

Natural World Exploited: An Ecocritical Analysis of Mythical Nonhumans in the Selected Work of J.K. Rowling

Sweta Jha, Dr. Manish Vyas

1. Research Scholar & Faculty, Science & Humanities, LDRP Institute of Technology & Research, Gandhinagar, Gujrat, India

2. Dr. Manish Vyas, Associate Professor, Science & Humanities, LDRP Institute of Technology & Research, Gandhinagar, Gujrat, India

Abstract

Man's authority over other nonhumans and nonliving things, excessive use of natural resources and his hunger to rule the sky and earth has led to climate change, pollution, extinctions of species of plants and animals, draught or flood and global warming. The disturbance in ecological system has forced man to rethink about his actions in every field, and to create awareness about his treatment of nature and other nonhumans. Man has realized that everything in the nature is not only for humans; and awareness is created towards environment and ecology. The study of representation of nature and ecology in the literature is known as Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is new paradigm which has recently emerged in the literary criticism during the second half of the Twentieth century. In the literature, Ecocriticism is an approach that focuses on the depiction of 'Nature' in the text. This Nature includes environment, climate, plants and other non-humans or animals. The scope of the Ecocriticism is still a debatable question for scholars, because it is heterogeneous movement. Use of mythological elements in the fantasy fiction can be proved of immense importance to explain moral lessons of ecology and negative impacts of anthropocentrism to the children and young adults. The present paper thrives to examine mythical animals which are portrayed in the seven books of Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling in the light of ecocriticism. The theoretical foundation is ecocriticism and anthropocentrism that explores literary depiction of relationship between humans and animals.

Key-Words: Humans, Nonhumans, Eco-criticism, Mythology, Anthropocentrism, J.K. Rowling

Since ancient past natural environment and animals are essential part of literary work; weather it is wild or oceans and mountains in the work of Homer, Spencer and Shakespeare, or it is depiction of nature and pastoral in the work of Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. In the later part of the Twentieth Century, the literary critics tried to analyze this depiction of Nature in the literature by defining tools and approaches of Ecocriticism under different roofs like Ecocentric, Anthropocentrism, Green studies, Eco-poetics, Anthropomorphism, Social ecology etc. "simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, xviii). But the table of discussion is still waiting for scholars as far the application of the approach is concerned because concept and scope of Ecocriticism is getting broaden day by day. As Greg Garrard opines:

"Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Ecocriticism may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own 'ecological literacy' as far as possible." (5)

On the other hand Anthropocentrism is a notion which is 'human centered' and accepts dominance of humans over the nature and other nonhumans. According to anthropocentric views, human and his interest are superior on the earth and rest of the organism and elements of nature are merely resources for his use. Human's dominance over nonhumans and culture's dominance over nature has led to destruction of ecology on

the earth. Humans always fail to establish harmonious relationship with the other elements of the nature because humans never give up their control over nature and other organism. In the literature also human has always ruled over other nonhumans and animals by his intellectual power. The paper efforts to show the same anthropocentric echo in the seven novels of *Harry Potter Series* by J.K. Rowling and tries to highlight the fact that mythological animals are possessor of immense power but man's wish to dominate them is not decreased an inch. Moreover, wild is also included as background in the novels. The setting of the story is Forbidden Forest and Hogwarts School which is surrounded by nature.

In the contemporary period, Rowling's Harry Potter series has broken all the previous records of sales and success by winning number of awards and cultivating habits of reading bulky novels of nine hundred pages among children and adults in the era of social networking. Rowling's *Harry Potter series* belongs to Fantasy genre and it also falls under the categories of Gothic genre and horror fiction but her extreme inclusion of nonhumans and animals in the series also makes it a part of environmental literature to an extent. Rowling's novels are ecocritical because the nonhumans are playing important roles and human and non-human relationship is depicted in each seven novels; moreover, the main setting of the series, Hogwarts is surrounded by natural background. In the series, Rowling describes the darker side of humans to control and use non humans for their own interest instead of establishing a harmonious relationship between humans and nonhumans. Rowling has not only depicted exploitation of mythical animals and other non-humans in the series but she also advocates the rights of non-humans and conveys the message that the dominance of man should be removed. In the Harry Potter series, Rowling has created wonderful world of magic by depicting mythological non humans and animals. The theme of the series is clash between 'Good' versus 'Evil'; wherein 'good' wins the battle after many struggles. One of the major reasons for enormous success of series is depiction of mythology and twist and turns in the plot and story. Mythology is part of world literature since ancient past and it has proved itself an enriched source for many authors. Rowling has borrowed heavily from Greek mythology and folklores of British Isles. Although the potter world is magical but Rowling has made it so convincing and realistic by portraying two parallel worlds of wizards and muggles (non-magical humans). Apart from wizards and muggles, many animals and nonhuman exist in the Wizarding world, but their existence is marginal because they are controlled by wizards. Wizards have established the 'Department for Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures' and wizards have also formed laws to overpower them. But the segregation of non-humans is problematic because it serves only human interest and leaves the nonhumans to suffer. In the wizarding world, animals and creatures like unicorns, centaurs, dragons, phoenix, hippogriff, griffins etc. are subdued by the human with his power of magic wand. Rowling has borrowed these animals from world mythology and she has also portrayed the natural background at length for setting of her novels that reflects ecocentric elements.

Forbidden forest also known as Black forest is dense dark forest at the edge of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The forest is home of many dangerous and docile creatures and nonhumans like giant spiders, centaurs, unicorns, vampires, werewolves etc. The trees in the forest are ancient that are tall and dense. "The forest hides many secrets." It is one of the important backgrounds wherein life changing events take place: like Drinking unicorn's blood by Voldemort to regain human body; hiding place of Voldemort; hiding place of giant Grawp; gathering spot of Voldemort and his evil army of death eaters before battle of Hogwarts, and Voldemort's attack on Harry by killing curse. Rowling has depicted harmonious relationship between nonhumans and nature in the Forbidden Forest because all the creatures are living their natural life without any interference of humans in the Forbidden Forest. Forbidden forest presents force of nature in the novels. Humans who control all fearful nonhumans in their world are almost 'others' in the Forbidden forest that is home of many dreadful animals. Forbidden Forest is home of animals but human uses this place to fulfill his evil motifs. Therefore animals

like Centaurs reject presence of humans in the Forest. The portrayal of Forbidden Forest is inspired by Rowling's love for nature and 'Forest of Dean'. Rowling's parents had love for pastoral life that forced them to shift in Tutshill village of South Wales in England. During her childhood days, Rowling was fascinated by 'Forest of Dean' near her home and she visited the forest frequently and developed affection for nature.

The anthropocentric views are depicted in the novels by portraying humans and nonhumans' relationship. In the wizarding world, wizards believe themselves superior than other nonhumans and animals. They have dominated nonhumans and animals by establishing a separate department and by implementing biased laws for them. Wizards regard them 'others' and exploit them. The anthropocentric aspects are presented by the portrayal of mythical animals like centaurs, dragons, unicorns, basilisk, hippogriff etc.

Centaurs are creature of Greek mythology that is part humans and part horse. According to Greek mythology, centaurs are lustful and lawless creatures but few were exceptions among them. Centaur Chiron was very wise who was educated by Apollo and was excellent in hunting, medicines, herbs, other war arts and arts of prophecy. He was teacher of Greek Heroes like Achilles, Jason and Hercules. In the series, Centaurs are abided by laws implied upon them by wizards. They have to live in the Forbidden forest and they are not allowed to leave the forest. The centaurs possess the knowledge of prophecy and astronomy. But they are considered inferior by the wizards and never get fair treatment by them. Centaurs deny accepting rules that are forced on them by the wizards. They have created their own different world in the Forbidden forest and established their separate laws. When Hagrid asks the centaurs to control their reckless behavior; one of them says, "Our ways are not yours, nor are our laws. Firenze has betrayed and dishonored us." (OP, 644) When cruel Umbridge enters in the Forbidden Forest, she boasts about superiority of Ministry of Magic. She asks the centaurs not to leave territory and insults them, at that time centaurs protest her. Umbridge attacks on the two centaurs with her magic wand and injures them which proves human's indifferent and cruel behavior to other non-humans. Compare to humans, these non-humans are shown more 'humane' in the nature. When Harry and Hermione enter in the Forbidden Forest with Hagrid, at that time centaur Bane wants to attack on Harry and Hermione but centaur Magorian tells them "the slaughter of foals is a terrible crime. We do not touch the innocent." (OP, 645) and they spare them without hurting. Centaur Firenze saves Harry from evil Lord Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest while he was drinking Unicorn's blood in his subhuman form. Centaur's benevolence is always neglected by wizards and the glory of their existence is also violated by wizards. Nonhuman tries to develop harmonious relationship with humans but humans want to utilize nonhumans. As J. Baird Callicott remarks:

"An anthropocentric value theory (or axiology) by common consensus, centres intrinsic value on human beings and regards all other things, including other forms of life, as being only instrumentally valuable, i.e.; valuable only to the extent that they are means or instruments which may serve human beings" (299).

Unicorn is mythological creature that is found in literature, legends and arts. In the mythology, unicorn is a horse like animal with tail of boar, and single horn on nose. It is regarded as divine creature that is associated with power, beauty and good luck. In the ancient Greece, people believed that many diseases can be cured by horn of unicorn. In the Harry Potter novels, unicorns are described as divine and powerful creatures that can revive life of dying human being. Unicorn's blood brings the dying man back to life but after that he has to live a cursed life. Hagrid explains it to Harry:

"The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips." (PS, 278)

Evil Voldemort kills unicorn in the Forbidden Forest and drinks its blood, and chooses to live a cursed life. It reflects human's 'inhumane' nature that can kill animal easily to

save his life. For humans, there is no value of life of other nonhumans. Here anthropocentric view of man is reflected clearly.

One more similar incident is narrated by the depiction of Hippogriff that reveals anthropocentric nature of humans. Hippogriff is creature of mythology that is mixture of part eagle and part horse with wings of eagle; and it is believed the symbol of immense power and unattainable love. In the novels, this splendid creature of mythology is shown as domesticated proud animal; if it will be paid respect then allows humans riding on him. Hagrid, who is fond of all kind of creatures, has kept a hippogriff named Buckbeak; he demonstrates it before the students in the class of Care of Magical Creature. One of the students named Draco Malfoy intentionally avoids instructions of Hagrid and offends Buckbeak; in return he gets injured by Buckbeak. The injury is not severe but Draco creates scene by stretching the matter and his father Lucius Malfoy, who is influential person in the ministry, presents the matter before minister of magic. The Minister orders to slaughter Buckbeak without proper investigation of the issue. Again it focuses that there is no value of life of animals in the world of humans. For humans 'use- value' of such organism is prime concerned and they are not ready to accept the fact that animals also have rights to live their life without human interference. As Richie Nimmo states:

“Humans are subjects while non-humans are objects. This in turn enables humanity to be elevated and centralized, while its necessary other – its very conditions of existence – are suppressed and marginalised, relegated to the status of a ‘context’, a mere ground upon which human subject stands” (61).

The Dragon is one more powerful creature of mythology that is subdued by humans in the wizarding world. Dragon is dreadful and mighty creature that exists in the myths of many cultures across the world. In the ancient time, people were frightened from this huge and fire breathing animal with destructive qualities. But in the novels, humans have overpowered this mighty animal with their magic wand. Breeding the dragon eggs in the human dwelling is prohibited by wizarding laws. Wizards have allocated special distance places to dragon for their dwellings. But dragons have not freedom at their separate places because they are subject of training. The wizards have special area called 'Study and training of the dragons' as one of the career options. Wizards have dominated dragons; wizards use dragons for different purposes after training them. Dragons are used in one of the tasks of Tri wizard tournaments; in that participants have to snatch the eggs from mother dragon. When dragons are brought for this tournaments; they are kept in the huge cages in the Forbidden Forest and it was difficult to handle them but many wizards control them with spells and magic. It confirms human's thrust to rule and control other animals and to use them for his own interest. It also reflects that humans are always desperate to control those nonhumans that are more powerful than him. If human acquires power then he would control them at any cost and suffering of such non humans will be easily overlooked by him. Another such instance is portrayal of three-headed dog from Greek mythology. According to Greek mythology, Cerberus is three-headed watch dog of Hades also known as hell hound; it prevents living to enter in the Hades and dead to escape from there. People of ancient Greek were frightened from him because he was dog with three heads, dragon's tail and hair of hissing serpents. In the novels, this fearful and monstrous three headed dog named Fluffy is controlled and domesticated by humans. Fluffy is guardian of philosopher's stone on the third floor of Hogwarts. But humans know the techniques to tame and manipulate this dog. Prof. Quirrell, who is possessed by lord Voldemort, lures this dog to sleep by music and reaches to the place to steal the stone. At this point, human is clever enough and knows all the way to control and dominate other nonhumans that are physically more powerful than man but he rules on them with his intellect and power of magic. In the Rowling's world, wizards are gifted with power of magic but they use this power to control and dominate other creatures that shows anthropocentric nature of man for whom self-interest is extreme important and he treats other beings of ecological system with indifference. Humans believe other organism as merely resources to use for them.

Apart from anthropocentric elements, the novels also contain elements of anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is attribution of characteristics of human to animals or other objects. It is “human characteristics of emotion or thought to [the] appearance, behaviour, and consciousness” of nonhuman entities” (Oerlemans 68). Rowling’s non humans like centaurs, spiders and snakes are anthropomorphized that can communicate with humans. Moreover, their thinking, emotions and behaviour is also like humans. In the novels, centaurs possess appearance and wisdom like human but ministry of magic has classified them under the category of beast instead being. This disappoints them and they strongly believe that wizards want to make them slave of mankind. They strongly oppose any action which shows them inferior to humans. When centaur Firenze saves Harry from Voldemort in the Forbidden forest and takes him on his back at that time Centaur Bane oppose him and tells, “Firenze!” Bane thundered. “What are you doing? You have a human on your back! Have you no shame? Are you a common mule?” (PS, 276). Centaurs strongly believe that they are far wiser than humans. They clearly express their views, “We are a race apart and proud to be so. We will not permit you to walk from here, boasting that we did your bidding!” (OP, 696). It reveals that like humans, centaurs have also developed ego, superiority complex and at an extent racism. When centaur Firenze accepts job of teaching divination arts to the students of Hogwarts on request of headmaster Dumbledore; at that time other centaurs banish him from the Forbidden Forest and attack on him because they want to keep this art limited to them and restrict to share it with others. It makes them humanlike because man is also reluctant to share his skills with others to maintain his domination and importance. The centaurs believe that Forbidden Forest is ‘their forest’ and they restrict Hagrid from entering into the forest. This reflects that like humans, centaurs are also greedy and possessive for lands.

Some ecocritics believe that if animals are anthropomorphized they become proponents of anthropocentric views; because the animal characters are written for human audience that advocates human opinions. The opinion is not accurate every time because by acquiring human characteristics, animals also reveal human’s vices and follies that humans can relate with themselves and learn a lesson to keep themselves aloof from it and they also learn to value the virtues and wisdom which are possessed by animals. Spiders are also anthropomorphized in the novels. Giant Spider Aragog was saved by Hagrid during his schooldays. Hagrid sets him to live in the Forbidden Forest and finds a mate for him with whom Aragog has formed colony of spiders in the Forbidden Forest by producing numerous children. Aragog always remember generosity of Hagrid and remains grateful to him for lifetime. These giant spiders are man eater but Aragog never hurts Hagrid and he has also restricted his children to eat Hagrid. It suggests unlike humans, spiders value life of other ‘beings’ that helps them, this is contrary to humans who forget beneficence of other nonhumans and kill them for their interest. Centaur Firenze saves life of Harry without any self-interest and at the last all the centaurs join the Battle of Hogwarts and fight against evil Voldemort because they know if Voldemort will win then he will be proved fatal for existence of many animals. This suggests the centaurs appreciate the value of organism in the ecological system. So it can be argued that ecocritical views are also encouraged by anthropomorphized animals in the novels.

In the wizarding world, use of animal organs is very common to make different magical objects and potions; Wizards use strings of fangs, snarled claws and dragon liver for purpose of magic. They use phoenix feather, unicorn hair and dragon heartstring in making wands. Dragon blood and meat is used to heal wounds. Silver unicorn’s horn and black beetle eyes are used in magic potion. It reflects anthropocentric views of wizards. Apart from mythological animals, other animals like dog, cat, owls, frogs and rabbits are shown as pet of the students and wizards. These animals are depicted as loyal and faithful pet to their owners. The owls are painted as a symbol of healthiest relationship between humans and nonhumans in the wizarding world. Owls are working as messenger in the wizarding world. Most of wizards possess family owl that delivers post for them and gets rewards for it. Moreover, wizards have owl post office at different places.

In the series, stag and other animals are demonstrated as patronus. In the Wizarding world, wizards can conjure patronus which appears in front of them in the form of various animals like stag, deer, rabbit and save them from dangerous situations. Harry conjures patronus for few times; his patronus is stag which saves him and others from 'death kiss' of dementor. In the novels, animals and creatures are shown as savior and supporter of humans: Stag saves Harry from dementors; Hippogriff Buckbeak helps to save life of Sirius Black and rescues him from seventh floor of West tower, Phoenix saves life of protagonist Harry from basilisk and it also saves life of headmaster Dumbledore from killing curse of Voldemort near department of prophecy. Rowling has portrayed these animals and nonhumans as model and preaches her young readers and children to develop ecocentric perspectives by showing the contradiction mindset of humans and non-humans. In the novels, humans exploit and dominate nonhumans but in returns they always render help to humans and they have harmonious perspectives for humans that is base of coexistence and balanced ecological system. So animals are strong advocates of ecocentrism in the novels.

Wizards treat nonhumans with indifference but Rowling has also portrayed characters like Hagrid, Dumbledore, Harry and Hermione who treat them with affection and respect. Hagrid is the Professor and key keeper of Hogwarts, who is strong proponent of ecocentric views in the novels. He strongly believes in the harmonious coexistence of humans and nonhumans. Hagrid has immense affection for the animals that are considered dangerous by the others. His love for dangerous animals encourages him to domesticate dragon, hippogriff, giant spider etc. When Hagrid gets egg of dragon from a traveler, he keeps it in his hut and tries to raise baby dragon like his mother and for the same he reads many books. Baby dragon Norbet hurts him many times by spitting fire on him but he ignores it and keeps him safe in his hut. The act of breeding dragon is risky for Hagrid because breeding of dragon in human dwelling is prohibited as per wizarding laws. When baby dragon is sent to live with other dragons, Hagrid remains sad for many days and cries like a child. Moreover, Hagrid saves the giant spider Aragog from false allegation and punishment, and keeps him safe in the Forbidden Forest; He also gets him a mate called Mosag. After few years when Aragog dies in the Forbidden Forest, Hagrid recovers his body at risk of his life, and saves its body from consuming by his children. Hagrid pays respect to 'his old friend Aragog' by performing death ritual and proper burial. Humans and animals are not so different for Hagrid. Like Hagrid, Prof. Dumbledore also has affection and respect for other nonhumans and animals. Headmaster Dumbledore, who is epitome of humanity and sympathy, always treats nonhumans with kindness and respect. When Hagrid domesticate dangerous creatures, Dumbledore indirectly helps Hagrid by saving him from disciplinary actions of ministry of magic. He also encourages Harry and Hermione and provides them with time turner to save life of hippogriff. Harry and Hermione risk their lives and save hippogriff Buckbeak from slaughter. Thus, these characters advocate for better human-nonhuman relationship, and inspire readers to adopt more ecocentric perspectives.

In the ecosystem, the interconnectivity of everything is prime concerned that cannot be overlooked. Humans, animals and Plants are connected with each other and they are interdependent. But this interdependency is disrupted by humans, when they abuse the other nonhumans and misuse his power to control natural resources for his own interest. Man has to balance the human- nonhuman binary in the ecosystem.

The indifference towards non humans is focused many times in the novels, but it is not advocated by the Author. On the contrary it teaches ecocentric lessons to the readers. As Sumathy states, "Literature plays a very important role in creating awareness about the environment. Just as post colonialism champions the cause of the "other", Ecocriticism upholds the voice of the "nonhuman other." (1). In the Harry Potter series, Rowling puts forward her ideas of ecocentrism by help of her characters like Hagrid and Dumbledore who believe in equality and value the lives of other 'beings'; and by depicting nonhumans with their 'humane' qualities. The traditional anthropocentric views of western culture are depicted throughout the novels by depicting complex human and nonhuman

relationship. But at the same time the background echo warns the readers against such anthropocentric views and it rouses sympathy among young readers for animals and non-humans. The crave for acceptance of nonhuman's separate existence and freedom is expressed by centaur, "Centaur is not the servant or plaything of humans," (OP, 555). The novels promote ecocentric consciousness among the readers by encouraging them to believe in peaceful coexistence of humans and animals.

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