

Interpreting Dhruv Bhatt's “*Samudrantike*” Through An Ecocritical Lens

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Abstract:

The 21st century's scientific advancements and evolutions have been made possible by the destruction of the natural world, which has caused humanity to lose their harmony with it and endanger their own survival. These topics are frequently featured in literature, which also examines them using the Ecocritical theory that first surfaced formally in the 1990s. Ecocritical analysis of literature examines how the relationship between man and nature is portrayed in the text. One of the most well-known authors of contemporary Gujarati literature is Dhruv Bhatt, with sensitivity and societal criticism, describing mankind in the embrace of the natural world. The literary work “*Samudrantike*” (1993), which Vinod Meghani translated into English as “*Oceanside Blues*” (2001), is an example of a work that honours the significance of nature in human existence. The goal of this article is to analyse the novel using the idea of ecocriticism in order to critique its illustration of the relationship between man and nature.

Key Words: *Gujarati Literature, Samudrantike, Oceanside Blues, Ecocriticism, Man – Nature Relationship, survival, seashore.*

Introduction:

The great chain of being depends on every living thing on Earth, but as we can see, the scientific advancements and evolutions of the 21st century have been made possible by the destruction of nature, which has caused humans to lose their harmony with it and put their own survival in jeopardy. According to a Times of India story, India is the nation most susceptible to climate change. The same article asserts that increased temperatures and decreased rainfall could be the most severe effects of climate change, potentially reducing

agricultural incomes in the most affected areas. Even at a symposium, former president Pranab Mukherjee discussed climate change, stating that its ill effects are visible in the abnormal behaviour of nature in recent times and climate change has moved centre stage in policy formulation. Even certain parts of the planet are getting closer to the end every day. News of earthquakes, tsunamis, melting glaciers, and other natural disasters has become commonplace. A few species of birds and animals have also evolved into instincts. Human activity and meddling are the cause of this overall imbalance in the natural world. Numerous writers and activists have raised concerns about the future of both the natural world and humanity as a result of this interference that is destroying the natural cycle. This tendency is undoubtedly reflected in literature, with nature serving as many authors' only source of inspiration. However, as a result of the unbalanced natural environment, beliefs regarding the survival of the environment have also begun to emerge in European nations. Ecocriticism is a theory that examines how the natural environment and human nature are portrayed in literary works. The goal of this essay is to apply the philosophy of ecocriticism to a Gujarati novel by Dhruv Bhatt called *Samudrantike*, which explores topics related to the natural world.

Gujarati writer Dhruv Bhatt is the 2002 Sahitya Akademi Award winner. His body of work as a writer includes countless books of poetry and novels. Several of his notable books, like “*Samudrantike*” (1993), “*Tattvamasi*” (1998), and “*Akoopar*” (2011) etc., are on the portrayal of the link between man and nature. His novels have been translated into Hindi, English, and other languages for the most part. He is an exceptionally talented writer. His writing is both captivating and revolutionary.

Ecocriticism

A postmodern theory that gained popularity in the 1960s and underwent extensive development in the 1990s is called ecocriticism. The state of living things in their natural environments and their interactions with them are referred to as "ecocriticism." The theory of ecocriticism analyses how the relationship between man and nature is portrayed in literature. Through their writing, American and English authors aimed to raise awareness of the dangers facing the environment. “*The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*” (1789), written by Gilbert White, is a prime example of ecological writing in England. In it, the author details his in-depth observations of the countryside and wildlife of England. Additionally, some of the earliest American writings in this genre were “*William Bertram's Travels*” (1791) and Henry David Thoreau's “*Walden*” (1854). Even scientists acknowledged the harm to the environment by the 20th century. Discussions on climate change marked the beginning of ecocriticism as a theory. Another recognised organisation is the ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment), which was founded by ecocritics and produces ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment), a journal. Ecocriticism is a humanities and natural sciences hybrid. Cheryll Glotfelty's journal, “*The Ecocriticism Reader*”, is credited with being a turning point in the evolution of ecocriticism. The leading ecocritics are Michael P. Branch, Glen A. Love, Sullen Campbell, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, and Cheryll Glotfelty.

Ecocritical Study of Dhruv Bhatt's Samudrantike (1993)

Dhruv Bhatt attempted to depict in the novel *Samudrantike* both the obvious and covert harm that human activity has caused to the natural components while also emphasising the side of nature's independence that is ever-changing and ever-alive. Nature's job is to keep the balance between humans and the natural world. Even though humans have transformed nature into a commercial product due to their greed and materialistic desires, nature is always revealing new parts of itself. Thus, "ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies," (Glottfelty & Fromm).

A description of the locals that live along the coast and how they manage to survive in the severe weather is given in the 1993 novel *Samudrantike*. Since that region of the land is not fertile, the anonymous narrator of the narrative is given the responsibility of surveying it in order to set up chemical plants there. However, as a result of the procedure, his ongoing interactions with the locals, and the delight of living surrounded by nature, the narrator's perspective is altered, allowing him to see his own "human side." The book examines how nature becomes an essential component of every living thing's survival chain and how it aids in humans' ability to adapt to the constant changes in their environment. Even in the most impoverished circumstances, the inhabitants appear content. The surrounding natural environment provides this strength.

It opens with a lovely description of the beach. As is customary with Dhruv Bhatt's books, the anonymous narrator is meant to arrive to Estate Bungalow, where he is assigned as the local engineer. His responsibility is to compile information on the land's fertility for the government. If land turns out to be less fertile, the government intends to build factories and a chemical zone there. The narrator is from a contemporary, developed metropolis, but he has been sent to this impoverished, undeveloped village for work. He is a little let down by the circumstances and muses over staying somewhere longer. He accepts a one-night stay at Valbai's Vadi, a small farm with a well, on the route to the Estate Bungalow, and despite being a stranger to them, the family treats him with humility. The narrator is taken aback by this neighbourly kindness since he has observed in his city that people rarely even exchange pleasantries. He meets Aval, the bungalow's owner, when he arrives at the "Estate Bungalow." She warns him against going "upstairs with your shoes on" (Bhatt 23), since the terrace is where rainwater is gathered for the upcoming year. Since the location lacks transportation options, the narrator hires a horse named Kabira, who thereafter becomes his.

The narrator encounters a number of significant people while regularly meandering through the area; these individuals either intentionally or unconsciously impart to him an appreciation of the surrounding surroundings and nature. One of them is Noorbhai, a forest officer who was born and raised in the region. He often recalls the area's verdant jungle and birds, which have since been replaced by the barren expanse of sand and a few babul trees that he planted when he was an officer. Bangali Baba, the itinerant "sage" who is conscious of the shifting environmental conditions, is another figure. He is the ideal illustration of the interaction between man and nature. His writings are calming and thought-provoking for readers. After voicing his intense annoyance over the establishment of the chemical

industries, the narrator Bangali Baba now questions him, "Dare you in an area that would harm the surrounding nature? "Do you really believe that by writing your R&P, you will destroy this land and that you will be held accountable for the results of your efforts to alter its appearance?" (Bhatt 119) He is also informed by Bangali Baba that "Earth did not exist once." Nature existed back then as well. Earth was formed as a ball of fire. Water, plants, and seaweeds appeared next. They died too, and then they rose again. Nature is boundless and absolute at all times. Put that in your mind (Bhatt 120). The conflict between nature and culture is examined in this conversation between Bangali Baba and the narrator. Since manufacturing and money are human inventions, they will destroy the area's natural beauty. As Greg Garrard correctly points out, "it is no coincidence that this view of nature took hold most strongly with the rise of capitalism, which needed to turn nature into a market commodity and resource without significant moral or social constraint on Availability." Nature has been treated as a capitalistic commodity (Garrard 69). The tale examines how reliant on nature humans are.

Attempts by Sabur to obtain land and cultivate the gardens there provide another wonderful illustration of the link between man and nature. It was impossible to grow even a little grass on the Rukmipano, a two-and-a-third-acre stone land that was given to him, even with year-round rains. However, thanks to Saboor and his wife's diligent efforts, they were able to grow mango, coconut, chikoo, and pomegranate saplings. His labours bear fruit, and they are able to purchase the land and all of its produce. The narrator muses on the ancient phenomena of the relationship between man and nature. Few people are able to respond to the call of nature. "Beyond doubt, there exists in this universe a secret code by which the animate and the inanimate are able to interact," the narrator muses (Bhatt, 183). Therefore, nature is not only necessary for human survival but also a living being in and of itself.

Additionally, the author has made a highly philosophical and successful attempt to illustrate the injuries done to nature. The engineer who is narrating the story is tasked with preparing a report for the development of chemical factories, but he is unsure about submitting it for some reason. His conscience keeps telling him not to proceed with the upcoming mission. There is a sense of oneness between him and the environment. The "dazzling opulence displayed by the night sky studded with myriad stars... inspire me to write that a region should not be condemned to produce poisonous chemicals just because it is barren of trees, infertile, and sparsely populated" (Bhatt 117–18).

His civil mentality, however, forces him to consider the possibility that the development of the area might be made possible by his endeavours to set up the chemical facilities. The route will become "a tar road bustling with honking vehicles in a few years," in his estimation. Khera's headman wouldn't have to walk seven or eight miles on a muddy trail to catch a bus. This place would then have easy access to the majority of the items that modern man considered necessary for happiness. Bhatti 156 However, the nearby natural aspect would also suffer greatly as a result of this development. It is going to alter "these salt

marshes blown by dusty tornadoes, this immense nothingness, this abandoned but incredibly beautiful coastline, these.

The local populace is integrated with the environment. They have blended in with nature and never attempt to hurt it or take advantage of it. The impoverished and ignorant have never, therefore, considered nature in terms of capitalism. The goal of individuals who consider themselves to be "developed" and "civilised" is to destroy the natural world in the name of production and preservation. As a result of these advances, society will become more disconnected from the natural world, and future generations will not know where their existence has come from. According to Harold Fromm, the majority of youngsters in America "are rarely in a position to experience a connection between the commodity that fills their need and their natural source," which makes the situation extremely tragic (Fromm 33). Dhruv Bhatt thus aims to demonstrate that nature has a significant impact on humans in addition to sustaining their existence. Psychosis and feelings. The locals treat the natural world in the same manner as they do individuals. Their naive outlook and adaptability to any environment can only be explained by "Nature! That was the only explanation." (Bhatt, 157). "I had always observed that those who lived in close proximity to nature inherited its essence simplicity, candour, fortitude, and openness," the narrator says in explanation (Bhatt, 157).

The book also demonstrates the harshness of nature and the ways in which humanity pale in comparison to it. The narrator, Aval, and other village children seek refuge in the bungalow's basement after a tornado strikes the area once. Their only meal for the two or three days that they are confined to the basement is crushed almonds, puffed rice, gramme, and jaggery. The waves were pounding the bungalow's walls and it was raining nonstop, so they were unable to sleep. When a scorpion attacks in the night from the lavatory, the narrator goes to kill it with his shoes, but Aval stops him and informs him that even scorpions have nowhere else to hide in this place. Aval's conversation captures the spirit of the locals. They don't intentionally hurt any animals or other creatures. Because they are aware that all living things, including humans, have senses and strive to live even in the most hostile environments. In this vast chain of existence, humans are not an exception.

The author has attempted to illustrate how, despite all of science's advancements, nature has always remained superior to mankind through the people living in this little community. "Many nature writers only realise who they are and what's what in the world by testing the boundaries of self against an outside medium (such as nature)," claims Scott Slovic (352–53). Along with trying to understand himself, the author highlights the value of all elements of nature, from tiny organisms to vast entities like the sea, with the assistance of his narrator. The water emerges as the most significant metaphor in the book because the locals saw it as a god that both lets them in and removes anything superfluous. The fisherman Krishna Tandela kharva illustrates that the sea always wants people to dive in it, and that no human can go against the sea's will. The author aims to demonstrate through Krishna's Philosophy that nature constantly controls human survival and that humans are merely puppets in her hands. Here, it is demonstrated that nature is provided and that people are not the inventors or originators as previously thought. Standing out in each and ever.

Conclusion

The author aims to demonstrate that all creatures have importance and that the connection between man and nature should be balanced. Every living thing has a unique way of surviving. Since humans are not superior to other creatures, the idea that they are is likewise disproven. who, despite nature's independence, depend on it and natural entities for their survival. Nature existed before humans did, and it will continue to exist after we are gone. The figures of Bangali Baba, Noorbhai, Aval, the Sarpanch, and Saboor stand in for everyone who has learned to appreciate nature, realised their own smallness in the face of its grandeur, and realised the significance of nature in helping people come to terms with their own existence. Therefore, the book serves as a wonderful illustration of how nature ought to be respected and the part it plays in ensuring the survival of all living things, including humans.

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