

## Pakistani Postgraduate Students' Perceptions of Ecocriticism in Relation to Two Novels

Ghulam Yasin<sup>1</sup>

Zoobia Abbas Khan<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*The present research study investigates postgraduate students' perceptions of ecocriticism in relation to two novels at a private-sector university in Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. The study is based upon the major research question: 'what perceptions of ecocriticism are held by a sample of postgraduate students in south Punjab, Pakistan?' Glotfelty's theory of ecocriticism was utilized as the theoretical framework guiding this study. The research instrument for collecting data was semi-structured interviews. The findings are based on data supplied by eight participants doing their M. Phil (postgraduate degree) in English literature. The main findings of this study are that the participants discussed and connected to ecocriticism and its themes in the novels that were close in terms of their personal experiences and context. However, no reference was found from the literature reviewed presenting students' perception of ecocriticism in a Pakistani context. The findings of the research are important for teachers and researchers of ecocriticism, fiction, and education because they present considerable insights into the perceptions of students in relation to fiction.*

Keywords: Perceptions, ecocriticism, fiction, Pakistan, postgraduate

### 1. Introduction

The present study explores postgraduate students' perceptions of ecocriticism in relation to two novels studied in the English department of a private-sector university in south Punjab, Pakistan. Hopefully, the study will contribute to perceiving ecocriticism on the basis of context and experiences gained through literature. It is hoped to commence the possibility of

---

<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, University of Sindh, Jamshoro Pakistan. ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8640-2945> E-mail:

[ghulam.yasin@scholars.usindh.edu.pk](mailto:ghulam.yasin@scholars.usindh.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer in English, COMSATS University Islamabad, Vehari Campus, Pakistan

E-mail: [zoobia@cuivehari.edu.pk](mailto:zoobia@cuivehari.edu.pk)

investigating the students' perceptions of ecocriticism through literature at the university level in south Punjab, Pakistan.

The two novels included in this research were: *The God of Small Things* (Roy, 1997), and *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958). The study was based on a research question: 'what perceptions of ecocriticism are held by a sample of postgraduate students in Pakistan?' The major objectives of this study were to investigate whether the postgraduate Pakistani students' perceived themes of ecocriticism were visible in the two novels and; if so, how they connected them with their experiences and observations of the surroundings. The research study is not aimed at finding some causal connections between fiction and students' perceptions; it rather investigates students' perceptions of two selected themes of ecocriticism: human relations with nature and culture and nature. Ecocriticism, being broader in themes, the selected two themes are the basic components of Glotfelty's (1996) framework. The choice was made with the purpose to delimit the research study. However, as the research study is focused on postgraduate students' responses, reader-response theory (Rosenblatt 1938/1970, 1978/1994) was added to accomplish the framework.

### **1.1 Context**

Multan, like other districts of Punjab, consists of a population with a mixed culture and languages. The majority of people are of Saraiki and Punjabi ethnicity, and their major profession is farming. Geographically, the area is surrounded by the river Chanab, which adds to its charm. Mango farming and the Shrines of Multan are famous throughout the world. So, the relationship of people with the land and nature is unbroken.

The participants of the study were enrolled in a two-year (postgraduate studies) M. Phil in the English literature programme. The particular private-sector university follows the curriculum given by the Higher Education Commission Pakistan. At this level, fiction, postcolonial literature, and world literature are taught as different subjects. Therefore, English literature taught at the postgraduate level is rich and diverse in its nature. The two novels, including the study, are part of the curriculum. *The God of Small Things* (Roy, 1997) is taught in the module of world literature; however,

*Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) is included in the module of postcolonial literature.

It was observed during the class that the theme of ecocriticism in fiction was not elaborated on or discussed during the lecture. But the students were well aware of the term because they had already studied it as a theory in the module on 'Literary Theories' or for their research projects.

### **1.2 The selection of novels**

The selection of two novels for this research project was based on a pilot study (as suggested by Syed, 2018). Five students were selected for the discussion. They were asked to share the themes of ecocriticism as they perceived them in any of the novels. However, their choice should be from the fiction included in their postgraduate curriculum. Most of the students narrated the themes of ecocriticism from two novels: *The God of Small Things* and *Things Fall Apart*. So, these two novels were selected for the present study.

*The God of Small Things* is about the Indian green village of Ayemenem, where the river Meenachal flows. The novel exhibits the exploitation of nature in the hands of human characters at the cost of human development (Mishra, 2016). Roy is not only a renowned author but an “eco-entrepreneur” because she makes the readers aware of the protection of nature and its elements through her writings (Premalatha & Lourdes, 2018). *Things Fall Apart*, on the other hand, depicts the local African culture's attachment to nature and natural elements. The nature in *Things Fall Apart* not only provides the environment where the local Africans breathe, but a religion in Igbo culture (Kumar, 2021). The lives of Africans in the novel revolve around nature. Their social norms, economics, culture, festivals, and even their religion are inseparable from nature (Thakur, 2020).

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Transactional Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) alongside Glotfelty's (1996) theory of ecocriticism was taken as a theoretical framework. Reader response theory was to help the research participants make their perceptions of ecocriticism.

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) considers the text "as an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols" (p. 23). It never means that these 'marks' or 'symbols' do not contain any meanings, but the response of the reader towards these produce meanings. This meaning-making process is two-way and she calls it a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1986). This transaction is not a passive but an active process whereby they both affect each other. In this way, the students' perception of the text or novel is always guided by their personal experiences and knowledge. Reader response theory also counters the "Lockean Philosophy", which speaks of the fixed meanings of the text (Wilson, 2020). This rejection is because every individual reader has their own experiences and knowledge. Resultantly, a varied interpretation of the same text is produced by various readers (Endrawati, 2018).

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) presents two styles of reading: efferent or informational reading, where the focus of a reader is on "the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem". Second, aesthetic reading focuses on "what the reader is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 24). Many other kinds of readers may also "fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum", but their major objective is attached to one of the two kinds during the reading process (Syed, 2020, p. 477). Moreover, the reader adopting an aesthetic style "reads primarily for pleasure as opposed to reading for information" (Chiang et al., 2020, p. 142). Consequently, the perception or interpretation of the novel is influenced by the reading style of a reader. Furthermore, these discussed factors of Rosenblatt's theory guided me in developing the research question.

Alongside Rosenblatt, Glotfelty's model of ecocriticism (1996) was also chosen as a framework to explain the elements that constitute the theory of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is "the study of relationships between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). It also presents the "interrelationship between human beings and environment". Moreover, it also portrays the shift of perceptions from human-driven interests to bio-centric interests in the modern world (Guha, 2022, p. 10). It also encourages readers to become more aware of the sustainable physical environment portrayed in contemporary literature. It demands an "eco-critic eye" from the reader to enhance awareness about ever increasing environmental crises.

Glotfelty (1996) argues that the concerns in literature have been directed towards the issues of gender, class distinction, and racism in the past, and ecocriticism has been ignored in the field of research. This ignorance made the readers' awareness limited to these issues, and they now refrain from adopting the earth-centered systems. Saraswathi and Balakrishnan (2021) focus upon the induction of ecocriticism in contemporary literature because it would enhance the readers' perceptions towards the issues related to the environment and also inspire them to work for its restoration. Moreover, the objective of ecocriticism (as defined by Hou, Kang & Xu, 2022) is to map the issues related to the environment in literary texts. Such literary studies would add to readers' perceptions of ecology and they would become more responsible for their environment. So, the current study based on participants' perceptions of ecocriticism and its connections with their personal experiences would help make the readers more responsible of their environment and natural elements.

Ecocriticism is not only a literary theory; it deals with the reality where all human beings are settled. Its scope is wider in every sphere of life, like in "social, cultural, political, religious, or scientific" (Mishra, 2021, p. 7). Glotfelty (1996, p. xviii-xix) has presented its various characteristics, but we delimited our study to only two characteristics as per its requirements: relations of humans with nature and human culture and nature. The relationship between humans and nature is everlasting and, according to Das (2020), the basic job of ecocritics is to judge the attitude of human beings towards nature. Moreover, the culture of human beings is directly connected with the physical world (Glotfelty, 1996), and according to Joshi (2021), nature and culture are interconnected.

### **3. Literature Review of the Novels**

The hidden relationship is shown between human beings and nature in *The God of Small Things* (1997). This relationship is closer to the human psyche. The power game, which merely benefits the elite ruling class, is criticized, and they pay attention neither to the marginalized part of society nor show any interest in caring for nature and its resources in their surroundings (Mondal & Lavanya, 2021). Arundhati Roy (1997) fixes responsibility on human beings for destruction of the environment, air, water, and soil. The environmental injustice and continuous growth in human population have

deteriorated the ecological health. Her descriptions of natural images in the novel not merely show the glorious landscape and beautiful atmosphere of the town, but also expose the polluted environment of Ayemenem (Borade & Singh, 2020). Moreover, Roy protests that even the common men exploit the natural elements for the sake of modern development. In *The God of Small Things*, she takes up the issues regarding nature through her characters. The destruction of the portrayed river Meenchal is another example (Wani, 2019).

The role of nature looks like the other human characters in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). It is a living being that can be found everywhere in the central place. The portrayal of landscape is found to be eco-friendly, and the Africans find shelter in the lap of Mother Earth, which shows their dependence upon nature (Ebim, 2021). Nature and its elements are treated with love and veneration, which shows the friendliness of the Igbo people towards their environment. Even harming nature is considered a sin in their religion (Kumar, 2021). Furthermore, Thakur (2020) calls *Things Fall Apart* (1958) an ecocritical text. Undoubtedly, Achebe uncovers the harsh struggles of the local African people, but the themes related to palm trees and butterflies are dominant in his fiction.

### **3.1 Research Gap**

The review of the related literature and the theories followed for the present research clearly define the research gap as two different literary theories (Reader Response Theory; Ecocriticism) are used for collecting and analyzing data. It is important to note that it is a tradition to do research in literature with the application of theory to the piece of literature, but the present research is unique as it explores the understanding of the reader of certain theoretical traces employed by the author of that book: novels in the present context.

### **4. Methodology**

The study is a qualitative inquiry that is particularly focused on interviewing methods. The researcher formulated semi-structured questions for the interview with the purpose to gather data in the form of words. The choice also provided a chance of gathering participants' experiences in detail (Murphy, 2021). A pilot study was conducted that helped the researchers in the selection of participants to be used for the major study. It also helped to

make data collection and data analysis more influential (Gani et al., 2020; Larsson and Ferngren, 2021). The study was accomplished in two stages. The first stage included a note-making process during discussions with two teachers of English Literature who were also the instructor of the selected novels to the same participants. Being a researcher, I joined them three times for classroom observations at this stage. This strategy helped me in the selection of participants and also provided background knowledge for collecting data for the study.

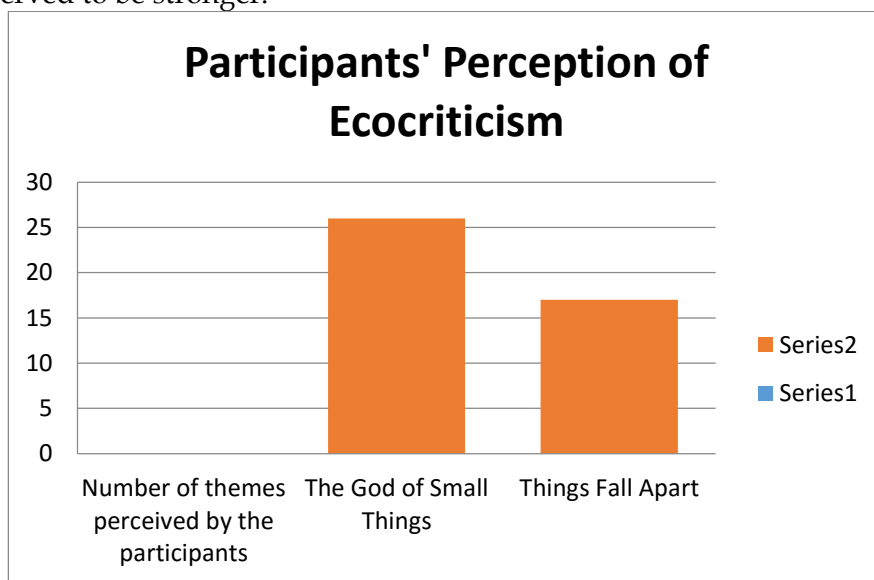
The number of research participants is important in the data collection process. In the second stage, the research was started with a sample of the minimum size (as suggested by Patton, 2015). Eight postgraduate students (n = 8), four male and four female, for semi-structured interviews were invited at the second stage. They studied Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in their "Postcolonial Literature" and Roy's *The God of Small Things* in "World Literature" modules as part of the curriculum. The research protocol was sent to them through email along with a consent form. Ethically, they had a right to withdraw or deny their participation at any stage and without giving any reason. Both male and female participants who have read the novel as a course text were included in the research. Moreover, pseudonyms for all the participants had been used in the data analysis sections.

The researchers feel it is necessary to use an explorative approach to explore the participants' perception of ecocriticism in fiction. As the study was based on students' perceptions, semi-structured interview schedules were found to be the best choice for data collection (as suggested by Patel and Crawford, 2022). The researchers documented the shared knowledge of the participants' experiences and the teachers' use of teaching methods for teaching fiction at the postgraduate level. The questions related to the theme of ecocriticism as aided by the theory as well as the students' responses were recorded during the data collection process. However, interviews with the students lasted between 33 and 35 minutes. The interview with the students was scheduled in four parts. Their personal information was gathered in the very first part. The second part included their choice of studying literature and how it influences their lives and changes their perceptions. The third part inquired how they connected ecocriticism in the selected novels with their personal experiences. Fourthly, they were provided an opportunity to

discuss things in general related to ecocriticism they perceived from the texts of the selected novels. The responses were recorded and analyzed with the help of theory of criticism promoted by Glotfelty (1996).

## 5. Findings

The research participants discussed various ecocritical themes in the selected two novels and then connected these themes with their personal and social experiences. They talked about general themes related to ecocriticism and how they observed it in fiction during their studies. They were more focused on their own experiences and relationships with nature. It was because Multan city is surrounded by green suburbs, and five out of eight participants belonged to the suburbs. They were brought up in the lap of nature and enjoyed the lush green pastures and meadows through their experiences. Later, they also experienced the damage done to nature and its resources in the name of development by introducing mega residential projects. In this way, their perceptions of ecocriticism in fiction were observed to be stronger.



**Figure: 1. Themes perceived by the participants**

Figure 1 describes the number of themes related to ecocriticism as identified by the participants in two selected novels. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was found to be the least referred novel, as only seventeen responses were



received in favor of ecocriticism by the participants, whereas Roy's *The God of Small Things* received twenty-six responses containing themes related to ecocriticism. As a result, it was thought to contain the most themes of ecocriticism. The bents and likings of the participants were also observed towards *The God of Small Things* during the interview process.

### **5.1 Participants on the Relations of Humans with Nature**

The participants found and discussed the events and characters in *The God of Small Things* that portrayed the ecocritical theme of human relations with nature. The first chapters, presenting the era of the 1960s, were said to contain humans' friendly relations with nature, whereas the last chapters, showing the age of development, contained humans' destructive attitude towards nature. Most participants identified it in the treatment of the river Meenachal. The choice of chapters was justified because the readers would notice two varied images of the river; "once it had the power to evoke fear. To change life". But now "It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea" (Roy, 1997, p. 124). The participants also identified this theme in the environmental change of the village of Ayemenem. The readers would also notice the fresh and pure air in the lush green environment where "dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air" (Roy, 1997, p. 1). Later, in the late 1980s, its ecosystem was polluted by using toxic pesticides and destroying nature in the name of development. Furthermore, the theme was identified in the portrayal of natural exploitation. It was also understandable because the readers would find the construction of a dam and deforestation for residential colonies turned the river into a swollen drain by stopping its natural flow, and the cutting of green areas destroyed the natural charm of the village.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the participants identified the ecocritical theme of human relations with nature. The first chapters presenting the pre-colonial era portray the friendly relations of the people with nature, keeping them prosperous. Most participants identified it in their daily affairs of life as connected with nature. It was understandable because their economy was dependant on the crops, their spiritual feelings belonged to the goddess of the earth, and even their festivals, like yam festivals, were connected to nature; "kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejioku, the god of yams" (Achebe, 1958, p. 13). The participants also identified this strong relationship with the

characters' use of language as closely connected to nature. It was found justified because it was not only the personal affairs of the characters but their names and language that were connected with nature. The clan of nine villages is named Umuofia. It gives an ecocritical gesture, which means "people of the forest". The language used by the characters, like the fame of Okonkwo, "had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan" (Achebe, 1958, p. 3).

The participants' views on the theme were also noticed during the process of interview. Importantly, the way they connected this fictional theme with personal and social experiences was important. The participants, living in the suburbs of Multan, connected their local settings with the geographical settings of the novels. Their surroundings are closer to the images presented by Roy and Achebe in their novels. Mr. Aslam described the images of his village closer to the village of Ayemenem, where "bananas, oranges, and mangoes are ripened." The chief businesses of the village are growing crops and farming animals. There is also a canal to the north of the village where the local people often go for fishing and swimming. These geographical settings may be seen in *The God of Small Things*. The other participant, Mr. Jilani, was working as a school teacher and performing his duties near the bank of the river Chenab. He observed the same attitude of the Multani people towards the river Chenab as the Indian people mistreated the river Meenachal in the late 1980s. To cite an example, "The River Chenab now remains polluted because of the toxic pesticides used as a modern tool of farming by the farmers, and then seeds are washed in the river". The dunghills of the animals and acidic remains of the factories are often thrown into the river. This mistreatment also damages the lives of animals living in the river". Humans' relationship with nature is deteriorating day by day, and it may disturb the balance of our ecosystem.

A female participant, Javeria, living in Multan City, raised an important issue about the deterioration of natural elements in the name of urbanization. The mega projects of residential colonies all around Multan city have damaged the millions of mango trees (Chaunsamango of Multan is world famous). It has also affected the millions of birds living in their nests on these trees. She connected it with the deforestation and cutting of trees in *The God of Small Things* for the construction of new homes, hotels, banks, and

hospitals. She also connected this change in humans' behavior towards natural elements to *Things Fall Apart*, when Okonkwo returned to his village after nine years. Its social, spiritual, and environmental conditions were changed due to the arrival of colonizers in the clan.

## 5.2 Participants on culture and nature

The participants shared their perceptions of the ecocritical themes in culture and nature in the selected two novels. Though no difference was found in general perceptions and trends as observed in the first part of interviews, participants' perceptions towards the novel *Things Fall Apart* were raised as compared to the last session. With the change of lifestyle in *The God of Small Things*, a cultural change may also be observed in the village of Ayemenem. The chapters presenting the era of the 1960s are said to present the pure and local culture of the town, whereas the chapters showing the era of the late 1980s present the induction of modern culture and lifestyle in to the town. Most participants identified this theme as the arrival of modernization because it also pushed people away from nature. It was understandable because the readers would find this shift through the image that "smelled of shit and pesticide brought with World Bank loans" (Roy, 1997, p. 1). No doubt, electricity in the town brought ease for the people, but it was also the cause of the death of the temple elephant and other birds. The participants also identified this theme in the social and cultural change of the village of Ayemenem. The readers noticed the wave of change on the return of Estha after 23 years in the village. She found new buildings but the old lush green trees had gone. The old History House was renovated as a luxury hotel. The river shows "[...] most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot" (Roy, 1997, p. 13). This cultural change brought the destruction of natural resources at large. The reader also found the garden of baby Kochamma was full of local and foreign plants, but her interest in watching TV destroyed the garden. So, modern technology has ruined eco-values by alienating human beings from nature's pure essence.

The participants further identified ecocritical theme of culture and nature in *Things Fall Apart* through characters and incidents. They identify it through the chapters presenting pre-colonial Igbo society. It was understandable because these chapters presented the pure African Igbo culture that was living closer to nature. Nature was a guiding star for them, but the

colonialism caused a breach between the natives and their surrounding nature. The natural elements were treated as living beings in the agrarian Igbo society. Okonkwo punished her wife by inquiring, "Who killed this banana tree?" (Achebe, 1958, p. 30). She faced physical beatings because mistreatment of nature was considered a sin in their culture. Later, colonial powers destroyed the whole belief and cultural system by cutting forests and trees in the name of human development. The participants identified it by the usage of ecological language by the characters, because language is a vital tool in presenting the culture of a community. It was found justifiable because the ample terms used by the characters were closer to words representing nature. Conversation among Africans is called "the palm oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe, 1958, p. 6).

The fame and honor of Okonkwo in the clan is told "like a bush-fire in the harmattan" (Achebe, 1958, p. 3) and he also enjoys his status by saying "you can tell a ripe corn by its look". Further, the growth of an African child is described as "like a yam tendril in the rainy season" (Achebe, 1958, p. 47). It was also identified by the shift of cultural moods with the change of natural seasons. It was also understandable because the rainy season always brings cultural festivals to the clan. A cultural week was held to appease the earth goddess in order for their crops and plants to produce abundantly. It was considered a religious ceremony. In this way, their culture, economy, and religion were linked with nature and its powers.

The participants also connected this fictional theme with personal and social experiences during the interview process. Ayesha, a female participant, argued that the two novels chosen have major themes of environmental exploitation and exploitation of women. It may be observed in their society as well, where both nature and women are also exploited for personal gains. She comments that, "the natural elements like mango trees growing for centuries in the surroundings of Multan were destroyed for the construction of living colonies. Every day, social media users see news and videos of women being beaten physically". This disappointing situation still prevails in the area, though legislation has been passed in this regard.

The culture closest to nature also exists in the local areas of Multan, as shown in the selected novels. To quote an example, Mr. Allah Dittah narrated the

festival of Besakhi, "Besakhi festival or Mela is always celebrated in the local areas of Multan before the harvesting season of wheat crops. It is a festival, mela or fair where some local sports like Kabaddi are also arranged". This festival has similarities with the one celebrated by Africans at the start of the rainy season. Kitchen gardening at home was once a fashion in this area, but finding such an example is rare now. People behave like baby Kochamma, and indulgence in time-wasting activities has become a trend now. A participant, Mr. Shoukat Ali, gave an example in this reference, "His uncle had a beautiful garden in his lawn for many years. He looked after it and it was like a hobby for him. With the passage of time, his hobbies changed and shifted towards watching TV and using social media on his mobile phone. His lawn garden had almost been ruined and most of the place has been covered with marbles".

A Saraiki-speaking male student, Mr. Muhammad Ali, argued, "He was brought up among the meadows, green fruit trees and enjoying the company of the river Chenab. He saw the damage done by floods in the area, but his attitude towards nature has been changed after reading fiction in the perception of ecocriticism. He realized that the damage done by humans for material gain was greater than the flood ruins".

## 6. Discussions

The participants identified ecocritical themes in two selected novels that were geographically and socially closer to their own experiences. Participants' perceptions of ecocriticism in relation to the selected novels presented apparent links to their understanding of the context portrayed in the texts. They had a choice to discuss any of two ecocritical themes in relation to any of the selected two novels, and most of the participants' discussions were about *The God of Small Things* in relation to both the themes, while very few talked about *Things Fall Apart*. The culture and personal background of the learner influence the meaning-making process (as suggested by Iser, 1978 and Rosenblatt, 1938/1970). The culture and context portrayed in the selected novels also influence the level to which students may connect to them.

The most discussed novel by the participants was *The God of Small Things*. The ecocritical elements relations of humans with nature and culture and

nature identified by the participants in the selected novels were related to humans' connection (both friendly and destructive) with nature and humans' living styles closer to nature. It was also observable when Mandal (2018), for example, argues that the building of dam, deteriorating conditions of the river, unplanned development, and deforestation in *The God of Small Things* prove modern man to be a "butcher of the Earth" (p. 514). Although Glotfelty (1996) does not talk about the destruction of nature in the hands of human beings as a theme of ecocriticism as mostly discussed by the participants, she talks about "the endangered Earth" (p. xvi). The participants were able to connect some of the characters and incidents of this novel to ecocritical themes based on the ignorant behaviors of their society towards nature.

The participants were also able to connect with the novel because of its presentation of human culture and nature. The nature and culture are directly connected in every setting of Multan city. The portrayal of this theme in *The God of Small Things* and the participants' cultural and contextual surroundings were vital in developing their perceptions. It was also observable in the novel because culture and nature are "interdependent and interrelated" (as suggested by Das, 2020, p. 161). Suresh (2021) argues that the local culture of Ayemenem has a close connection with nature that changes with the change of its social values and norms. The participants further explored this theme in the context of their own social behaviors and context. The settings of the village of Ayemenem and its surroundings, in particular, are similar to the settings and surroundings of the local Multan. A participant, Mr. Muhammad Ali, was emotional in narrating the strong relation of a man with nature like Velutha. Like Velutha, he belonged to a lower class family, and worked on his animal farm. He also made some toys for the children by using leaves and branches from the trees. He loved to stay in the wilderness near the bank of a canal where nature provided him with shelter, food, and also fodder for his animals. So, it became easier for the participants to develop a relationship between the ecocritical themes in the novels and their own personal experiences and social settings.

The reason behind participants' bent towards *The God of Small Things* was not merely the social context; the temporal context was also apparent. The novel by Roy was published in 1997 and was more recent as compared to

*Things Fall Apart*, which was published in 1958. Speaking about Achebe, a participant, Javeria, said: "The novel is a bit outdated and portrays pure African culture. We are not well aware of its settings. So, it demands some extra effort to relate it to our culture and settings". The generation gap may be one reason, but other factors such as teaching methodology and student fiction selection may also have contributed to arousing this interest. *The God of Small Things* was the best choice for students because it was written by an author who belonged to the subcontinent, and its characters and settings were also familiar. Secondly, the teaching methodology adopted by the teacher was also found impressive by the students, as most of the students mentioned it during their interviews. As Rosenblatt (1938/1970) argues, the teacher influences the meaning transaction process. This influence may further affect the response and interest of students in a text. Along with these factors, some other participants were interested in the novel because of the issues and themes presented by the author in it.

The choice of fiction and teaching methodology are vital influencing factors, but the influence of contextual settings seems more apparent when participants identified ecocritical themes. *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe (1958) was the second selected novel for our research. The participants also identified some themes related to ecocriticism in the novel, the most common being relations of humans with nature and culture and nature. Ebim (2021) argues that nature works as a living being in *Things Fall Apart*, and all the human characters revolve around it. It presents an eco-friendly environment where Mother Earth looks dominant. Tan (2020) looks at the exploitation of nature along with female characters in *Things Fall Apart*. The opening chapter presents nature as a goddess and its worship in the Igbo community, but colonialism works on changing their culture and religion directly connected with nature. However, the participants did not talk about it from a colonial perspective, but their perceptions were based on ecocritical themes. As Muhammad Ali said, "The various natural ceremonies teach the African people sympathy and peaceful living in the ecosphere. It prevented them from behaving in a cruel way with all the other creatures living in the system". In contrast, the removal of nature from their religious ceremonies makes them exploit nature and all its elements.

A participant, Sidra, called the Yams festival a source of union for the people of Clan. They joined hands in digging out the crops when the time came. She connects this union with the local vegetable digging out process. At the time of Potato and Arbi or Arvi (local names of Taro), the people, particularly the women of the town, join together and help the men in this process. Though it is like labor work and wages are also paid, it is also the source of union for them. To conclude, the participants explored the themes that they might perceive through their personal and social experiences. They did not consider it important that the themes should be discussed in the light of their academic or examination point of view. Other elements like context, teaching methodology, and the choice of fiction played a role in developing the responses of the participants and helping them relate to the selected novels.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on their personal and social experiences, the participants identified and connected ecocritical themes and human-nature relationships, as well as culture and nature, to the selected novels. *The God of Small Things* was the most discussed novel by the participants as it was closer to their local context and social settings. The influence of a teacher in teaching *The God of Small Things* was also observed. Most of the students mentioned that the teacher was more passionate and preferred two-way communication. The students' involvement and sharing of ideas were ensured in the classroom. It developed the interests of students. *Things Fall Apart* was the second novel in our study. It was found that the students were more interested in discussing the theme of culture and nature as compared to human relations with nature. Again, its reason was the context. They talked about the festivals, rituals, and ceremonies, and it was easier for them to connect them with their local festivals. Based on these findings, I propose that more Pakistani fictional literature depicting indigenous culture and fiction closer to the Pakistani context and settings be added to the postgraduate curriculum. It would also give students more freedom to choose from a wider range of literature. Second, the teachers should be given space in designing the curriculum and class time tables so that they may choose the novel of their interests. This would boost the classroom learning environment.



During the class observations and discussions with the teachers, it was found that ecocriticism and its themes are not discussed in the classroom as a part of the curriculum. Their focus is on gender, racism, identity, and postcolonial issues. Even its learning in the curriculum of literary theory depends upon the mood and choice of a teacher. So, the complaint by Glotfelty regarding the ignorance of ecocriticism, “No journals, no jargon, no jobs, no professional societies or discussion groups, and no conferences on literature and the environment” (1996, p. xvi) becomes justified. As a result, not a single student in the class was interested in doing their research thesis on ecocriticism, which is compulsory for getting an M. Phil or postgraduate degree from the university. I also recommend that teachers be trained and made aware of the importance of this subject. It is required to be discussed, shared and taught, particularly at postgraduate level. It would encourage more research-oriented work in the field and help improve the relationship between human beings and their ecosystem.

The current research presents some specific contexts, like a private-sector university working in Multan and students with specific contextual settings. It is also recommended that the participants' perception of fiction and connecting with their personal and social experiences can be further explored on issues like gender, class conflicts, or postcolonial issues (the most discussed issues by teachers and students in the classroom) in the specific context through more research. However, some comparative research studies with other universities may also be conducted to observe the influence of other factors like culture, differences in teaching methods, or social context.

## References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Chiang, J. K., Ganapathy, M., & Tan, D. A. (2020). Aesthetic Response of Language Learners to Stylistic Devices. *Capturing the Past and Shaping the Future through Language*, 139-156.
- Das, D. (2020). Ecocriticism and Its Perspective: An Analytical Study. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 09 (12), 160-162.

- Ebim, M. A. (2021). The Depiction of Environment in Literary Texts: An Eco-Linguistic Study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Journal of Education Research and Behavioral Sciences*, 10 (1), 1-7.
- Endrawati, A. (2018). *Readers' Response To Child Marriage In Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns Novel*. Surakarta: Universitas Muhammadiyah.
- Gani, A., Imtiaz, N., Rathakrishnan, M., & Krishnasamy, H. N. (2020). A Pilot Test for Establishing Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Interview in the Blended Learning English Proficiency Course. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(05), 140-143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.05.23>
- Glotfelty, C. (1996). Ecocriticism: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis. (C. A. Glotfelty, Ed.) *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, 229-236.
- Guha, B. (2022). Impact of Ecocriticism on Pushing Readers towards Sustainable Ways of Life and Being Environmentally Responsible. *International Journal of Arts Humanities & Social Sciences*, 10-18.
- Hou, L., Kang, J., & Xu, Y. (2022). A Study on the Influence of Human Cultural Environment on Literary Creation from the Perspective of Eco-Criticism. In *4th International Seminar on Education Research and Social Science (ISERSS, 2021)*. Berlin, 69-75.
- Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Joshi, A. (2021). *An Ecocritical Analysis: Selected Fictions of Dhruv Bhatt and Margaret Atwood*. Ahmed Abad, India: Gujarat Technological University.
- Kumar, B. S. (2021). An Ecocritical Interpretation of *Things Fall Apart*. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education*, 4(1), 11-25.
- Larsson, E. & Ferngren, L. (2021). *A Descriptive Research on How Brands' Responses Towards Sexism Advertisements Affect Consumers' Attitudes*. Sweden: Linnaeus University.
- Mandal, S. (2018). A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading Of Arundhati Roy's Novels. *International Journal of English Language*, 6 (3), 510-519.
- Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E.J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mishra, S. K. (2016). Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature. *BRICS Journal of Educational Research*, 6(4), 168-170.

- Mondal, C. S., & Lavanya, S. (2021). Exploring The Interrelationship between Nature and women in Arundhati Roy's the God of Small Things. *Int. J. of Aquatic Science*, 12(2), 1139-1144.
- Murphy, R. (2022). How Children Make Sense of Their Permanent Exclusion: A Thematic Analysis from Semi-Structured Interviews. *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2021.2012962>
- Patel, C., & Crawford, G. B. (2022). A Qualitative Study Using Semi-Structured Interviews: Comparing the Views of Palliative Care Unit Patients and Clinicians on Corneal Donation Discussions. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1172675/v1>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.
- Premalatha, R., & Lourdes, C. (2018). Novelists as Eco-Entrepreneurs: A Comparative Study of RK Narayan's The Dark Room and Arundhati Roy's The God Of Small Things. *Language in India*, 18(3), 313-326.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1978/1994). *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of A Literary Work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois university press.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1938/1970). *Literature as Exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1986). The Aesthetic Transaction. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 20 (4), 122-128. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3332615>
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. India: IndiaInk.
- Saraswathi, K., & Balakrishnan, K. (2021). Man and the Water Life: an Eco Critical Reading of Sarah Joseph's Novel Gift in Green. *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, 25(6), 9010-9015.
- Singh, B. & Borade. (2020). Environmental Constructions and Ecocritical Observation in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 11 (vi), 79-86.
- Suresh, L. (2021). Understanding the Relationship between Sustainability and Ecofeminism in an Indian Context. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 37(1), 116-135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X211001648>
- Syed, G. K. (2018). Pakistani undergraduate students learning English fiction: an insight into perceptions of identity, rights and duties in

- relation to four novels. *English in Education*, 53(2), 161-174.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2018.1529534>
- Syed, G. K. (2020). Citizenship through Fiction: An Insight into Pakistani Undergraduate Students' Perceptions. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 48(5-6), 468-487. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685314-04805006>
- Tan, C. (2020). An Ecofeminist Reading of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. *International Journal of Language Academy*, 8(5), 344-351.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/ijla.48028>
- Thakur, R. S. (2020). Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart: An Ecocritical Portrayal of African Life. *Akshara: Research Journal of English Literature and Language*, 15-22.
- Wani, A. R. (2019). Ecocritical Concerns in Indian Writing in English. *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, (1), 1-5.
- Wilson, A. (2020). The reader, the Text, the Poem: The Influence and Challenge of Louise Rosenblatt. *Education*, 3(13), 1-17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2020.1824704>