




## Nature under siege: An ecocritical reading of Bahar Dutt's *Green Wars*

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### Abstract

*The paper aims to present a comprehensive study of the ecocritical dimensions of Bahar Dutt's Green Wars: Dispatches from a Vanishing World (2014). Dutt's account of her journey, presented in the form of a chronicle of piquant stories and anecdotes in the course of environmental journalism, comes out as a splendid narrative highlighting her environmental advocacy. Undertaking the ecocritical stance, this research analyses how, in the name of development, Nature is rampantly abused, degraded, and destroyed. The text under study addresses the emerging issues of biodiversity conservation by critiquing the unsustainable rubrics sanctioned by the Indian State Government, contributing to drastic and irreparable deterioration of ecology. Dutt's investigative journalism forecasts the environmental apocalypse, and mirrors her eco-anxiety. The study applies a qualitative research design, emphasizing and interpreting the quotations and anecdotes from the text replete with ecological concerns. The textual analysis is done through the lens of ecocriticism, thereby foregrounding the universal environmental problems ranging from the extinction of certain flora and fauna, melting of glaciers, to the mindless infrastructural development causing pollution and ecological imbalance.*

**Keywords:** Eco-criticism, Biodiversity, Environmental degradation, Ecological consciousness

### 1.0 Introduction

Human beings have always been consumed by the lust for accumulating material wealth to appease their insatiable desire for material needs in the name of progress. They have always tried to tame Nature according to their material wants. Human greed to lead a materially sophisticated life and a modernising economy that has brought misplaced priorities have caused severe damage to the environment creating a global environmental threat. Bahar Dutt's compelling narrative, *Green Wars: Dispatches from a Vanishing World* explores the often underestimated issues of environmental crises that seem insignificant but pose a potential threat to humanity. With her unique journalistic reportage and rigorous research, she contemplates the ever-growing trend of technological advancement in various states of India that is finally bringing about an ecological catastrophe. Dutt's journalistic intervention focuses on environmental issues, including endangered species of flora and fauna, depletion of natural resources, loss of natural habitat, dying rivers, global warming, health hazards caused by environmental exploitation, and the displacement of indigenous communities as well as unsustainable developmental plans.

Influenced by an anthropocentric view, human beings are hell-bent on exploiting Nature to the hilt without considering the probable undesirable consequences to be countered in the near future. This severe lack of environmental consciousness and reverence for Nature is bringing about a global environmental catastrophe. Dutt's *Green Wars* attempts to bridge the gap between human beings and Nature and provides an ecological vision for a balanced and healthy cohesion. Written in the form of a travelogue, *Green Wars* enriches the literary world with insightful

information about the significance of biodiversity and ecology. This paper is an attempt to expand the scope of knowledge in the arena of ecocritical studies by critically examining the work through the lens of ecocriticism. Along with its contemplative nature, Dutt's *Green Wars: Dispatches from a Vanishing World* emerges as a sordid warning for those who are trying to probe into Nature's serenity and ravage it unabated.

## 2.0 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical aspect of this research paper hinges on the literary theory of eco-criticism, a new discipline of criticism that emerged in the 1990s. In lucid words, ecocriticism is a recent emergence in the area of literary and cultural criticism that articulates Nature to be supremely significant and attempts to interpret any text through the lens of environmentalism. It studies and explores how literature and the environment interact and influence each other. Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), a prominent eco-critic, defines:

Simply put, eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (p. xviii)

Ecocriticism is a theoretical concept that keeps 'Mother Nature' at its core and deals with the ideas connected to it. Echoing the core idea of Glotfelty, Chatterji (2021) writes that "Ecocriticism is a vast opportunity for literary and cultural researchers to explore the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment. It looks at the links between literature and the environment" (p. 55). He further writes that "In eco-critical literature, the relationship between the environment and literature is examined. Its main purpose is to educate people about environmental issues and hopefully get help" (p.55). To be specific, Ecocriticism focuses on the entire ecology and explores the human attitude towards Nature. It denies anthropocentrism and voices a more inclusive eco-friendly point of view.

William Rueckert first used the term 'eco-criticism' in 1978 in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocritics*, wherein he defines it as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world" (1996, p. 107). Rueckert emphasizes the pressing need for the co-existence of biotic, abiotic, human and nonhuman elements for a smooth functioning of the ecosystem.

The ecocritics aim at redefining the elements of Nature that are muted, violated, and suppressed in a text. They attempt to acknowledge the worth of all living and non-living entities that contribute to the overall balance of the ecosystem. They contribute to a harmonious co-existence of humans and Nature to mitigate the horrible catastrophes. While discussing ecocriticism, Nayar (2015) states:

Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches. (p. 242)

Ecocriticism, in this sense, is an area of research that explores, investigates, and encourages to study literature that raise ethical questions about relationship between human and nature. Akhter

and Tabassum (2023) aptly remark that "Ecocriticism is a relatively new field of literature and ecology "from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature" (p. 114).

### **3.0 Results and Discussion**

*Green Wars: Dispatches from a Vanishing World* is a compilation of twelve enticing and piquant anecdotes of the rigorous and ardent journey of a conservationist and environmental journalist Bahar Dutt. The book encapsulates the story of her various expeditions across India and abroad ranging from her reports of environmental wreckage from Arunachal Pradesh to the Arctic, combating the mining mafia in Goa, to the melting of the Gangotri glacier, preservation of the rainforest, to the protection of not-so-endangered species. *Green Wars* is a sneak peek into the experiences and investigations made by an environmental journalist. Dutt's reporting explores the tension between ecology and the development being done at breakneck speed. Aligning herself with the third wave of Ecocriticism, Dutt critiques the reckless and rampant environmental degradation, and vehemently criticises the anthropocentric and abusive methods of development.

#### **3.1 Dichotomy between Development and Ecology**

Bahar Dutt has aptly and suggestively used the title *Green Wars: Dispatches from a Vanishing World* to indicate and typify the ongoing clash between two domains of ideology- the general anthropocene thought of the money-mongers who are hell-bent to usurp Nature in order to appease their materialistic greed, and a much tender eco-centric thought for the preservation of ecology. Through her lively academic treatise, Dutt makes her readers aware of the devastating environmental condition and its adverse impact at the global level. Many of the chapters are dedicated to outcries against the illegal, unethical, and reckless pillaging of natural resources in the pretext of progress. In several states of India, Dutt, along with her team and other green warriors, confronts issues of irreversible environmental damage. She vehemently criticizes the concept of mega-development projects like the construction of dams, roads, mining industries that are carried out without environmental consciousness.

Dutt, as a responsible environmental journalist, gives a real account of environmental conflicts and exposes how the policy of national interest and development ransacks the integrity of ecology. Her statement leaves us flabbergasted when she writes:

India had arrived in the international markets. Airports on forest land, unprecedented scale of mining and highways through tiger reserves were the new order of the day. India was shining but at the cost of her wilderness and biodiversity... the country on an average was losing 333 acres of forest to coal mines, thermo-power plants and river valley projects every day, often based on faulty environment impact assessment reports. (p.16)

The above statement highlights the tussle between economic growth and development, and the crude exploitation of ecology. The very core reason for the degradation of biodiversity is the compromises made by the bureaucratic government through its negligence towards the preservation of natural resources while carrying on with the development projects. This lack of ecological vision, along with unsustainable development plans, is pushing the entire ecology towards doom. The detrimental development policies disregard the ecological welfare, further complicating the interrelation between all forms of life. Regarding the interconnectedness between human life and environment, Amit Pandey (2024) argues:

Ecocriticism paves the way to meet the purpose by examining the keen association of the environment with humans, literature, and culture. The ecocritics look for such a place

where they can see humans and nature coexist harmoniously without destroying the natural community per se. They want an ecological sphere where the human ego cooperates with environmental eco to ensure the safety of nature. (p. 9)

Ecocriticism, in this sense, makes an earnest appeal to make the earth hospitable to all forms, be it human or nonhuman forms, of life.

Dutt exposes the hypocrisies of the Indian government by unveiling the truth behind the mega development projects that bring about economic growth at the expense of rich biodiversity and the environment. She unmasks the brutality of men in power who designate the policies that seem innocuous but are in fact a tremendous threat to the ecology. In the chapter entitled *Reporting from the Wettest Place on Planet Earth*, Dutt delves deep into exploring how the virgin forest of Meghalaya is being ravaged and wrecked by the multinational cement factory. The so-called progress aims at defiling the pristine beauty of Nature. She asserts:

Across Meghalaya today, the forests, much like the village commons, are being over-exploited at an alarming rate. In no other state in India is illicit mining as brazen or as entrenched as it is here, with limestone mines virtually a cottage industry... I had documents with me which showed that a deliberate and wrongful classification of the rich forests as 'wasteland' had allowed a multinational mining company to get the requisite permits for mining. (pp. 37-38)

In order to expedite the development rate, the government overlooks the ecological impact of the development. The serenity and the enriching biodiversity are completely deteriorated. While describing the heavenly, natural beauty of Meghalaya, Dutt writes, "The biodiversity of this region is unparalleled; environmentalists have noted over 150 species of birds and over a hundred species of orchids" (p. 40). But tragically, there has been a steep decline in this number. Moreover, the reason behind this is attributed to massive deforestation being done by coal mining industries and limestone quarrying, which has eventually led to the drying of natural bodies. She substantiates her claims by presenting data from the EIA Resource Center, an environmental NGO based in New Delhi. She states:

... between the years 2006 and 2008, when India was at the peak of its economic frenzy, 1073 construction projects, 952 industrial projects and 587 mining projects were cleared by the MoEF. Only ten projects were rejected. The ministry had clearly abdicated its role as a watchdog. (p. 41)

This pathetic condition of the environment is the outcome of unethical and illicit infrastructural development. The unruly human activities have brought about an environmental catastrophe. In a quest for materialistic growth and development, human beings have staked their claim on Nature. The tyranny of human beings has brought forth grotesque environmental damage. The situation anticipated in *Green Wars* harrowingly reminds us of Peter Barry's statement when he states that "We are on a destructive – and ultimately self-destructive course" (2002, p. 29). In this context, it is a must to quote P. K. Nayar. He argues that "We live in a world increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry-sponsored bio-disaster. It is now a truism to say that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for life of any kind" (2015, p. 241). Barry and Nayar's view regarding the human-nature relationship is similar to the ecological concerns of Dutt. She harshly criticizes the unrelenting greed of humans that leads to the environmental damage. This maltreatment of the natural environment in the name of modernization is the force behind the disturbed, harmonious relation between humans and Nature.

Barry Commoner, while discussing ecology, says that "Everything is connected to everything else" (2020, p. 29), which means even a slight change in any of the ecological components is sure to impact other components. This interconnectedness between humans and ecology is the focal point of eco-criticism. Dutt resonates with this view by stating:

And as we progress through the day, every action of ours has an environmental cost. The light that we switch on comes from a thermal power plant built on the habitat of elephants in Chhattisgarh. The coffee that we drink comes from the home of leopard and ... gibbon and leopard in Assam. Biodiversity is closer to us than we imagine. (p. 45)

Dutt's thoughts are brimming with her reverence for Nature. She is a champion of green rights in a true sense. She details the causes and consequences of destruction in nature caused by human beings.

### **3.2 An Overview of Technocratic Environmentalism**

One of the radical issues that *Green Wars* raises is the concept of technocratic environmentalism. Dutt harshly criticises the so-called technocratic solutions to the overarching environmental problems. The seemingly hilarious remedies, such as relocating animals, constructing artificial habitats, or ignoring ground realities in favour of satellite data to overcome the ecological disasters that the government prescribes, make no sense. Dutt exposes the vile and callous nature of the bureaucratic institutions and governance that privilege development over environmental welfare.

*Green Wars* is a typical ecocritical dystopian non-fiction in which Dutt presents a dismaying picture of environmental degradation as a subsequent outcome of coveted desires of human beings to tame Nature. In a rush for material advancement, the human beings have started expropriating the natural resources creating a distressing situation of environmental crash. Dutt, while talking about the Vedanta's Aluminum Refinery Project, gives a shocking data revealing the bleak and grotesque reality of it. She writes:

... approximately 660 hectares of forest land would be clear-felled for mining bauxite from Niyamgiri. The Net Present value of the environmental cost of forests lost due to bauxite mining is estimated to be equal to approximately Rs 448 crore. The report then calculates the carbon emissions from the project: The alumina refinery will produce 250,000 tons of carbon dioxide annually... the easily quantifiable environmental cost is estimated to be around Rs 1,101 crore. (p. 102)

Ignoring these horrifying details of ecological disasters, the government is heading towards the modern materialistic civilization, but ultimately reaching a dreadful environmental crisis. Fitting tightly in the framework of environmental non-fiction, *Green Wars* portrays the increasingly fraught relation between Nature and human beings in this technologically and materialistically advanced period. Nature is placed under constant threat by the humans whose consumerism has reached its climax. Regarding the climate crisis caused by the capitalocene tendency of human, Nixon (2011) uses the term 'Slow Violence' – "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 2). Dutt's main argument is that the accelerated rate of development has overturned the whole ecosystem, proving it to be monstrous. Miffed at the atrocities of humans on ecology, she tries to awaken humans from the delusions of progress and the grandeur of mega-projects. Her ecological narrative is an eye-opening revelation of the rapid encroachment and destruction of Nature's treasures percolating through the modern period in the pretext of development. Making it a humdrum, the Anthropocene is successfully ruining the harmonious cohabitation of the environment and the people due to the malice of government

agendas regarding the mining industry in Goa. She aims to expose the dark secrets of the development projects that lead to environmental disaster. She pens down:

Goa's mining scourge is a serious one. According to a study by The Goa Foundation, by 2007 there were about seventy mines cleared for operation by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), which granted clearances without visiting any of the sites... Besides it is also the habitat of the great pied hornbill, the Indian leopard and giant squirrel. (pp. 107-108)

Her only motive is to expose how the rampant illegal mining has alarmingly destroyed the natural beauty of Goa. The negligence of the greedy government of Goa and capital monger people has ruined the integrity of the ecosystem. Historian Worster (1993) anticipates this idea in his quotation:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems functions. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (p. 27)

Worster, with a great precision, is suggestive of opting for eco-consciousness in the absence of which the reciprocity between humans and Nature is marred. Humans have always strived hard to find a convenient way to improve their material well-being, and for this, they have disrupted the natural flow of the environmental order. The human mind is under a false illusion that it is superior to Nature. However, it forgets it is virtually dependent upon the nature's support system, despite its rapid technological and scientific development.

*Green Wars* anticipates the revolutionary ecocritical ways to preserve the reciprocal relationship between humans and their ecology. Dutt denounces the hostile ways of progressing, and the aggressive and exploitative practices of humans towards Nature. She employs her travelogue as a medium to educate and awaken people. Her conclusion comes close to what Meeker (1972) states:

Literature should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. (pp. 3-4)

Through this speculative travelogue, Dutt talks about the insidious impact of deforestation in a world where infrastructural development does not foster sustainability but exacerbates the climatic crisis by confining and oppressing Nature's treasures. Achille Mbembe hits upon the head while discussing his concept of necro-politics- "the ability to decide who is allowed to live and who is condemned to die has become a function of state and corporate control" (2019, p. 42). Mbembe's remark is what Dutt implies in her writing. She dismantles the illusion that technological innovations and advancements lead to progress as she states:

Even a cursory glance at the statistics blows the cover on the mining industry's lofty claims: For every one percent that mining contributes to India's GDP, it displaces three to four times more people than all development projects put together (CSE report, 2008). Between 1991 and 2004 ... employment plummeted by 30 percent... turnover was Rs 830 crore... little as Rs 17 crore. Less than one percent of the state's revenue came from mining. (p. 117)

Dutt discards the eco-capital trend transforming the ecology into a commodity at the hands of humans. With these startling details, she pinpoints how the mega-projects for the development

need ramifications and scrutiny as the outright neoliberal control of bureaucratic government is inextricably inviting the devilish ecological crash.

### **3.3 Voicing out for Nonhuman Agency**

*Green Wars* is a sweeping indictment of anthropocentrism and ever rising modernity. Dutt strongly believes that the current environmental catastrophe is the cumulative effect of humans' estranged relationship with the nonhuman world. With the wake of modernity, there have been intensified ecological challenges and misplaced priorities which have altered the harmonious relation between humans and nonhuman agency, especially the animals and the ecosystem. The crux of Dutt's argument is to illustrate the adverse impact of burgeoning anthropocentric dominance over the other species and the fragile ecology. She constructs a narrative framework to reveal the nexus between human and non-human world that has disrupted the ecological harmony.

The human species has always been described by its rationality, but unfortunately, its rationality has been blurred by its coveted materialistic desires. In its herd of modernity, it has become oblivious to the fact that ecology is an integrated form of all human and nonhuman entities. Underrating and relegating the nonhuman species have become the order of this postmodern era. These rational beings, in their hubris, have started thinking of the nonhuman agencies like rivers, animals, mountains, forests, etc. as redundant. They have discarded the 'animistic view', silencing and muting the identity of these nonhuman agencies, which are rather valuable and significant. Aptly quoting Aquinas, O. Lovejoy states:

The goodness of the species transcends the goodness of the individual, as form transcends matter; therefore, the multiplication of species in greater addition to the good of the universe than the multiplication of individuals of a single species. The perfection of the universe therefore requires not only a multitude of individuals, but also diverse kinds and therefore diverse grade of things. (1936, p.76)

Aquinas, here, reverses the claim that *Homo sapiens* are the emblem of reason and are thus superior in the stratum of species, and the nonhuman agencies are at the nadir. In the natural cosmos, to privilege intellectually viable beings over nonhuman agencies based on superiority makes no sense at all. *Green Wars* objectively depicts this dichotomy between the appreciation of the so-called worthy humans and the eclipsing, depreciation, and objectification of the nonhuman world. Dutt reiterates and clamors for the preservation and privileging of the nonhuman agencies as they perform the crucial task of maintaining balance in the ecosphere. *Green Wars* sparks a similar debate and speaks aloud to decenter the general thought by recognizing the worth of nonhuman agency. Dutt's insistence upon the preservation of India's rich biodiversity contributes to the critical reevaluation of the coercive methods used by humans to control other species. Her words testify her stance about the critically endangered crocodilian gharial found around the Chambal riverbed. She reports:

In these pristine waters, the “unicorns” of the river, the gharials, have done well. The Chambal hosts the largest population of these reptiles. Once found in India, Pakistan, Nepal ... are now extinct from most of these areas ... its sandy banks were being plundered.... But a sand mining mafia was operating here, disturbing their habitat. By midday, the trucks arrived in large numbers. One by one, they lined up next to the river bed and the scooping out of sand began. I saw at least 40-50 trucks lined up, and they multiplied as the day progressed. This was blatant plunder, right in the heart of a wildlife Sanctuary. (pp. 27-28)

The instances of invasion and destruction of the natural habitat of the nonhuman species by humans were staggering. The mental vacuity and short-sightedness of human beings are the central reasons for the dwindling number of Species. Predicting the possible environmental disaster, Arnold Toynbee, a famous English historian, has gloomily stated that:

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. (1976, p.9)

What lies at the depth of the argument is that a deep meditation is required for the human species that has grown apathetic towards their fellow nonhuman beings, and making the whole biodiversity suffer for it. Sheffer rightly asserts that environmental degradation is not a mere crisis, and quotes Lord Ashby saying that "a crisis is a situation that will pass; it can be resolved by temporary hardship, temporary adjustment, technological and political expedients. What we are experiencing is not a crisis, it is a climacteric" (1989, p.100). The environmental cataclysm and disturbed ecological order is framed by the ego-centric nature of Homo sapiens, who have diminished the natural growth of other non-human species. These nonhuman agencies of biodiversity have been tormented and abused due to the over ambition of humans for consumerism. The horrific angst-ridden upheaval has traumatised the zoological universe. The destruction of natural habitat and decline in the food and security has brought about a horrible situation for these voiceless creatures. Unable to cope with the rapid changes in the ecosystem, many of the creatures are becoming extinct and decreasing in number. The disturbances that are created by the acts of progress in the Nature's order act as an extortion for the meek creatures. Making dams by distorting the flow of a river, establishing mining industries in the Sanctuary, constructing concrete roads through the forest, conducting soil mining on the river banks and earmarking wetland as the proposed site for building an airport and other material expansion have threatened the existence of the nonhuman creatures by hampering their natural survival. The case of Mulayam Singh's whim to build an airport in the district of Etawah is not only bizarre but also an act of sheer improvidence. Staking a whole breed of Saras in the pursuit of advantage by manipulating the ecological law is the pinnacle of debasement. The pristine forest, the landscapes, and the mountains are the treasures of ecosystem and these endowments should be preserved, not violated.

The human world is rapidly pacing towards its doomsday by making irreversible alterations in Nature's tangible and intangible components. The brutal and merciless plundering of the Nature's glory in order to undergo a radical transformation for human cult displays the ongoing onslaught on Nature. Dutt gives ample evidence of how the meek, voiceless, and nonhuman creatures are facing a horrendous exploitation and abuse by human beings. Talking about the critically endangered hog deer, she pens down:

The state of Haryana known for its glitzy shopping malls and call centres juxtaposed with lathi-wielding farmers, had, usually, one sanctuary dedicated to this animal. The Saraswati Wildlife Sanctuary, home to at least 200 hog deer, was facing a threat from Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda's plans to construct an irrigation canal... The intention was noble, except that the government didn't bother to take permissions from the environment ministry...last section passes through the sanctuary, spread over 4,452 hectares in Kurukshetra and Kaithal district, in February 2007, without the required clearances. (79-80)



The case of the hog deer is just a passing reference for the rational human being who overshadows the basic requirements of their fellow creatures. Felling over trees, ploughing through the Sanctuary, blatant violation of the Wildlife Protection Act, is of little value to humans.

Human beings have unmindfully exploited Nature on an enormous scale, and this rash endeavor contributes to the suffering of nonhuman agencies. The homo sapiens' ignorance about the crucial role of the nonhuman entities in the balancing of ecosystem is quite baffling. They are still ignorantly blind to the fact that even the slightest disorder in any one of the ecological processes can bring about a phenomenal change in any part of the Earth. Factors like acceleration of globalization, flourishing of technology, population explosion, deforestation, etc. have weakened the harmonious relation between human and nonhuman agencies. A sordid reminder of the inhumanity of the reckless human class is justified by Dutt with her testimony of the declining number of Orangutans.

When forest land is acquired for palm oil, trees are clear-felled and wood debris is burnt in the orang-utans' habitat. Typically, the companies responsible for 'clearing' the forest hire hunters to slaughter the remaining orang-utans, who have not already been burned to death during the fires ... illegally funneled into the international black market where they are left to the mercy of middlemen until they reach their... Almost 80 to 100 percent of the native flora and fauna just die out. (pp. 126-127)

The above-mentioned statement is a morbid exhibition of humans' atrocious behavior towards nonhuman creatures. Dutt's concern is similar to that of Kim Fortuny when he writes that "human communities marginalize animal communities due to misguided notions of progress, and in marginalizing them drive them toward extinction" (2014, p. 289). Expanding the idea of rupture of ecological balance and the violence that permeates the lives of so many nonhuman agencies by the trespassing corporate encroachment, Dutt brings to knowledge what Shiva calls "the human tendency of being anesthetized to ecological destruction" (Slovic, 2015, p.183).

The overall motive of Dutt in *Green Wars* is to make human beings aware of their follies that are creating havoc in nonhuman world. She criticizes the humans' addiction to consumerism and sophistication that has deteriorated the ecosystem as a whole. Flummoxed by the derelict behavior of human beings, King says:

A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants must maintain diversity. Ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution. Biological simplification i.e., the wiping out of whole species corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer market... Therefore, we need a de-centralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. (1989, p.20)

Reverberating King's idea, Dutt's writing insists on the critical re-imagination of the human-Nature relation that gives a genuine place for the other biological and non-biological elements of the ecosystem.

### **3.4 Framing Eco Precarity and Environmental Justice**

*Green Wars* minutely posits the growing vulnerability of nonhuman species and eco-system. The econarrative addresses the fragile situation of life forms that humans have victimized. Dutt has expressed her apprehensions over the increasing entanglement of human lives with technology, which is giving impetus to a dreadful scenario of a dystopian world where humans as well as

nonhumans are leading precarious lives in this era of ecological disaster. For this kind of situation, Nayar (2019) uses the term “eco-precarity” and writes that:

... ecoprecarity is at once about the precarious lives humans lead in the event of ecological disaster – witness Katrina, Fukushima, the tsunami and, of course, Bhopal and Chernobyl – and also about the environment itself which is rendered precarious due to human intervention in the Anthropocene. (p. 7)

*Green Wars* speaks about and resists the vulnerability occasioned by the modernity's appropriation of Nature and the onslaught of petroculture. Dutt narrativizes the ecological precarity prevalent in the contemporary time of ecological crisis. She addresses the urgent issues of deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and loss of indigenous culture. She warns us against the ill-treatment done against the ecology and the subsequent ecoprecarity. In the wake of modernity, the degradation of ecosystems, along with the destruction of habitats, climate, and Nature, is a significant concern. Ecoprecarity focuses on the precariousness of all forms of life prevalent in the ecosystem due to ecological disruption like pollution, climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, etc. The dimensions of ecoprecarity range from the dire consequences of ecological disasters, interconnectedness between human and nonhuman elements in the environment, to the marginalization of indigenous classes. The initial chapter of *Green Wars* is based on the precariousness of the indigenous snake charmers who were suffering and living a miserable life due to unemployment. Dutt affirms:

This community, once revered for its magical skills, now lived on the edge of poverty, facing arrases and seizures of their snakes. They knew no other way to earn a living. Once enjoying an almost god-like states for their ability to charm deadly snakes ... (p. 3)

This vulnerable state of Saperas (snake charmers) touches one crucial aspect of ecoprecarity – the marginalisation of poor clans in the age of ecological crisis. The way these ‘snake charmers’ were derogatorily labelled as ‘green criminals’ testifies to ecological injustice towards them as they are forbidden to enjoy their natural and inherent ability to cope with Nature. Dutt even talks about another traditional community – a hunting community of Rajasthan known as the ‘Bawarias’. These people were given notorious title of ‘thieves’ and ‘poachers’. Due to this stigmatization, they are made to live in a deplorable and pitiable situation. They faced humiliation, regular beating, and false arrest and were forced to engage in drudgery. This marginalisation is what Nixon calls the impact of environmental destruction. The declining tiger population is directly associated with the poverty-stricken Bawarias. Rob Nixon aptly mirrors this sentiment in his argument: “It is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence. Their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives” (2011, p. 4). The displacement and marginalization of indigenous people and the denial of their customary rights are all the outrageous outcomes of ecoprecarity. Dutt comes forth in support of the tribal people who are local guardians of biodiversity. She even proposes environmental sustainability in collaboration with social justice. Dutt relates the protest of Dongriyas Konds against the Vendanta mine industry to the ecological justice. To quote Dutt:

The fear for the tribals is that mining on this plateau will drastically reduce the water retention capacity of the hills... The Niyamgiri forests are home to over twenty species of amphibians, nineteen species of lizards, and twenty-two species of snakes and are a haven... The forest and its plant diversity are clearly providing sustenance not just to the tribals but also hundreds of wild animals. (pp. 99-100)

The way the tribals are deprived of their rights and habitat is making the situation more aggravated and precarious.

### *Nature under siege: An ecocritical reading of Bahar Dutt's Green Wars*

The modern men, with the help of modern technology, are indiscriminately engaged in the act of ecological disasters. In the pursuit of aggrandizing more power, wealth, and comfort, human beings have stacked the biodiversity that has, in turn, magnified the precarity of the environment and ecosystem. The lofty lifestyle of human beings has risked the whole ecosystem, which is eventually leading towards a more precarious future. The technological advancement like fuel-guzzling machines, medicines, roads, electricity, etc. is stemming up a rift between Nature and people inhabiting it. The venomous scientific progress is producing a world of dust, smoke, filth, disease and debris. Such a world is nearly a death-warrant not only for natural things but even the bossy human beings. With the escalation of ecological catastrophe, what has accelerated vis-à-vis is precarity. The impending disaster as a product of foolish human acts is haunting the ecosystem. Remarking on the imprudence of humans, Rachel Carson writes:

The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognised partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world the very nature of its life. (1999, p. 23)

The chain of evils that Carson talks about is the excessive use of biocides that are ruining the environment and pushing it towards a desolate future. The alarmingly degrading environment, decreasing bio-species, and polluted natural resources become the nodal point for precariousness. Dutt, through her serious interaction with the head of the Indian scientists, Dr S. Rajan, explains that "the entire global atmosphere was like a huge conveyor belt. So, what happened in the Arctic could affect the monsoons in our country" (p.155). This interconnectedness is a prominent issue in the concept of ecoprecarity. The precarity not only concentrates on the relegation of the ecosystem and its profound impacts on humans as well as nonhumans but also suggests alternative measures to mitigate the destruction of the environment by shifting our locus from anthropocentrism to ecocentricism. Adopting ecocentrism means assigning intrinsic worth to all living and non-living things that contribute to the smooth running of the ecosystem and ecosphere. One of the noted theorists, Bookchin argues:

Ecological wholeness is not an immutable homogeneity but rather the very opposite — a dynamic unity of diversity. In nature, balance and harmony are achieved by ever-changing differentiations, by ever-expanding diversity. Ecological stability, in effect, is a function not of simplicity and homogeneity but of complexity and variety. The capacity of an eco-system to retain its integrity depends not on the uniformity of the environment but on its diversity. (1982, p.24)

The wholeness that Bookchin underpins is what Dutt is trying to elucidate to the readers. She gives a stern warning against the gory plunder of Nature and implores to preserve the wholeness of the ecosphere.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

*Green Wars*, an enthralling masterpiece of Bahar Dutt, is an eco-critical intervention that exposes the dismaying picture of environmental contradictions of the current time. The travelogue comprises several journalistic essays that illuminate the persistent degradation of the environment on a limitless scale. Reaching over the most complicated issues of ecological disasters, Dutt solicits the readers to rethink the issues of development, ecological integrity, and preservation of biodiversity, and the indigenous knowledge about ecosystem. Dutt's cautionary tales make her a vital figure among the ecocritics as she reminds humans that the injustices and

the harm they are doing against Nature are, in fact, the harm against themselves. So, it is imperative to reformulate their relationship with Nature and prevent the green planet from being extinct. The stories in *Green Wars* challenge the conventional binary between conservation and development, urging a rethinking of how progress is defined. Dutt's work ultimately serves as a call to action, emphasizing that environmental sustainability and human rights must go hand in hand. Her conclusion is clear: if we are to protect our vanishing world, we must reconcile ecological wisdom with inclusive growth, fostering a development model that is both equitable and ecologically resilient.

Dutt exposes how ecological concerns are often sidelined in the name of economic progress. Dutt brings to light the voices of tribal communities, forest dwellers, and environmental activists, giving them space in a discourse typically dominated by policymakers and industrialists. In doing so, she reveals the deeply entrenched eco-political conflicts—what she terms the “green wars”—that define India's environmental landscape today.

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