national emblem. Ecocritical appreciation of the nature-oriented literature of India can therefore be expected to help the humanity in discovering effective socio-political and legal remedies to deal with the present, glocal environmental problematic.

As mentioned before, if one traces the Indian heritage of nature-writing, one would appreciate the fact that the Indian linguistic diversities have always appreciated floral and faunal biodiversity in various ways. Indian epics are full of stories about the deep emotional bonds their protagonists develop with the natural environs of the forest regions in which they stay and travel for long spans of their lives.

The story of *Ramayana* is in fact a poetic expiation written in response to an atrocious human act against nature. The seeds of the story lie in the deep sympathy Valmiki's feels for the wailing "Krauncha" (a female bird of the crane family) whose mate has been pierced and killed by a hunter's arrow before the poet's eyes. Rama's fourteen year's stay in forest along with Sita and Lakshman, their loving relationships with monkeys, squirrels, vultures, plants, bears and eagles show the ecological wisdom of the protagonist of the epic; and tribal ethos of India on many geo-specific locations still exhibit the same.

As if reflecting the spirit of the human-Nature bond depicted in the *Ramayana*, the Rajasthani Bishnois from the Jodhpur district of India had fought not only tooth and nail in the mid of the eighteenth century against the Royal power structures to protect the green covers, but they had not hesitated even to lay down their lives for the same. Technically speaking, the Bishnois (or the 'Vishnois') of the Khejarali village of the Thar desert, being the followers of a nature-worshipping-Hindu sect, were the precursors of the Chipko Aandolan in India. Since the trees called Khejari used to grow in abundance in the village, the place was recognized after the tree's name.

In 1730, when the men of Maharaja Abhaysingh went with their axes to the said village to cut trees and bring wood to build a royal palace in Jodhpur, their logging operation was halted by Amrita Devi, a local woman. This Bishnoi women and her three daughters preferred to get brutally beheaded by the axes of the king's men rather than allowing them to wound their green patriarchs. Following their sacrifice, when more than 360 members of the Bishnoi communities, irrespective of their age and marital status, chose to get their heads chopped off one by one by the axes to protect the trees, the king had to withdraw his orders to fell tress for his palace ("Amrita Devi").

In Kalidasa's most celebrated Sanskrit poem *Meghdutam* (Cloud-Messenger), the exiled protagonist 'Yaksa' sends a message through a cloud to his wife yearning for his return. According to Rajendran Chettiari, in this poem, Kalidasa's poetic description of the panoramic route [as if taken an aerial view from a literary drone] to its destination in the Himalaya has been well acclaimed for his ability to narrate the scenic beauty of nature.

Not only the classic literature of Sanskrit or the Indian epics, but several texts written in the other regional languages of India have also often been appreciated by scholars for their beautiful accounts of Nature's pristine beauty, her spiritual significance and medicinal values.

It may be noted that the Indian fiction has received global recognition within last couple of decades; and concurrently the urgency to deal with the complex environmental problematic has also been exponentially increased the world over. In this situation, it is quite pertinent to appreciate ecosensitive aspects of the texts written in India, which is in a position to offer important environmental insights on account of their socio-cultural positions.

The colonial experience has in fact left a message for the Republic of India that she should now prevent herself from repeating those colonial practices within her own domains. To combat the domestic ecological issues, since it has become all the more important for every country to observe environmental ethics in all their transactions, India also needs to respect voices of the activists that draw attention to the links among the drastic effect of industrial sectors on agro economy, the recent rise in the suicide rates of farmers, and the horrible hike in pollution indices.

Since all these factors irreversibly harm the socio-cultural and ecological networks of India, voices of eco-whistle blowers and RTI activists who oppose

illegal mining or de-forestation should not be suppressed by the power systems. However, under the impact of global market trends, like in other countries, stories about alleged acts of suppressing such voices also often surface in the Indian media too.

For instance, Priya Parmeshwaran Pillai, a green peace activist of India, was not reportedly allowed to travel abroad in 2014 by the authorities on the grounds that she would speak about the harmful environmental impact of the Indian economic policy in the outside world (Kush Kalra 4).

Keeping in view the recent struggles of the people of 'Plachimada' village of Kerala against the beverage giant like Coca-Cola, which has emptied ground water, dried water wells, and contaminated surface waters of the that village (Konikkara, Aathira), the writers of India need to expose the stratagems of the neoliberal market forces that intend to capture the collective natural resources without the help of which the poor cannot survive. Literature and criticism cannot ignore calls of the eco-activists who alert the society about the internal as well as external factors that ruin ecology and the agrarian economy that form the backbone of India.

Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues* and Mohanty's *Paraja* alert the readers about the environmental and social impact of the unplanned industrial and the mono-culture-based agricultural expansions. In *Oceanside Blues*, the protagonist is supposed to take decision about approving a government proposal to plant chemical factory on a sea shore; and *Paraja* shows how hard-working and poor farmers are tortured by power structures and how some of them are forced to leave their green forests to work in industrial slums of city areas.

The signals, field studies and statistics provided by environmental activists and ecologists about ecological disorders taking place in any corner of the world

should not be ignored- whether these disorders are human-sponsored or Nature-sponsored.

Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984) was a result of a human negligence committed by the American pesticide company called Union Carbide. India has already suffered incredible social and ecological loss due to this tragedy.

Chennai Oil Spill (2017) took place when two heavy fuel oil tankers collided around Ennore. Reporting the aftermath of the tragedy in *The Diplomat*, Abhijit Singh writes that the cover of toxic sludge that spread all over Chennai's beaches have made the ecologists worried about "the prospect of large-scale destruction of sea life" and "a near-permanent imbalance in the marine ecology of the region."

On the other hand, although the Gujarat Kutch-earth quake (2001) and The Odisha Super Cyclone (1999) are among the top five worst natural disasters that have struck upon India so far, it is the human tendencies, and not the natural furies, which could be held responsible for the ineffective post-disaster management and their corresponding impact on ecology.

It is also a matter of great concern that the Ganges, the pride of India and a home for the oldest marine species like Dolphin, is paradoxically still among the top ten most polluted rivers of the world.

Socio-political approach towards water conservation and towards marine life can be assessed when one juxtaposes fictional realities with the geo-specific facts about the condition of our rivers. Like the Ganga, since the Narmada river on which the story of Bhatt's *That Thou Art* is based, also occupies a sacred place in the cultural psyche of India, it is crucial to focus upon its present situation from ecological view point.

It should be admitted that because of the huge amount of chemical pollutions being discharged into Narmada, Gujarat, as per *DNA*, was declared as the most polluted state in India as per the 2010 report of CPCB (The Central Pollution Control Board), and till 2017 this pollution index has not much improved.

Agitations led by activists like Megha Patkar in the 1980s, and the eco-justice debates raised by Arundhati Roy in post 1990s had attracted global attention regarding the construction of the world's second largest (Sardar Sarovar) dam over the Narmada river and the socio-ecological destruction it entailed. However, it may be noted that literary figures from Gujarat- from where Narmada flows- have not written much either in favor or against theories of such activists fighting for environmental causes.

Besides Bhatt's novel, aesthetically rich depictions of Narmada and her religious significance can of course be found elaborately discussed by many other well-known Gujarati authors. Nevertheless, one scarcely comes across authorial comments on the pollution of this great river in their literary expressions.

For example, *Sarvatra Ramya Narmada*, a fine collection of Gujarati essays, does appreciate the multi-dimensional significance of the Narmada. This book comprises a wide range of writings through which known Gujarati authors like- Dhumketu, Ramnarayan Pathak, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Amrutlal Vegad, Narmadanandji, Swami Premanand Saraswati, Gunvant Vyas, Gita Nayak, Bholabhai Patel, Zaverchand Meghani, Manilal Patel and Ajaysinh Chauhan- have acknowledged the importance of the river from aesthetic, mythologic and religious dimensions. But, none of these writings seem to reflect the predictive power of literature which can forewarn the humanity about the dangers of not protecting the ecological wellbeing of such a great river.

It may be understood that in the writings written before 1980s, the authors may not have thought it necessary to situate Narmada in eco-social contexts. But the

authors who have witnessed eco-politics over the Narmada dam for more than two decades should have at least presented their views about the significant human contribution in polluting the river whose beauty they cherish. It is not out of place to expect some of them to devote a few lines on the socio-cultural and ecological impact of the construction of the dam.

India does have a glorious past, and she has indeed achieved enviable milestones in missile and satellite technologies today. Eco-friendly measures are also being taken in India in the present times. However, the encouragement being given to adoption of solar technology, introduction of electric cars and alternative energy resources seems to prove inadequate against the terrific speed of de-forestation, the spread of plastic and chemical pollution into the soil and water resources, and the amount of the atmospheric carbon-emission taking place in India.

According to Priyanka Singh's Times of India report dated 9 May 2014, as per the WHO declaration, India ranks among the world's worst air polluted countries. Chetan Chauhan in Hindustan Times of 5 June, 2015 reports that 13 cities of India are still among the top polluted 20 cities in the world. The Delhi smog of 2018 suggests that the situation has still not much changed, and India is among the top five countries in the world in E-waste generation today.

Forest cover of 33% of the geographical area of any country is necessary to keep it in good ecological health. Green cover of India is around 24% in 2019. Population growth, growth in print media, urbanization, industrial policies, and the political will to implement environmental laws produce mostly negative impact on green covers of India. Huge trees that form the dense forest take very long time to attain their fully-grown status. But they are felled within no time to meet our residential, industrial and agricultural requirements. So, the gaps between de-forestation and re-forestation are never easy to be filled up where environmental laws are violated flagrantly.

When the growth in human population and decrease in green cover go usually side by side, it is important to note that in post-independent era, the Indian population has registered a huge jump- i.e. from around 330 million to 1.3 billion. Maninder Dabas in *India Times* expresses grave doubts about the growth of 0.21 per cent shown in green cover of India between 2015 and 2017 by the ISFRs (Indian State of Forest Report). He suggests that this “increase at least on paper” can be attributed to “the mechanism of forest area measurement, its definition and timely changes in what we call a ‘forest’.” Secondly, ISFR has used satellite pictures that interpret green cover as forest and it doesn’t “discriminate between natural forests, plantations, thickets of weeds”. Not only that, but “commercial crops such as.... tea plantation, coffee cultivation, and orchards have also been included in the coverage.”

In this scenario, relevance of ecocritical study of the genre of Nature-writing in India indeed becomes self-evident. India can offer remarkable contribution to the ongoing global environmental discourse because, as the forthcoming chapter would highlight, many ecocritical streams like deep-ecology and movements like Transcendentalism have been directly or indirectly influenced by the environmental wisdom of Indian scriptures, religious traditions, and the Gandhian philosophy- which are based on the pluralistic tenets of non-violence, self-reliance and sustainable development.

Perhaps that is why features of ecocriticism that promotes equality and justice for each individual share close affinity with the socio-political vision of India. For example, the ecocritical emphasis on ecojustice is based on egalitarian principles- which are in tune with the democratic ideals of the Indian constitution that directs the socio-linguistically, culturally and religiously diversified citizens of India to

maintain harmony among themselves and with the highly diversified biodiversity of India.

As the select texts will show, according to the majority of the Indian culture accept that like humans, non-human elements also possess spirit. So, Indian social customs teach people to accord due respect to water bodies and trees and plants. In fact, it was Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), the father of the modern Indian science, who, with the help of Cresco graph, proved in 1905 in the Royal Society of London that plants, like humans, are also capable of emotions.

The ancient Indian belief in the universal spiritual oneness accentuated in *Geeta* supports the deep-ecological platform that claims that everything is connected in the universe. The Indian ideal of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” agrees with the ecologists’ idea of establishing economic and ecologic equality the world over.

The openness of ecocritical approach that allows an ecocritic to accept any critical theories and ideologies which can work towards environmental protection echoes the spirit of the well-known Rig Vedic Sanskrit mantra “Aano bhadra krtavo yantu vishwatah” (Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions) (1.89.1) (qtd. in *Hindu Encyclopaedia*)

It is for these reasons that the nature-oriented literary works of India need to be identified and appreciated. Ecocritical study of such texts can certainly open possibilities of discovering reasonable ways to avail the techno-scientific benefits without furthering, or at least minimizing the undesirable speed of the present ecological decay.

2.5 Ecocritical Appreciation of Nature-writings

Man being a part of nature, depicting nature in various art forms is of course a tradition as old as human existence itself. So, it is important to compare the modes of ecocritical examination of texts and the conventional methods of appreciating Nature-writings.

Descriptions about the relationships between man and Nature could be found in forms as diverse as the ancient cave-paintings, edicts, sculptures, dance, folk lore, mythologies, epics, and religious texts. Such descriptions have of course been appreciated by scholars from time to time for their felicity of expressions and their imaginative power that evoke aesthetically rich word-pictures of Nature.

As discussed before, major portions of the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* take place in forest regions, and many episodes of these epics imply deep emotional bonds their protagonists develop with the flora and fauna of the forest regions amid which they spend considerable amount of time. Literature written in regional languages of India by various poets and authors like Kalidasa, Tagore, Kalapi or Nirala have also expressed a deep sense of love for Nature in their expressions.

In the classic Sanskrit literature, numerous narratives and slokas could be found showing deep reverence for the mother earth for her bounty and for the nourishment she provides for an unaccountable number of life forms. Dhruv Bhatt also uses classical mythologies to establish the cultural significance of Nature in his texts. For instance, in *Oceanside Blues*, we have a tale of *Dasavatar* (i.e. Ten (Das) incarnations (avatars) of God)- from fish to man – which shows various stages of the evolutionary process; indicating thereby, the inseparability of the man-Nature bond. Mohanty's *Hide Tide, Ebb Tide* tells story of a Calcutta-based family going on a

short trip to the sea shore of the famous town called Puri in Orissa- where, along with the blue expanse of the ocean, they also witness in the temple the statue of the blue God Jagannath Vishnu. One of the messages of the story suggests that if man recovers his spiritual harmony with God/Nature, he would be able to heal all the abrasions he might have developed as he passes through daily hardships and their corresponding psychological ebbs and tides. Man needs to turn his attention towards the boundless ocean-like cosmic reality of Nature/Lord Jagannath that embraces the existence.

As mentioned in the first chapter here, the English Romantics as well as the American Transcendentalists have also articulated their responses to nature by giving beautiful pen-pictures of seas, rivers, plains, seasonal cycles, trees, birds, animals, insects, rivers, valleys, clouds, skies, butterflies, and rainbows.

For Emerson, the representative poet of the American Transcendentalism, Nature was a divine entity in whose colossal cosmic grasp we all breathe. Pained by the post-industrial aggression on the bucolic beauty of the agrarian ways of life, Wordsworth, the representative poet of the English Romanticism, used to worship nature. His poems enable us to understand that peacefulness and simplicity of nature was the best source for the mankind to feel joy and freedom. For him, humans can learn even moral values and wisdom from Nature.

These nature-writings have of course often been appreciated for their romantic portrayals of nature by various scholars, and they have also been criticized time and again for their sentimentalism and lack of practicability. Nevertheless, it may be noticed that in both cases they have not been explored sufficiently from environmental viewpoints.

Ecocriticism radicalizes the ways in which Nature-writings have been appreciated so far. Ecocritics may re-visit canonical texts to disapprove of the exotic exposition of natural beauty. Nevertheless, they always try to discover ecosensitive spots dispersed in texts which contain environmental preservation appeal.

Although poets like William Blake or Wordsworth might have been criticized for their unpragmatic vision of life by their Neoclassical successors; ecocritics, while scrutinizing the socio-political, psychological and philosophical contexts of those writings, would appreciate that despite their so-called sentimental portrayals of Nature, Romantics have mostly been able to poetically warn the mankind against the practical impact of industrial capitalism.

For example, like Bhatt's Sansai of *Akoopar*, Wordsworth's Lucy, a litter imaginary girl of his poem *The Education of Nature* has been portrayed as a "lovelier flower," who has been raised in the lap of Nature and educated by her.

Being a child of Nature, Lucy's being radiates with the sparkles of innocence, playfulness and freshness she has imbibed while playing "with glee" like a "fawn" "across the lawn or up the mountain springs;" playing amid the "sun" and "shower," amid the "rock and plain;" and the "glade and bower." She fills her "virgin bosom" with "vital feelings of delight" while she watches the midnight stars and hears the sweet murmur of the dancing rivulets. The poet, being a resident of the Lake District himself, wishes to live together with Lucy- the personification of Nature herself- in that "happy dell." However, after absorbing us in the idyllic pastoral beauty of Nature, the poet, by portraying the forlorn heath and the "calm and quiet scene," shocks us with a plaintive news of Lucy's untimely death (*New Dimension* 83-84).

In the contemporary times which echoes Neoclassical trends in many ways, for the people accustomed to live amid the din of absolute logic and reason, this poem may be seen

as a sentimental Romantic piece which just talks of some imagery past which is beyond our reach; but radical literary minds will not agree with such notions. Traditional examiner of the poem would appreciate Wordsworth's choice of free verse- which has of course allowed the poet an imaginative freedom to highlight Nature's rhythmic chaos and its intuitive exuberance which cannot be restricted within the mechanistic rules framed by the human logic. Ecocritics will also appreciate the aesthetic balance of the poem since it reminds the reader to recognize importance of maintaining man-Nature harmonies for a peaceful and joyous co-existence. Besides that, ecocritics will also attempt to situate the poetic realities in its socio-political-cultural-economic contexts during which the poem was produced- because it will help them understand how human culture affects Nature; and how/why the poetic consciousness has responded to the same in the select poem. Ecocritics would see how effectively *Education of Nature* imaginatively draws us closer to Nature by appealing to our senses of sight (stars at night), smell (flower), touch (shower, sunlight), sound (murmuring rivulets). Sensuousness of this poem surely helps us re-connect with Nature. One can surely understand the mankind will lose if it continues to remain insensitive about our increasing psychological and physical distances from Nature.

So, it is important to note here that while assessing representations of Nature, ecocriticism also scrutinizes the nature of those representations. That is to say that it assesses how nature-writings can ecosensitize its readers. Mentioning different kinds of literatures written on nature, an encyclopaedia article thus explains the nuances that differentiate them:

Depending upon its emphasis and the period and genre in which it is written, literature concerned with the natural world is variously called natural philosophy, natural history, environmental literature, and nature writing. While "natural philosophy" refers to prescientific meditations on the human relationship to nature and "natural history" identifies late writing that is concerned primarily with describing flora and fauna, "environmental

writing” usually indicates literature with conservationist or preservationist agenda or sensibility. The broadest term “nature writing,” includes all forms of literature whose primary concern is nature and human relationship to it. (“Nature Writing”)

While studying the selected texts, I will try to study how man-Nature relationships have been portrayed, how sensitively environmental concerns have been woven in their thematic structures and how effectively they stimulate our environmental imagination.

Nature-Writing: Basic features in “Writing Outdoors”

In “Writing Outdoors,” Stephen Alter shares some tips to identify the best features of the genre called nature-writing. Being a curious blend of Alter’s practical exposure to wild life and his ability to translate it into a lucid language, this essay offers a sound frame work to evaluate any nature-oriented text in ecological contexts. I have therefore devoted this section to the criteria of nature-writing Alter has explicated elaborately in the essay mentioned.

According to Alter, nature-writing “is usually written in the first person, with the author being the part of the story, but the human element is always secondary.” Secondly, “It often employs techniques of journalism, but goes beyond simply reporting the facts.” Thirdly, “It identifies different species using their common or scientific names but it is much more than a field guide.” And, according to him, photographic illustrations or drawings may be used, but “the writing always stands on its own, creating vivid images in your mind through the power of words on a page” Alter admits that although any single dictionary definition cannot explain the meaning of ‘nature-writing,’ it is “essentially a well-researched, thought-provoking piece” without “too specialized and technical jargons” that enables us to focus on “anything that human beings have not invented, built or programmed” (5).

Whether Bhatt’s chooses to tell his stories in the first person; or Mohanty employs authorial voice, it is the authenticity of their lived experience of the forest lives and the Wordsworthian simplicity of their language that gravitate the readers’ attention towards the

birds, animals, wilderness, tribals, hills and the rivers they describe. In Bhatt's *Akoopar*, the protagonist is a painter who draws pictures of the forest life he sees around him. The experiment of juxtaposing the free-hand sketches of the people and places the protagonist comes across in the story, and the word-pictures of the same in *Akoopar* succeeds in connecting us closely with the natural ambience of the text.

Alter also asks nature-writers to "get out doors" to "observe the hidden secrets and complexities of nature" to be able to find [in a Coleridgean fashion] "something new and different" "even when their subject is "common or mundane", and to make their "reader visualize" what they "describe, through a fresh set of eyes" (9). So far as going outdoors is concerned, both Bhatt and Mohanty have invested considerable amount of time staying and roaming in jungles and around water bodies- which, as we will see, reflect in their descriptions of nature.

Alter recommends the authors of this genre to "learn to listen to the language of nature" because it is "essential to be attuned to the vocabulary of the forests and deserts, the whisper of the rain falling upon the broad leaves of a teak or the hushed murmur of wind unfurling curtains of the sand" (10). And, to maintain his persuasive tone, an author should act "like a lawyer whose client is nature" (9). Discussion on the select texts would show that both Bhatt and Mohanty have listened well to the language of Nature, and how they often succeed in poetically advocating their "client's" cause.

Alter also refers to the need on the author's part to depict the spatial dimensions of literary scenes in such a way which can evoke vivid visual images in the reader's mind. In addition to that, the descriptions should also be able to stimulate five senses of the readers through which they develop adequate ecosensitivity. A good specimen of depiction, according to him, "combines empirical evidence with poetic imagery, using language both as mirror and as a lens" (6). He also reiterates that the art of comparing similar and contrasting

dissimilar objects and elements in the story enhances clarity of narrations. In order to satiate the instinctual desire for narrative, Nature-writers should be good storytellers. For them, “it is important to pick the right thread with which to snare a reader’s attention” and, “Something must happen in a story- something changes, something is revealed” (8).

Alter explains in the above passage as to how Nature-writers need to be good story tellers; whereas, the following chapters will show how Bhatt and Mohanty, besides being good story tellers, could also be classified as good Nature-writers.

Both of these authors, as Alter suggests, also weave small threads of suspense within their narratives and sometimes at the end of the chapters. Bhatt sometimes uses flashbacks and flash-forwards to unfold his plots; whereas using the technique of simple linear progression, Mohanty chooses to unravel the epic story of his *Paraja*. Their narrative techniques, as Alter has remarked above, succeed in snaring the reader’s attention.

As mentioned in the bird-eye-view of the thesis, thematic analysis of Mohanty’s *Paraja* in ecosocialist contexts will be discussed in the fourth chapter; but in the following chapter it has been examined how Bhatt’s fictional world could be understood in light of his women characters in order to understand the ecofeminist significance of his texts.

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