

---

**A Sensual Ecology: Unveiling Nature in Sujata Bhatt's The First Meeting**

---

**Dr.A.Marish**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Yadava College (Autonomous)

Govindarajan Campus, Tiruppalai, Madurai-14

Mobile: 8015545230

[marishprofile@gmail.com](mailto:marishprofile@gmail.com)

---

**Article Received:** 18/02/2025

**Article Accepted:** 20/03/2025

**Published Online:** 21/03/2025

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.03.172

---

**Abstract:**

Ecocriticism, or Green Studies, emerged in the late 1980s (USA) and 1990s (UK), defined by Cheryll Glotfelty as "the study of nature writing." It addresses ecological problems caused by human actions. American Transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller) and British thinkers (Bate, Williams) influenced its development. Ecocritical theory categorizes landscapes into wilderness, scenic sublime, countryside, and domestic picturesque, which are reflected in the works of these writers. This paper analyzes Sujata Bhatt's "The First Meeting" through an ecocritical lens, examining the poem's use of sensuous imagery and its exploration of the human-nature relationship. Drawing from the origins of ecocriticism in the works of Rueckert and Glotfelty, the study demonstrates how Bhatt challenges anthropocentric perspectives and promotes ecological awareness. Through vivid descriptions of the Indian landscape and the girl's encounter with a King Cobra, the poem highlights the interconnectedness of life and the need to move beyond fear towards empathy. Comparisons to D.H. Lawrence's "Snake" and Girish Karnad's "Nagamandala" further illuminate the poem's exploration of human-animal interactions and the symbolic significance of snakes. Ultimately, this analysis reveals how Bhatt's work serves as a powerful reminder of the Earth's shared habitation, advocating for a more harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Transcendentalists, sensuous imagery, anthropocentric perspectives and ecological awareness.

**Introduction:**

Ecocriticism, also known as Green Studies, emerged as a critical approach in the late 1980s in the USA and the late 1990s in the UK. The term's origins can be traced to William Rueckert's essay, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Cheryll Glotfelty, considered a key figure in American Ecocriticism, defined the field in *The Ecocriticism*

---

*Reader: Landmarks of Literary Ecology*, co-edited with Harold Fromm, describing it as "the study of nature writing.". She believed that many ecological problems were initiated by the human being. She said,

We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse. Many of us in colleges and universities worldwide find ourselves in a dilemma. Our temperaments and talents have deposited us in literature departments, but, as environmental problems compound, work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem. (Peter Barry, 138)

Nineteenth-century American literature saw three prominent figures, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau—New England Transcendentalists—celebrate nature and its powerful presence in the American wilderness. In contrast, British ecocriticism was shaped by thinkers like Jonathan Bate, Raymond Williams, Richard Kerridge, and Greg Garrard. Ecocritical theory divides the landscape into four overlapping areas: the wilderness (deserts, oceans, uninhabited continents), the scenic sublime (forests, lakes, mountains), the countryside (hills, fields, woods), and the domestic picturesque (parks, gardens, lanes). American Transcendentalist writings, particularly those of Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau, focused on the wilderness. British Romantic writer William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* centered on the scenic sublime. The countryside and domestic picturesque served as common settings for fiction and lyrical poetry. In *Revaluing Nature: Towards An Ecological Criticism*, Glen A. Love quotes the lines of English historian Arnold Toynbee as: mankind now has the power to make the biosphere uninhabitable, and that it will, in fact, produce this suicidal result within a foreseeable period of time if the human population of the globe does not now take prompt and vigorous concerted action to check the pollution and the spoliation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by short-sighted human greed. (Peter Barry, 135)

Ecocritical writers re-evaluate literary works through an eco-centric lens, prioritizing the natural world. Their analysis often centers on concepts such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, and sustainable versus unsustainable resources. To promote "factual" writing, they expanded the scope of topographical essays, memoirs, and travelogues. While both American and British writers explored the interplay of nature and culture, Indian writers also contributed significantly to environmental discourse. Within the Indian context, nature is deeply interwoven with human existence and cultural practices, though it has not traditionally been a central theoretical concept in literature. Nevertheless, Indian poets and writers effectively convey the unique and enduring aspects of their natural environment through metaphorical language and vivid imagery. Although ecocriticism is not widely applied to the Indian English literary canon, authors such as Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan have presented rich portrayals of human-nature interactions. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* provides a detailed account of a South Indian community's symbiotic relationship with its

surroundings. R.K. Narayan's Malgudi serves as a consistent backdrop for exploring these themes. Furthermore, writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Nissim Ezekiel, Toru Dutt, Arundhati Roy, and Kamala Das have incorporated nature as a vital component of their narratives. This study seeks to examine Sujatha Bhatt's *The First Meeting* from an ecocritical perspective, building upon these existing representations.

Sujata Bhatt, born and raised in India, immigrated to the United States in 1968. A prolific poet, she has published numerous collections and received critical acclaim. Bhatt's work often explores the complexities of language, particularly the reconciliation of her native Gujarati with English. She examines the tension between the historical atrocities of colonialism and the contemporary acceptance of the English language's influence. In *The First Meeting*, she provides a compelling ecological description, depicting a unique sense of kinship with a snake and tracing their gradual acquaintance.

*The First Meeting* recounts a young girl's inaugural encounter with a King Cobra, offering a vivid exploration of her relationship with nature. The opening stanza captures her youthful exuberance. Bhatt employs sensuous imagery to create a rich portrayal of this connection. The narrator, potentially the poet herself or a character drawn from her experiences, recounts a significant childhood memory. The girl's unrestrained enthusiasm is evident as she immerses herself in the natural landscape. The poem's imagery, such as the breeze circling her legs, foreshadows her initial meeting with the snake. Despite her initial fear, the green snake attempts to establish a sense of comfort. The following lines kindle the reader's imagination on ecology,

When I run past the uncounted trees,  
groves of mango, eucalyptus—  
how the grass slips beneath my feet,  
how the wind circles up my legs,  
    (invisible snake I can't escape)  
how the kingfisher-blue sky grows  
sunnier each second as I run  
up the hill almost blinded,  
run down the other side, my tongue dry,  
to the lake where the sky is trapped, tamed blue....

(<https://voetica.com/poem/11057>)

With the buoyancy of a light breeze, the girl joyfully traverses the landscape, running towards the hill. Her journey reveals a vibrant natural world, characterized by "uncounted trees," mango and eucalyptus groves, and lush grasslands, evoking the scenic sublime. Her innocence and exuberance create a sense of freedom from worldly concerns. She qualifies the sky as "Kingfisher blue" as she climbs the hill, reaching the summit before the sun's full intensity. Upon reaching the top, she experiences a temporary sensory deprivation, possibly due to her complete absorption in the natural environment, physical exhaustion, or the interference of perspiration. Abruptly, a sense of home and family may prompt the girl to

descend the hill, her mouth parched. The scenery transitions from the hilltop to a breathtaking lake. The poet's description of the lake is striking, portraying it as a space where the sky, "trapped tame blue," is reflected. This image evokes the myth of Narcissus, who became enamoured with his own reflection. The sensuous imagery of the "trapped tame blue" sky effectively conveys the serene reflection of the sky in the lake's calm waters. As she approaches the water to drink, the girl observes a snake surfacing, causing her to experience a sudden surge of nervousness and shock. The poet's action is given in the following lines, As I drink

green snakes swim up to the surface.

I recoil amazed, run back faster, faster. ...

(<https://voetica.com/poem/11057>)

The girl's fear compels her to flee the lake, and she runs rapidly towards home. Upon her arrival, she encounters an even more alarming sight: a large King Cobra, tightly coiled in a corner. A sense of pity overtakes her as she observes the snake's apparent exhaustion, echoing D.H. Lawrence's "Snake," where the speaker extends compassion to an unexpected visitor. Bhatt's portrayal of the snake, with its ability to communicate, recalls Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*, where snakes possess mysterious powers. In a moment of fantastical imagination, the snake speaks, requesting that she enter and close the door. To alleviate her fear, he reassures her, introduces himself as a resident of her garden, and smiles. The poet employs a dramatic monologue to convey this encounter. She describes the garden's beauty, particularly the large purple and golden dahlias, which the snake favours. Further, she notes the garden's abundance of "plump mice." Having detailed the garden's amenities, she cautiously asks the snake what it desires, her fear palpable, anticipating a potential venomous strike. However, the snake reveals its peaceful intentions, expressing weariness with human traditions. He implores her not to worship him, as he is constantly burdened by unwanted prayers and an excess of milk offerings. He asserts his invulnerability, stating that no one can capture him or extract his fangs. He also rejects the idea of being confined to a basket and forced to perform. Ultimately, he requests only to share a bowl of milk on her shoulder. I want to live in your garden,

to visit you, especially those nights you sing,

let me join you.

And once in a while, let me lie around your neck

and share a bowl of milk...( <https://voetica.com/poem/11057>)

It is crucial to remember that the Earth was created as a shared habitat, not solely as the property of humankind. This planet is as much the home of snakes, worms, insects, and other creatures as it is ours. The urgent need of the present is to recognize the detrimental selfishness of humanity, which encroaches upon the rightful spaces of other beings. This poem serves as a powerful reminder that the Earth is a shared home, not just for humans, but also for animals like snakes.

SP Publications

## International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal

Impact Factor: 8.175 (SJIF) | ISSN: 2581-8333 | Volume 7, Issue 3 | March 2025

---

### References:

<https://voetica.com/poem/11057>

Barry, Peter (2002), *Beginning Theory: "Ecocriticism"*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

### Citation:

Dr.A.Marish" A Sensual Ecology: Unveiling Nature in Sujata Bhatt's The First Meeting" *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2025, pp. 168-172. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.03.172.