

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF NATURE AND MAN: AN ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE NOVEL LORD OF THE FLIES

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ABSTRACT

In examining the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world, this study delves into the exploration conducted by the author of "*Lord of the Flies*." Through a comprehensive textual analysis, the paper scrutinizes both explicit and implicit connections between man and nature as portrayed in the novel. By applying the lens of eco-criticism, the study evaluates the ecological consciousness depicted within the characters of the boys stranded on the island. The analysis of pivotal events within the narrative unveils a poignant conclusion: human civilization often precipitates the degradation of the natural environment. This research holds significant implications as it paves the way for a novel approach to interpreting literary works from ecological perspectives, thus broadening the scope of literary analysis.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, relationship, *Lord of the Flies*

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism explores literature-nature-relationship (Gltofelty, 1993). It studies a text from earth-centered approach and asserts the moral questions regarding interaction of humans with nature in literatures regardless of any specificity. According to Reukert (1978), Eco-criticism explores the relation of literature and environment. It studies that human beings through their acts bring about their own ruin by destroying the balance between them.

Ecocriticism is connected to ecology since the theory in literary studies was introduced as man and his environment are interdependent and interrelated in more than one way. Ecology, according to New Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2010), is the relationship of man and plants with each other and to their environment. All things in the universe are interdependent on one another. Man and nature, for instance, depends on one another for their protection and existence.

William Ruekert introduces the term 'ecocriticism' for the first time. He makes man realize the importance of the factors related to ecosystem that are linked to his theory. The sad part is that humans are anthropocentric and not bio-centric (Reukert,

1978, p.113) Anthropocentric placing human needs first; the other being bio-centric who advocate the importance of nature and hence places nature first against the human"(Reukert, 1978, p. 116).

Ecocriticism has its root in two major schools of thought in English literature: The American Transcendentalists and British Romantics. In The Natural History of Selborne for instance, Gilbert White (1789) notes that extreme hunting had abolished local members of partridges and red deer. Eminent romantic writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelly have taken this subject in distinct ways. Wordsworth praises nature in "Tintern Abbey" (1798) as never a failing friend but a nurse, a teacher, and a healer. Coleridge in his famous poem, "The Rime of Ancient Mariner" (1798), forbids the mariner to kill the bird as soul of the environment. Ecocriticism focuses on the protection of birds and animals, (Rajesh, 2014, p. 204).

In William Golding's novel, "*Lord of the Flies*," boys aged 6 to 12 find them stranded on a deserted island after their plane crashes (Golding, 1954). There is no adult human on the island and it is in its very natural

form. The boys start living there, but after some time problems begin to appear. There begins rivalry among them on the election of the head and they are afraid of a beast somewhere on the island. They decide to light fire as a signal to the passing ships but Jack, jealous of Ralph's power, decides the boys should devote their energies to hunting pigs instead of maintaining fire. They also start polluting and destroying nature which is intact till then. The longer they are on the island, the more savage they become. Slowly their dormant and latent evils begin to surface. They become blood-thirsty of one another. They put out the burned fire, ignoring its importance, as the ships pass by the island at that time without noticing them. By now, they are celebrating a party of pig hunt. It's all frenzied reenactment of the pig hunt until Simon, still bloody, sweaty, stumbles down into the center of the crazy boys. He tries to tell them about the beast but the boys jabs him with spears until he is dead. His body is washed away by the sea. It's all downhill from here. Jack and his fellows attack Piggy and Ralph to steal Piggy's glasses and in the meantime Roger pushes a huge boulder off a cliff, killing Piggy. Ralph ends up running for his life, followed by Jack and his crew. At that time, a naval officer comes there to rescue them all.

During this exploration, it is revealed how nature and man affect each other; how man affects nature and is affected by nature in return. The novel discusses the ecological consciousness conveyed through the storyline by William Golding. Pastoral Ecology is the best tool in the light of which one can examine the eco-critical side of the *Lord of the Flies* and is considered as the fundamental principle of environmentalism and eco-critical reading.

Objective

1. To explore the relationship between humans and nature as represented by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies*.

Research Question

1. What is the role of the physical environment of the novel *Lord of the Flies* in conveying ecological consciousness?

Literature Review

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," (Birkerts, 1994, p. 32). Glotfelty then establishes the scope of

'ecocriticism' by asking "How is nature represented in this sonnet?" Or: "Are the values in this play consistent with ecological wisdom?" Or: "In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world?," (Birkerts, 1994, p. 33). According to Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Haise, and Karen (1998), ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s to draw a relationship between nature and humans in literary works. They opine that literature can provide a good sense of the human activities that cause degradation of nature and increase creative thinking in the people to understand the urgency of the problem in the current age of industrialization.

Ecocriticism takes into account the concept from different disciplines to make itself one of the intriguing fields of inquiry about nature. The close reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) suggests that the Mother Nature provides for everything that the boys in the lone island need. However, the boys, in return, become the source of destruction of nature as in the case of the host animal in the parasitic relationship. (Killingsworth & Palmer, 2012).

The relationship between men and nature and the impacts of this relationship on culture is analyzed in length by Elizabeth Deloughrey, Renee K. Gosson, and Goerge B. Handley (2010) in their book *Caribbean Literature and Environment: Between Nature and Culture*. They argue that white settlements and their subsequent colonial activities have altered the Caribbean landscape and consequently, the whole history of Caribbean culture. The interaction between nature and men in the white colonists' regime became completely different and the whole narrative is subsequently affected by it.

Pedreira blames the natural environment for the subjugation of the people of Puerto Rico. According to him, the diminutive environment of the island has left its inhabitants with no options other than being patient. In the words of Antonio Pedreira: "Isolation and diminutive geography have condemned us to live in perpetual submission, having as our only defense not aggression but patience," (Pedreira, 1934, p. 115). Hence, the physical environment has a greater impact on humans than the scholars prior to the 1990s would have thought. The geography of any particular region determines its history and hence, its culture, too. Later scholars attribute the colonization of the West Indies to its natural environment, as according to them, the islands were only suitable for

violence and sugar plantation. They deem the colonization of the West Indies as the natural consequence of its geography, as Elizabeth Deloughrey, Renee K. Gosson, and Goerge B. Handley in their book (2010) write: "there were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: the size of the islands called for nothing else," (114).

Ecocriticism found its way in American studies when the attention was shifted to cultural studies. The shift in attention was due to the remarkable success of globalization, which has led American literary scholars to traverse the history of the American culture and the role of the natural environment in shaping the cultural traditions. In her words: "Environmentally oriented literary and cultural studies, or ecocriticism for short, emerged as a new field just before this shift toward the transnational assumed its full force," (Heise, 2016, p. 37). She has made an interesting point that environmentalists have resisted the trend of globalization, yet they were lured by the term diversity that globalization will bring to the cultural and environmental studies. However, Heise opines that despite the growing trend of globalization, specific local theories and practices find its ways to ecocriticism.

Gijanjali Gogoi has analyzed Chinua Achebe's fiction in her study *An Ecocritical Approach to Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God*. The article examines the difference in relationship between men and nature in pre-colonial Africa and colonial Africa. Gogoi states that the relationship between African people and nature during the White colonial regime was based on alienation as African people were forced to interact with nature the way colonial masters wanted them to interact. The value of the sense of affection with one's natural environment is expressed in the article: "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity," (Gogoi, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, African people during the colonial regime were divorced from their natural surroundings; consequently, the feeling of alienation overpowered the African people during the European colonization of Africa. The article highlights the social norms of African people, which they strictly observed in their interaction with nature. As expressed by Gogoi in her article: "In the first place, mention must be made of the different individual and community activities observed in different seasons. Igbo maintained strict

rules during the planting and harvest seasons," (Gogoi, 2018, p. 2). Hence, there were native rules for the course of interaction between man and nature. However, the arrival of the European colonists had disrupted the natural course of interaction, which ultimately resulted in the feeling of alienation of the African people from their natural environment.

Research Methodology

While taking a critical lens (of eco-criticism) about the inter-relationship of man and nature, it also describes the events of the novel as seen from the ecological perspective. As the story represents an incessant struggle between the colliding factors of man and nature and how man often corrupts the environment around us, the ecocritical lens was the best choice.

The methodology of the study consists of qualitatively looking at the text of the novel through an ecocritical lens. There is not much space for a quantitative measurement in this study. The whole study has taken place in the qualitative ambit. As per Steckler (2019) and Collins and Stockton (1978), since there is lesser space for numbers, figures, facts, and tables in such a paradigm, centrality is given to theory instead. In this context, the theory of ecocriticism has been the guiding star for the analysis of the text of the novel. The themes related to the interrelationship of man with nature, of man's impact on nature, and man's anthropocentric views have been looked at from the perspective of the theory of eco-criticism. The analysis in accordance with such a methodological stance has been conducted to explore how the abrasive humanly element has been presented in the novel *Lord of the Flies*.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework of the study comes from the critical approach broadly, and the eco-critical one specifically. The compound word 'eco-criticism' was put forth by William Ruekert in 1978 in his work *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Eco-criticism analyses literary texts in a way that it brings out the concerns related to the environment and analyzes the different ways that a piece of literature deals with the subject of nature and man relationship with it.

Technique for Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the methodology of textual analysis has been used. The textual analysis

done in this study is thematic, and not linguistic per se. Textual analysis for thematic analysis is a technique in qualitative research in which language is analysed to obtain data about the experiences and attitudes of people (Weber-Fève, 2014, pp. 453-467). In textual analysis, the text of the novel provides clues to the themes and symbols in the novel which can be analyzed under the umbrella of a specific theory.

Content Analysis and Discussion

The setting of the novel is an isolated island. It is hardly accessible to the common people. The island is still full of the resources which are necessary for sustaining life. When the kids find the conch, they feel that they are the only humans on the island and there they think that they need a leader. "Seems to me we ought to have a chief to decide things," (Golding, 1954, p. 15). Ralph is a natural choice as his father is a naval officer. So he seems to be a trained boy for the leadership role. He is good by nature and is sympathetic too to the people around him. He, after being elected, immediately assigns Jack the duty of providing food to the entire community.

To explore the island and to find something to fulfill their needs, Ralph, Jack and Simon, play the role of explorers and eventually find themselves on a lovely tropical island, without human habitation, with logs, cliffs, mountains and a jungle. They are ecstatic as they know the island belongs to them owing to the fact that there is no other human being. In the words of the narrator: They were awe-struck by the beauty of the place and overjoyed by the idea that they were the sole inhabitants of the place.

Unoccupied, rich in fruit, the island seems a kind of magical world. Ralph happily looked at the nest: "like icing on a pink cake," (Golding, 1954, p. 27). Another main character, Simon thinks the evergreen shrubs "Like candles. Candle bushes, Candle buds," (Golding, 1954, p. 32). The basis of the novel is a feeling of intimacy and familiarity with the mysterious natural world. Describing the natural environment, which is there, the writer, depicts the island as a continent which is quite far from the human beings, untouched by them and safe so far. The signs of civilization and the destruction they bring is to be found nowhere throughout the island: "The shore was overgrown with palm trees. These stood or leaned or reclined against the light and their

green feathers were a hundred feet up in the air," (Golding, 1954, p.4).

The link between humans and extrinsic nature exists only in the process of providing food to them so that they may satiate their hunger. Obviously, understanding ecology is essential for any discussion on human-nature relationship, because the new recognition of man as a biological entity depends on the existence of Earth for survival. The wealth of the island is related to the rich food for children. There are acres of fruit trees: "less energetic people can find an easy if unsatisfying meal," (Golding, 1954, p. 61). The relationship between children and external nature develops through daily reminders of human dependence on the natural world and the ability to enjoy an undiscovered natural beauty. They are well aware of their natural environment and their relationship with the objects around: They became ecstatic when they became conscious of the beauty and serenity of the island. This sense of awareness has been summed up by Freedman in these words: "The psychological notion of sensibility becomes the epistemological notion of cognition; the aesthetic problem of objectifying internal perception in art becomes the existential problem of identity," (Freedman, 2018).

Environmental ethics are of the perspective that all living creatures are part of nature. Humans are the most intelligent in nature. The relationship between humankind and nature has assorted from the early periods of man on earth to the present day. The environment is stirring the life of man right from the start. In the same way, man is stirring the nature through different actions. The co-existence of man and nature is interdependent. The latter delivers basic aura of life on earth; provides the essential comfort to mankind.

When one sits down to sift through the contents page of the novel it becomes evident that physical environment is going to play a major role in the plot. The different chapters are named in a way that they highlight the different aspects of the nature vs man debate. For instance, the first chapter is named 'The Sound of the Shell'. This refers to the sound of the conch shell the boys find on the island and which is used to assemble all of them. Thus, at least at the start, the early relationship between man and nature is shown to be favorable as a gift from nature i.e. the conch shell is being used to gather the boys up and to save them from individual annihilation. The name of the second chapter i.e. 'Fire on the Mountain' seems

more ominous as one sees the interaction of man with nature gaining momentum. 'Huts on the Beach' signifies how the boys come to be comfortable in the lap of nature away from the watchful gaze of their elders. The beach gives them respite from the supposedly dangerous forest so they install themselves there. Next, 'Painted Faces and Long Hair' signifies how being in the lap of nature brings out their embryonic passions as they pat their faces just as the ancient people did. The face-painting and letting their hair grow is symbolic here since the author seems to represent man as devoid of civilization's effect (the reason for choosing young illiterate boys) and nature as devoid of intrusion until that point (the reason for selecting a serene island as the setting). As the story goes on, one is forced to think that this is how ancient man had viewed nature. The next two chapters 'Beast from Water' and 'Beast from Air' signify tension building up. The next chapter 'Shadows and Tall Trees' is proof of how the immensity and force of nature is gripping the boys in its fold. Thereafter, 'Gift for the Darkness' is a harbinger of darker times on the island to come. 'A view to a Death' signifies the innate brutality of man surfacing as the inner brute passions of the boys result in the death of a boy. Lastly, the 'Cry of the Hunters' ends the story by seemingly referring to the defeat of man as the naval officers come to rescue them and they cry uncontrollably

Conclusion

The whole novel is a critique of how man exploits nature. Golding, by putting a group of young British boys on an island highlights the contrast between man and nature. The fact that the boys are young and the island is also an epitome of natural beauty divorced from the outside world is significant. The story leaves the reader wondering at how children can descend into a show of darkness. An eco-critical reading of the text shows how the universal binaries of evil and good, man and nature, and nature and culture unfold. Through human and natural symbols (and sometimes and amalgamation of the two), Golding leaves the readers aghast at the brutality which man can inflict upon the nature around him. In the island, which initially is just a place to be occupied, becomes an area to be colonized, demarcated, and molested afterwards. Even though the boys are the most active members in the novel, one cannot deny the influence of the immense island (and thus nature itself). The island is the setting for

the story of the novel. Its highlights and contours serve the purpose of pushing the story forward. Although it is the same island that the boys landed on, the fact that such havocs are wreaked upon the island is evidence of Golding's opinion that man has a corrupting influence on everything surrounding him. Thus, the whole novel is a vivid reminder of one's own choices in relation to the environment and a bell of precaution for readers. It makes one ponder on the choices that one has been making and which one often takes for granted. Studying the novel from eco-critical angle makes sense because if the novel is read without any such lens, the readers would just be left wondering what Golding meant by showing a descent into violence of a group of boys. On the other hand, eco-critical reading opens one's eyes to the symbolism of man and nature present in the novel. The novel represents the equation between man and nature in a sinister way and brings out ecological consciousness among people by charting the path of the group of boys in juxtaposition with nature. The critique of the anthropocentrism of the English culture in the novel is implied throughout the novel and the same has been made explicit through the above analysis.

The current study helps to pave the way for future researchers to go forward in the field not only to find new things related to ecocritical theory but also all others like queer theory, psychoanalytical theory etc. This way they will be able to add something new and unique to the existing body of literary field.

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