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A Critical Review of *Akoopar*

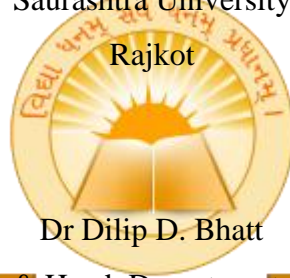
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Introduction:

Dhruv Bhatt has been a prominent name in the contemporary Gujarati fiction writing. His works represent his personal life experiences and acquaintances of the common people. However, these common people's tales have the universal appeal. These tales also depict the collective wisdom that these common people have contributed in every walks of life. On the other hand, various regions of Gujarat find their vivid description with their cultural, social and geographical peculiarities found their description in his novels.

Akoopar is set in and around the forest of Gir and portrays the people, places and the heritage of the region in various *Kathiyavaadi* dialects. As in most of the regional novels of Dhruv Bhatt, *Akoopar*, too is resulted out of his extended stay at the region. It narrates the unique blend of the fact and fiction of the people and places that the author came across and observed. The present article aims at reviewing the novel from the critical point of view.

The Title:

Dhruv Bhatt has bestowed Gujarati literature with the 'novel' titles that have their roots in the Indian myths and legends on one hand and are contextual to the present times on the other. The title *Akoopar* is derived from *Vanparva*, of the *Mahabharat*. *Akoopar* is the name of the tortoise who appears in the tale told by Markanday rishi to the Pandavas who were in the exile for twelve years in the forest. The tale is that of the king Indradhumn, who is to be expelled from the heaven as his balance of the good deeds is over. To have the balance of good deeds was the prerequisite condition to live in the heaven. Indradhumn pleads to the Devtas that his good deeds are still due. Devtas tell him to produce the proofs of his good deeds. For which, Indradhumn comes down to the earth and searches for someone who may know him and can acknowledge his good deeds. Starting from Markanday rishi to the owl Pravarkarna to the crane Nadijangh, Indradhumn asks all respectively the eldest ones alive on the earth. Ultimately, Indradhumn is lead to *Akoopar*, the tortoise who lives in the lake named Indradhumn. *Akoopar* emerges out of the lake and gladly acknowledges the good deeds of the Indradhumn. Hence, *Akoopar* has been the oldest alive creature on the earth who has witnessed the deeds of the all those who have lived on the earth so far. In the novel Dhruv Bhatt depicts the Gir forest that's as ancient as *Akoopar*. The forest houses the treasures of the flora and fauna. It also gives shelter to



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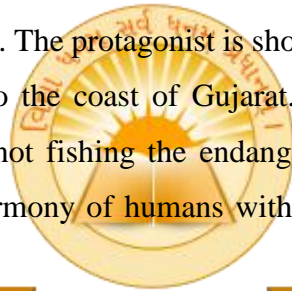
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mankind who depends directly or indirectly on the forest. The entire life-cycle is abide by the rules of the nature. The forest silently observes the deeds of all the living creatures. Thus, the title of the novel is apt and evocative.

The Nature and the Universal Concern:

The nature finds an all-pervasive place in Dhruv Bhatt's novels. The author gives it such detailed description and bold treatment that it emerges as a larger than life character. In *Akoopar*, the forest of Gir remains a leitmotif. All the characters and the creatures appear are woven in and around the forest. The fauna of the forest of Gir in general and the lion in particular are dealt with minute observation and in grand scale. The lions are referred as the king not just of the animal kingdom but of the entire Gir region. All the characters mention of maintaining respectful, and not awful distance from the lions. Even after being attacked by the lions the characters such as Dhanu and Sonal have no grudge for these predatory animals. On the contrary, Dhanu believes that the lion did not want to kill him at all. In the latter half of the novel the author illustrates the looming threats to the marine creatures. The protagonist is shown involved in the awareness campaign for saving the whale and shark who come to the coast of Gujarat. Rani, the Sarpanch of the coastal region successfully convince the fishermen for not fishing the endangered species of the fish. Thus, the natural surrounding plays a vital role and the harmony of humans with the nature remains pivotal throughout the novel.



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The Characterization:

The characters of *Akoopar* are quite realistic and true to life. The protagonist who visits Gir for his painting assignment narrates the story. It is through his eyes that we see the events of the story getting unfolded. Being a painter, he observes the nature its pictorial form. He also perceives the seen and unseen aspects of the forest in his painting. The women characters paly significant roles in depicting the traditions and the belief systems of the forest. Aima represents the collective wisdom of the Gir forest. She advocates the harmonious coexistence of all the living creature on the earth. She does not have empirical justification of her beliefs but her faith in them is unshaken. Her ability to see through and intuitive vision proved all the time during the course of the novel. Sansai is yet another leading woman character of the novel. She is one with the nature and feels pain pleasure of the forest and all creatures of the forest. Her boldness of character and sternness of language surprises the protagonist and the reader alike. Lajo is drawn after her friend, Sansai. She too is



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straight forward and can see through the things. When her beloved cow is hunted in front of her she feels ripped from within but let the lions take her away. She does not curse the lions rather she pray for them and apologies her cow, Girvan. The characters of Revtubha, Gopalbhai, Dhanu are the real life characters that author came across during his stay in the forest of Gir. They represent the spirit of the people of Gir who lead a disciplined and law abiding lives.

The Dialects:

The novel is set in the Gir region of Gujarat depicts the race and milieu of the region. Though all the characters, except Dorothy who belongs to Africa and the students who came from Madhya Pradesh, speak Gujarati language. Nevertheless, they represent the dialectical features of the class, caste, religion and region they belong. The takes care in differentiating the variety of these dialectical features with minute distinctions. Each section of the dialectical features have their unique variety of words, word-formation and pronunciation. And interestingly all these variety of Gujarati dialects are intelligible to one and another. The protagonist, being an outsider is observing, along with the reader, these minute distinctions as he travels to various places and interacts with various users of the dialects.

Limitations:

The novel remains a lucid account of the people, place and milieu in an objective manner. However, the novel lacks the element of surprise and dramatic elements. Unlike, a historical fictional novel most of the accounts of the real life events and places are not narrated as they took place in the history. Hence, these descriptions lack artistic grandeur. Further, the narrative style of the novel is not maintained in single flow. In the initial chapters the protagonist narrates the events as a witness. Thus, in these chapters the author adopts the first person narrative technique also known as fictitious autobiography. However, from latter chapters the author appears as an interpreter and starts narrating the protagonist, his thought process. At many places the author is narrating as an omnipresent voice and describes the vision that the protagonist watches as a flash back. Hence, here, the second person narrative technique has been adopted by the author. Further, characters such as Aaima, Sansai and later Lajo are described revealing their opinions and point of views about the other characters and events as well as they also share their interpretations of the of the events. For instance, Sansai narrates the hunting of Girvan, Lajo's cow by the lions, she interprets the outlook and mental agony of Lajo. Thus, here the author adopts third person narrative technique. Hence, in the course of the novel the author



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keep on shifting from one mode of narrative technique to another. Nevertheless, the flow of the novel is not compromised due to the shift of the narrative techniques to great extent.

Conclusion:

The novel is set in the region of Gujarat and narrates the life and time of the humans and the nature living with distinctive harmony. Nevertheless, the novel has a universal appeal of coexistence of man vis-à-vis nature rather than man versus nature. Unlike the imaginative world of the romantic nature with shades of truth in it, the author recreates the real world of his first-hand experience and adds shades of imagination to his novel. He eulogies the inclusive nature of the mother earth and also of those larger than life characters who live for and with nature rather than against it.



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