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Harmony and Conflict: Environmental Themes in *The Village by the Sea*

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Abstract

*This research paper attempts to explore the environmental theme in Desai's (2001) *The Village by the Sea*. The rural setting, steeped in the primal innocence of nature, makes the family members endearing and relatable. Through her masterful portrayal of their actions and emotions, the distinguished novelist reveals that poverty does not equate to moral deficiency, as some wealthier individuals, aligned with a technology-driven urban culture, might suggest. Surrounded by nature's abundance, the characters' emotions are deeply influenced, allowing them to sense the presence of a hidden divine force in various subtle ways. Their faith arises naturally from the depth of their feelings rather than from the intellectual eschatological debates scholars engage in within the confines of their drawing rooms. Through the tale of a struggling family in a small Indian town, Anita Desai's (2001) novel examines the fragile balance between nature and human life, emphasizing both harmony and conflict. The story offers a complex perspective of how these interactions impact the villagers' lives, and the environmental concerns are intimately linked to the social and economic struggles that the protagonists encounter.*

Keywords: *culture, conflict, ecocriticism, harmony, nature,*

1. Introduction

In *The Village by the Sea*, the story spins around Hari and Lila, two youngsters from an unfortunate family in Thul near Bombay. Their dad, a heavy drinker, and their disabled mother pass on the kin to deal with the family, care for their more youthful sisters, and battle to get by. Despite their neediness, they stay strong and focused. Having a miserable outlook on his future in the town, Hari leaves for Bombay, where he looks for a decent job and direction from kind outsiders like Mr. Panwallah, who shows him watch fixing. This experience engages Hari to get back with newly discovered abilities and investment funds, changing him into a confident young fellow. In the meantime, Lila deals with the family, gets her mom treated in an emergency clinic, and guarantees her family's endurance through the help of the de Silva family and a naturalist, Sayyid Ali

Sahib. Their dad, during his better half's recuperation, likewise goes through an ethical change, surrendering liquor. When Hari returns, the family's monetary circumstance improves, and they meet up to observe Diwali, representing a confident and prosperous future for them all. Desai's (2001) book vividly depicts life in a coastal community where the environment is vital to the people's livelihoods. The seasons, land, and water all play a significant role in village life. The link to the land signifies stability and tradition to Hari, the main character. Hari's family and the other villagers depend on farming, fishing, and other natural resources. The way the locals coexist with their environment to thrive demonstrates a harmonious, albeit precarious, equilibrium.

The novel illustrates how industrialization affects traditional lifestyles and the environment through Hari's family, but it also raises the prospect of adaptation and rejuvenation. The plot is driven by the friction between the old and the modern, between exploitation and stewardship of nature, which makes it a rich investigation of the environmental difficulties that rural communities face. It also reflects how quickly Hari and Lila must mature and adjust to their new living circumstances. Both kids understand that they have to look after themselves and their younger siblings because their parents aren't able to do so. They both grow up fast and take on the responsibilities that their parents were meant to play. They learn how to manage their finances, their resources, and their housekeeping skills despite their young age.

The novel is a fascinating and canny depiction of provincial life in India. Through the encounters of Lila and Hari, Desai (2001) reveals insight into the battles and flexibility of people confronting neediness and vulnerability. The original's investigation of topics like family, obligation, and the effect of industrialization makes it a powerful and interesting read. The story, at last, passes on a message of trust, underscoring the potential for self-awareness and positive change even despite the difficulty. The Original features biological mindfulness by clearly depicting the regular habitat and its communication with human characters. The novelist lays out a rich and itemized image of the beachfront town of Thul, stressing the excellence and significance of the regular environmental factors. The ocean, the land, and the verdure are depicted in a way that features their characteristic worth and their part in the existence of the locals. The cleverness highlights the cozy connection between the townspeople and their current circumstance. The townspeople depend on the ocean for fishing, the land for cultivating, and the normal assets for their everyday necessities. This reliance cultivates a feeling of regard and comprehension of nature's cycles and cutoff points. The writer doesn't avoid portraying the natural difficulties faced by the town. Contamination, industrialization, and the infringement of urbanization undermine the fragile harmony between the locals and their current circumstances. These dangers act as a scrutinizer of impractical turns of events and feature the requirement for natural protection. The characters' reactions to natural issues reflect fluctuating degrees of biological mindfulness. A few characters perceive the significance of safeguarding their regular environmental factors and endeavor to keep a

maintainable lifestyle, while others are more centered around quick monetary increases, even at the expense of ecological corruption.

The battle for endurance is a focal subject in the novel and is firmly connected to environmental supportability. The locals' endeavors to adjust to changing natural circumstances and their systems for a feasible living are critical to the account, underscoring the interconnectedness of human and environmental prosperity. Through the encounters of the hero, Hari, and his family, the writer grants an instructive component with respect to environmental mindfulness. The clever fills in as a sign of the need to offset human yearnings with ecological safeguarding. The Town by the Ocean features biological mindfulness by delineating the unpredictable connection between the locals and their current circumstances, tending to the dangers presented by present-day advancement, and advancing maintainability and regard for nature.

The novel demonstrates harmony between men and the natural world by depicting the natural world and its interactions with humans in realistic detail. Desai (2001) depicts the coastal village of Thul in great detail, highlighting the value and beauty of the surrounding environment. The description of the land, the sea, and the plants and animals emphasizes their inherent worth as well as their significance to the people's way of life. However, the text also sheds light on the conflict among the villagers when the fertilizer factory was established. It discusses the effects of civilization and industry on the environment. The villagers' natural environment and traditional way of life are in danger due to pollution and factory encroachment. The long journey of a harmonious relationship between villagers and the environment was shattered and marched towards the conflict.

2. Review of Literature

Ecocriticism is a critical method that looks at the connection between literature and the natural world. It focuses on how literary works portray, understand, and interact with ecological themes and issues. Cultural studies, environmental science, and literature are all connected by ecocriticism. It entails examining works from an ecological point of view, taking into account literary devices and cultural settings in addition to scientific discoveries and environmental issues. Literature's treatment of environmental problems such as pollution, climate change, deforestation, species extinction, and sustainable living is examined by ecocritics. They look at the portrayal of these themes and the lessons the texts teach about the interrelationship between humans and nature. In this instance, nature becomes an active force rather than just a setting that appears to be something out there.

Glotfelty (1996) has organized ecocriticism into three stages, which correlate to the aims of ecocriticism:

Ecocriticism studies and excavates the representation of nature in literature. It checks whether a text uses stereotypes such as "virgin land" and "savage

wilderness" (xxiii), and if there aren't any, then ecocriticism searches for any sign of nature in the text. 2) Ecocriticism seeks to find "buried" and "ignored" nature writing to gain recognition in the literary market. Also when reading literature, the ecocritic examines not only the text but also the author's environment and views how that environment shaped the author's writing. 3) Theoretically, it aims to draw upon the symbolic construction of nature with a critique of Western conceptual dualisms such as mind/body, men/women, and nature/culture. (xxiii, xxvi)

Ecocriticism examines how nature is portrayed in literature, taking into account both realistic and idealized depictions. It examines how various writers and civilizations view and depict nature, particularly how they employ metaphors, symbolism, and imagery from nature. The interaction between people and the environment is a major issue in ecocriticism. It explores how literature reflects and influences how we perceive this relationship, as well as the moral and ethical ramifications of human behavior toward the natural environment. In order to comprehend how environmental attitudes and behaviors have changed throughout time, ecocritics situate literary works within their historical and cultural settings. They investigate how historical occurrences, cultural values, and societal shifts influence literary representations of nature. With the goal of promoting ecological preservation and increasing public understanding of environmental issues, ecocriticism frequently has a significant activist component. It inspires readers to think about how literary works affect the environment and to take steps to create a more sustainable future. Concepts of ecological identity and belonging are also examined by this method. It takes into account how people and groups define themselves in connection to their natural environments and how literature reflects these identities. By opposing anthropocentric (human-centered) viewpoints, ecocriticism advances a more inclusive viewpoint that acknowledges the inherent worth of all living things and ecosystems. It promotes the study of non-human voices and viewpoints in literature. To put it briefly, ecocriticism is a literary and cultural philosophy that highlights how crucial the natural world is to comprehending and analyzing literary works. It looks for ways that literature affects, reflects, and challenges our relationship with nature. Ecocriticism is a basic way to deal with writing and culture that spotlights on the connections between people and the normal world. It arose during the 1990s as a reaction to developing worries about ecological corruption and the effect of human movement in the world (Glotfelty and Fromm).

Human beings and animals are embedded in the network of ecological web. If any part of the network is harmed then the whole web stops to function. Barry Commoner in his "First Law of Ecology" states: "Everything is connected to everything else" (17). Similarly, eco-critics, Cheryll Glotfelty mentions "[...] eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). It means eco-criticism is a theoretical aspect that examines the role of nature or the environment in any

text. Sharing the common values of nature and coexisting Paul W. Taylor (2003) in his essay “The Ethics of Respect for Nature” said:

We share with other species a common relationship to the earth. In accepting the biocentric outlook we take the fact of our being an animal species to be a fundamental feature of our existence. We consider it an essential aspect of 'the human condition. 'We do not deny the differences between ourselves and other species' [...]. (43)

Ecocriticism examines the reciprocal interaction between humans and the land because it is an ecological approach to the study of the relationship between literature and ecology. The indivisible bond that humans have with the land throughout their lives is the foundation of ecocriticism. According to ecocritics, ecocriticism is primarily a moral approach that keeps an eye on and helps to connect people, society, the environment, and literature. As a result, it responds to the need for a humanistic understanding of how humans interact with the natural world during periods of natural disaster.

3. Methods

This qualitative inquiry explores the environmental themes of harmony and conflict in Anita Desai's (2001) *The Village by the Sea*, drawing on secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and online materials. Rather than aiming to uncover new discoveries, the objective of this study is to offer new interpretations of a topic that has often been overlooked in the current scholarly landscape. The paper engages with interpretive inquiry, utilizing the perspectives of ecocritical theorists such as Lawrence Buell (1995), Barry Commoner (1972), and Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) to analyze the novel's portrayal of human interaction with nature.

In the novel, the author depicts the precarious equilibrium between the people of Thul and their natural surroundings. Through the tale of Hari and Lila, the book illustrates the difficulties brought on by poverty, industrialization, environmental damage, and the peasants' harmony with nature. Due to the factory's disruption of the local ecology and customs, there is pollution, unstable economic conditions, and a loss of livelihoods.

The paper examines how the novel speaks to larger environmental issues, like the effects of industrialization on rural populations and their relationship to nature, by using ecocritical concepts. The study explores how the tenacity of Hari and Lila in the face of these environmental difficulties functions as a microcosm of more general concerns about environmental justice and sustainable living on a global scale. This paper seeks to clarify Desai's (2001) ecological perspective, which alternative readings have frequently obscured.

The paper stresses the ecological repercussions of industrial development and emphasizes the possibilities for environmental renewal and adaptation. Hari's trip to Bombay, where he picks up new skills, and his eventual return to the village raise the possibility that combining ancient knowledge with contemporary methods could be the answer to environmental problems. This analysis adds to the body of knowledge by emphasizing how this novel presents a complex viewpoint on the interaction between humans and nature and promotes a peaceful and balanced living with the natural world. This paper seeks to offer a fresh perspective on the novel by examining it through the lens of ecocriticism, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's environmental themes. By engaging with the ideas of Bate, Buell, Commoner, and Glotfelty, the study highlights the novel's relevance in contemporary discussions on men's relationship with nature. It views that when there is environmental degradation and ecological crises, men's relationship with nature will be full of conflicts. In other cases, we find a perfect bond between men and the environment.

4. Analysis and Finding

The inhabitants have a strong spiritual and cultural bond with their surroundings. Nature-related rituals and beliefs, such as prayers to the sea, highlight how traditional life is centered on environmental respect. Desai (2001) depicts the rhythms of rural life as people follow the tides and the harvest, among other natural cycles. The inhabitants have a strong spiritual and cultural bond with their surroundings. Nature-related rituals and beliefs, such as prayers to the sea, highlight how traditional life is centered on environmental respect. Desai (2001) depicts the rhythms of rural life as people follow the tides and the harvest, among other natural cycles. The rocks in the sea were taken as temples, and people bowed their heads. It is revealed in the text as:

When she came to the edge of the sea, she lifted the folds of her sari and tucked them up at her waist, then waded out into the waves that came rushing up over her feet and swirling about her ankles in creamy foam. She waded in till she came to a cluster of three rocks. One of them was daubed with red and white powder. It was the sacred rock, a kind of temple in the sea. At high tide it would be inundated but now, at low tide, it could be freshly consecrated. Lila took the flowers from her basket and scattered them about the rock, then folded her hands and bowed. (8)

The above-mentioned quote depicts the people living in the Thul village who deeply respect nature and its elements. They had a close connection with the sea, water, rocks, and trees. In other words, the village had a harmony between men and nature.

More women would visit the sacred rock later in the morning to present flowers. Since they were all fishermen's wives and daughters, some would offer a little prayer for the safety of the fishermen at sea. Others, like Lila, would merely meet God with a bow.

It looked like a nice way to begin the day. They needed something to which they could offer flowers and red kum-kum powder while they prayed, and the big flat-topped rock that stood in the shallow water and was easily accessible was the most practical one. However, there was no real reason why they chose this rock over others. “It was not so far away as the temple in the village at the far end of the beach, nor did they need to give money to a priest who would perform the *puja* for them. The women preferred to do it themselves” (8). They preferred to pray in the sea instead of going to the temple. It was their faith and devotion to the natural world. Barry Commoner (1972) opines that everything is connected to everything else. There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all. In a similar way, we can see that the people in the Thul village have a sense of connectedness with the natural world.

The sea, which is essential to the fishermen's livelihood, represents both danger and hope. Because of its abundance, it gives them food and serves as a source of prosperity and life. But its erratic nature, which can be serene one minute and raging the next, reminds the inhabitants of the delicate equilibrium they must preserve with the natural world. The villagers' delicate relationship with their environment, where they depend on the sea for survival but must always respect its strength, is reflected in this ongoing conflict between its generosity and its perils.

‘I told them – I told them not to go: the weather was too treacherous for those little matchstick boats,’ Biju roared, standing by the creek and supervising the anchoring and tying up of their boats” (84).

Beyond their practical use, they are significant because they symbolize the people's natural balance with their surroundings, relying on their resources to survive while honoring their cycles and rhythms. This intimate relationship symbolizes a way of life in which nature and human existence are not distinct but rather intricately intertwined. Desai (2001) expresses as:

Then, the lights were never put out in the city, which was always lit up so that Hari's tired eyes longed for the deep darkness and the quiet nights of his seaside village. He could hardly remember the soft sounds of the sea or the wind in the coconut palms or the feel of the clean sand between his fingers and under his feet. (71)

This demonstrates how natural features, like coconut palms, are deeply ingrained in the villagers' everyday lives and function as both necessary providers and a part of the landscape. The coconut palms provide a natural refuge for the locals by providing shade from the scorching tropical sun. The coconuts themselves supply food, oil, and trade commodities, supporting the livelihoods and economies of the locals, while their fronds are used to construct roofs and make household goods. With their height and constant presence, these trees become mute witnesses to the hardships and victories of the community.

Despite this early peace, urbanization and environmental deterioration have led to a great deal of tension in *The Village by the Sea*. The inhabitants and their surroundings are at

odds because of these problems, especially as industrial expansion encroaches on their land and water. The natural environment is disturbed by the construction of a sizable factory close to the village, which pollutes the land and the water. Many villages' livelihoods and the fishing industry are being negatively impacted by the industrial trash that has contaminated the once-clear waters. A sense of dislocation and environmental alienation is also brought about by the factory's presence, which symbolizes the invasion of modernization on traditional village life. The villagers are worried about their profession. They express as:

And what about us who already live here?' asked Biju angrily, his face quite purple. The stranger laughed and chopped at the air with his hand as if he were cutting down weeds. 'Like that— your village will go. In its place, factories will come up, fertilizer will be made, gas will be produced, many jobs will be created. The government says so,' he added loudly when he became aware of the angry looks of the villagers. 'Fishermen and farmers are now to become factory workers?' shouted Biju. 'You mean these boys are to give up their fathers' lands and boats and go to work in factories like city people?' (43)

For Hari's family and many others in the area, environmental deterioration immediately results in financial loss. The sea's pollution makes fishing less dependable, and the factory's introduction of new, unsustainable farming methods overshadows conventional farming methods, neglecting the fields. The villagers protested against it. "What did they talk about? 'We will get jobs – then we will have money.' 'How will we get jobs?' Hari asked, sitting up suddenly and filling his hands with fistfuls of sand. 'They will bring men from the cities to work in the factories.' 'No, they won't,' all three boys shouted in protest" (15).

5. Conclusion

Desai (2001) employs environmental themes to depict the complex interplay of harmony and conflict in the villagers' relationship with nature. Through the struggles of Hari's family, the novel reveals how industrialization disrupts traditional ways of life, polluting the environment and eroding the livelihoods of rural communities. However, Desai (2001) also weaves in a sense of hope, suggesting that adaptation and renewal are possible, even in the face of environmental degradation. The tension between preserving the natural world and the pressures of modernization emerges as a central theme, highlighting the broader conflict between exploitation and stewardship of the environment. This duality not only captures the immediate struggles of Hari's family but also serves as a reflection of the larger ecological challenges faced by rural societies, making the novel a profound exploration of human resilience and the potential for coexistence with nature.

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