



## Pakistani Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Ecocriticism in Relation to Two Novels: A Case Study of a Public-Sector College District Vehari

<sup>1</sup>Ghulam Yasin, <sup>2</sup>Ghazal Shaikh

<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Pakistan

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\*Corresponding author: (G.Yasin)

Ghulam.yasin@scholars.usindh.edu.pk

### Abstract

The research study aims to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of ecocriticism in relation to two selected novels at a public-sector postgraduate college in Vehari, Pakistan. The selected novels are *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1997) and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958). The study relies upon the single research question: 'How does the sample of undergraduate students in Vehari College perceive ecocriticism in fiction?' The framework of ecocriticism by Glotfelty (1996) was utilized to guide the research work. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect research data by eight participants doing their BS English in the same college. The study is distinctive because it explores the participants' perceptions of ecocritical themes in fiction and connects their social and personal experiences with the themes portrayed in the selected novels. The findings reveal that the participants discussed and connected ecocriticism and its themes in the novels that were contextually and culturally closer to their experiences. The findings of the study are important for teachers and researchers working in the field of ecocriticism and fiction because they present considerable insights into the students' perceptions of ecocriticism related to the study of novels.

### Keywords:

Perceptions,  
Undergraduate,  
Ecocriticism,  
Fiction,  
Pakistan

### Introduction

The current research study investigates how undergraduate students perceive themes related to ecocriticism in connection with two selected novels. The participants studied these novels at a public sector college in district Vehari, South Punjab. It also aims to contribute to perceiving ecocriticism based on the participants' context and the insights they gain from fiction. Its further objective is also to persuade the scholars of this particular region to further explore students' understanding of ecocriticism in literature at a broader level.

The novels selected for the research study are; *The God of Small Things* by Roy (1997) and *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe (1958). The basic research question asks, 'How does the sample of undergraduate students in Vehari College perceive ecocriticism in fiction?' It would also determine whether the selected themes of ecocriticism identified by the participants are evident in the selected novels or not, and if so, how they further connect the themes with the local context and their personal experiences while living in a society.

The research study in general does not focus on establishing the cause-and-effect relationships between the participants' perceptions and the selected novels. Instead, it explores how the students of a public sector college in Vehari perceive two selected themes of ecocriticism: humans' attitude towards nature and the relationship between human culture and nature in the two selected novels. Though ecocriticism has a broader scope and various themes the selected themes align with Glotfelty's (1996) framework. Only two themes were chosen to narrow down the scope of the research study. Moreover, the study emphasizes the undergraduate students' response to literature. So, the reader-response theory by Rosenblatt (1978/1994) is introduced in addition to a better understanding of the participants' reactions and interpretations.

### Context

District Vehari is the homeland of a diverse population. Though the people live in a blend of cultures and different languages, the majority of its residents belong to Saraiki and Punjabi families. Their major source of living

is farming. Situated on the right bank of the River Sutlej, Vehari is renowned for cotton production throughout the world. It not only enhances the natural beauty of its towns, but it also strengthens the bond between the people and their natural lands.

Participants of the study were pursuing a four-year BS program in English at a public sector college in Vehari city. They were following the curriculum set by Baha-Ul-Din Zakarya University Multan. In this program, the students delve into literary subjects like fiction, postcolonial literature, and world literature. The study of diverse subjects made the BS English program multifaceted. Both selected novels, *The God of Small Things* and *Things Fall Apart*, fall under the domain of postcolonial literature.

Although ecocriticism in fiction was neither part of their syllabus nor discussed in detail during their lectures, the participants were familiar with the concept. They got information related to ecocriticism from their studies of literary theories or research projects.

According to Guha (2022), ecocriticism focuses on the shift of human-centric affairs towards biocentric behaviors. It also encourages the readers to explore and develop the sustainable physical environment presented in modern world literature. Saraswathi and Balakrishnan (2021) argue that the perceptions of ecocriticism in literature would not merely create awareness of the issues related to nature and the environment but also persuade the readers to play their role in its restoration. Furthermore, the purpose of ecocriticism in literary research (as shown by Hou, Kang, and Xu, 2022) is to explore environmental issues in literary texts. Such types of research studies may contribute to the perceptions of ecocriticism, and this developed understanding would make the readers more responsible towards nature and the environment. As the present study is also based upon the undergraduate students' perceptions of ecocriticism and its interrelationship with their personal experiences, it would not merely create awareness of the issues related to the environment but also make the readers more responsible in dealing with the natural world.

#### **Novel Selection**

Two novels, *The God of Small Things* and *Things Fall Apart*, were selected on the basis of some criteria developed by the researchers. Firstly, the review of the literature shows that the novels contain some relevant selected themes of ecocriticism. Secondly, the novels came up in the discussions with the students, who studied them as part of their syllabus and found them closer to the research plan. Thirdly, both novels are written in different contexts and environments, at different times and by authors of both male and female genders.

*The God of Small Things* presents the context of an Indian village known as Ayemenem. It highlights the exploitation of natural resources because of unplanned human development. Humans are the cause of destroying nature and wildlife, though nature is the source of benefit for humans (Mishra, 2016). Roy not only enjoys the status of a high-ranking author, and a social activist but also an "eco-entrepreneur" because she raises a voice for the protection of nature and the surrounding environment (Premalatha & Lourdes, 2018). The other novel *Things Fall Apart* presents the deep connections between the local African Igbo culture and natural elements. Achebe artistically portrayed nature not only in the background, but it is seen all around in their culture, lives, and beliefs. Every aspect of the lives of local Africans, from social norms and economics to religion and festivals, is influenced by nature and its elements (Kumar, 2021; Thakur, 2020).

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Louise Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) transactional reader response theory and the theory of ecocriticism by Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) collectively develop a theoretical framework for the study. It is justified because reader response theory supports the participants in developing their perceptions of ecocriticism in the selected literary texts.

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) finds the text no more than a piece of paper and some ink without a reader because "some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols" (p. 23). So, the reader makes the text more valuable by giving some meaning to it. It also does not show the verbal symbols lying on the paper have no meanings, but the reader's response to these symbols creates meanings. So, the process involved in making meanings is two-way, and she names it a transaction between reader and text, whereas the readers' experiences and past knowledge influence the transaction process (Rosenblatt, 1986). Rosenblatt rejects the Lockean philosophy, developing the view of the fixed meanings of the text (Wilson, 2020), because every individual reader contains varied experiences and knowledge. So, different meanings of the same text are produced by different readers.

Commonly, the participants utilized two styles of reading during the reading process of the selected texts as discussed by Rosenblatt (1978/1994). Efferent or informational style of reading, where they wanted to acquire some information regarding the text. Second, the aesthetic reading of the text connected their real-world experiences with the world of the text and also gave them feelings of pleasure. Resultantly, the participants' perceptions and interpretations of the selected texts were affected by their chosen styles of reading along with their social experiences. Moreover, these elements of Rosenblatt also guided us in developing the research question.

Second, the theory of ecocriticism (1996) by Cheryll Glotfelty was taken so that the participants may explore its themes in the selected two novels. According to theory, ecocriticism presents the connection between literature and the physical environment. Human beings and their surrounding environment have interconnectedness with each other and the studies in the field of ecocriticism describe such connection in different ways. It further includes the humans' attitude towards nature and environment, human culture, and their dealings with wilderness.

Glotfelty (1996) shows serious concerns regarding the ignorance of scholars and researchers towards the field. The issues of gender, finance, class, and race were discussed more in literature, and such ignorance towards nature and the environment limited the awareness of readers. The reason why is that they still hesitate to deal with the earth-centered approaches. It shows the urgency of bringing readers towards ecocritical studies so that humans' dealing with the surrounding environment and issues related to it may be perceived and highlighted. Though Glotfelty (1996) discussed various characteristics of ecocriticism, we delimited the study only to its two characteristics as per need: humans' attitude towards nature, and the relationship between human culture and nature.

Glotfelty (1996) does not consider ecocriticism just a literary theory, but it also focuses on the real-world experiences where humans are living. Its interdisciplinary nature enhances its scope in various other affairs of life. So, it makes the connection between humans and nature everlasting, and Das (2020) fixes this responsibility upon the shoulders of ecocritics to judge the humans' attitude toward the natural world. Moreover, Glotfelty (1996) also finds a direct connection between human culture and their surrounding physical world but according to Joshi (2021), nature and culture are interconnected and cannot be separated.

### Literature Review

It can be argued that environmental injustice and rapid urbanization in the town destroy the ecological health and natural environment. *The God of Small Things* looks like a document of protest by Roy against the environmental and natural destruction in the hands of humans. She wants to find the solution to the cause by throwing a message to live with harmony among all other elements (Borade and Singh, 2020). Roy also manifests how humans are responsible for the damage of ecological diversity, natural exploitation, and the destruction of various plants and animal species through industrial and technological advancement shown in the novel (St. John, 2022). River Meenachal was the real source of joy for the town in the past, but it is contaminated now. The toxic waste materials not merely polluted it but also diminished it into a drain (Regmi, 2023). However, Elahi and Khan (2023) stated the destruction of nature and the environment as the destruction of human race because the natural environment has the tendency to bring change in humans' moods and behaviors. Similarly, Regmi (2022) found Ammu and her children having close connections with the river. It was the source of comfort and peace for them. Later, it was no more than the drain of human shit. It had lost its charm and attraction.

It can be further argued that *Things Fall Apart* narrates the story of the strong connections of Igbo people with the surrounding nature and their environment. Nature is not merely an environment but like a religion for them. Their social life, their economic issues, their feasts and festivals, their culture, and even their worship also revolve around nature (Kumar, 2021). According to Ebim (2021), there is seen a friendly coexistence of everything in the ecosystem. The role of nature is like a living character and the dominance of Mother Earth is all around. Thakur (2020) calls Unoka, the father of Okonkwo, a child of nature because he has some sort of ideal relationship with nature but he neither exploits nature for his gain nor tries to produce abundantly from his land. In contrast, Ugwu and Abonyi (2020) perceive the relationship of his son with nature as totally different. His manliness and heroic appearance in the clan present his character as antagonistic to nature.

Moreover, the Igbo culture is the cause of developing strong connections of people with nature. Neupane (2022) argues that the celebrations of festivals like 'week of quiet' and 'week of peace' and 'the New Yams Festival' are all connected to please the goddess of Earth. Otherwise, their crops would not flourish. Similarly, Danlami (2020) also mentions the local yam festival bringing all the people of the clan together. Yam crops are directly connected with their economy. So, nature is the source of union and bringing prosperity to them. Priyanka and Kumaraswamy (2019) even call the Igbo people dependent upon wilderness for their living. Their villages exist closer to it and they also get palm oil for cooking and fueling purposes through the wild palm trees. Palm wine and kola nuts used for ceremonies and guests are also the products of nature.

### Methodology

The present research study is a qualitative inquiry. It focuses on interviewing methods of data collection and particularly on the semi-structured interview process. We designed semi-structured questions to conduct interviews of the selected undergraduate students of the Vehari district to collect data in the form of words required for the study. The choice of collecting data through semi-structured interviews also provided us an opportunity to discuss things and collect the participants' perceptions of ecocriticism in detail (as suggested by Murphy, 2021).

Collecting data from enough research participants is always crucial in the process of research. So, the data collection process was initiated with a small-sized sample for its further thematic analysis (as suggested by Braun and Clark, 2013). So, we decided not to take large samples. Eight postgraduate students studying in a public-sector college of district Vehari were included. Though some students showed their interest as they were told about the research project, but random selection of the participants was ethically not acceptable. So, purposive sampling was decided because it also provided the researchers a chance to invite the participants and later chose the volunteers proving more valuable for the study (suggested by Syed, 2020).

The required data includes the participants' personal and social experiences, and the life experiences of male and female members may be different though living in the same social environment (as suggested by Larsson and Ferngren, 2021). So, it was decided to have a coherent but mixed-gender group consisting of both male and female students. Finally, four male and four female students who had studied the selected texts as part of their syllabus were included in the process of data collection. However, pseudonyms were used during data analysis to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

They studied the selected novels *The God of Small Things* and *Things Fall Apart* in their Postcolonial literature module as the part of their syllabus. The designed research protocol was shared with them in advance through WhatsApp group and contact numbers organized by one of the professors of the college on our request. The students were more comfortable in using WhatsApp rather than email. So, this mode of sharing was utilized. Ethically, the participants were given a right to withdraw the process or refuse for the participation any time and without presenting any explanation.

We utilized an explorative approach to find the participants' perceptions. Considering the qualitative mode of data based on participants' perceptions, semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most suitable tool for collecting data (as suggested by Patel and Crawford, 2022). The questions centered on the selected themes of ecocriticism were included in the interview schedule to record the responses and insights of the participants during the data collection process. On average, interviews spanned between 15 to 20 minutes. The interview schedule was divided into four segments. The very first part was based on the participants' personal information. Subsequently, participants discussed their perceptions on humans' attitude towards nature. The third part explored the relationship between human culture and nature. Lastly, they also connected their personal experiences with the world of fiction.

### Findings

The research participants presented various mentions regarding two selected ecocritical themes from the texts of the selected novels. Importantly, they also connected these fictional themes with the real-world experiences. The discussions were based upon their perceptions of ecocritical themes in fiction during their classroom studies and how they observed such things in real life. They also highlighted their connections and experiences with nature. They were more concerned with the protection of natural elements and environment because the most of them were grown up in rural belts of district Vehari, surrounded by lush green fields and meadows of the river Sutlej. Later, the participants also observed natural and environmental destruction under the umbrella of city and human development. Various residential projects and markets were built in the last decade by destroying green fields, mango gardens and some small forests lying near the river belts. So, these elements also contributed in developing their perceptions of ecocritical themes.

#### Humans' Attitude Towards Nature

The research participants perceived the ecocritical theme of humans' attitude towards nature through observing some events and characters portrayed in the selected novels. In *The God of Small Things*, the participants observed two different attitudes of human characters in different eras. Bushra found the people of the 1960s more friendly and loving towards their lush green natural surroundings. The river Meenachal was the center of their activities whereas the next generations damaged their natural surroundings in the name of development and modernization. So, they also polluted the physical environment and the river. Aslam in particular talked about the river which was source of their living, fishing and farming. The people of town also spent time on its bank but later it was destroyed because of throwing the waste materials in it. It not only destroyed the river life but also disbalanced ecosystem of the town.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the participants perceived the relationship and attitude of the local African people friendly towards natural surroundings and the nature in return also benefits them. They found every village not only standing closer to the forest but also had some social and spiritual reasons behind it. The most of their living was dependent upon them. So, Azra called them natural friendly and "the people of forest". Aslam also mentioned the reason for being a society dependent upon lands and natural resources made them friendly towards it. They got food, fruits, shelter, woods for burning and oil for eating purposes from the natural resources. Shaukat called this friendly attitude because the local Africans had no concept of human development. So, they were living in the center of forests without thinking about any change in the conditions. However, Rimsha in contrast also perceived, "we may find where



the arrival of British missionaries is the cause of destroying the local Igbo culture and natural surroundings and even, they destroyed the pure environment in which Igbo society was existing”.

Further, some participants demanded humans’ friendly attitude towards nature because they are always benefited from it. Aslam mentioned the character of Okonkwo from *Things Fall Apart* loving his lands and in return he also gets plenty of yams and richness from there. Similarly, Javeria talked about the Igbo society relying upon natural surroundings and getting yams and palm wine for food and importantly they were living in a pure natural environment. Rimsha particularly named the characters of Velutha and Ammu in *The God of Small Things* finding shelter, peace of mind, and food when they were in distress. She called it a message by the author for modern people how they may recover from the tensions and stress of the daily life by spending some time in the company of natural world. Shaukat further said, “It would reduce their anger, fear and stress and also enhance the pleasant feelings towards life. It would also control their blood pressure and also contribute to their physical well-being”. So, they suggest that people should have a friendly attitude towards nature like the characters mentioned, they would also find peace and relief from nature in return.

Some participants connected natural and environmental exploitation with the social status of the people. They argued that the common men had a friendly attitude towards nature in both novels like Velutha, Ammu or the father of Okonkwo but the exploitation of natural resources occurred through the hands of influential people of the society. Sajid talked about the construction of a dam on river Meenachal as per the desire of the strong politicians and landlords which destroyed the river life along with the life of birds and humans. Similarly, Javeria also observed the destruction of nature and the environment in the hands of colonizers when they came to power in *Things Fall Apart*. So, this is not the common man destroying nature but the people with some interests are destroying surroundings and wilderness for their interests. It shows that they want to conquer nature also like common men so that they might use it according to their desires.

#### **Relationship Between Human Culture and Nature**

The research participants also shared their perceptions on the second selected theme of ecocriticism. Importantly, the number of participants’ mentions of the particular novel *Things Fall Apart* went higher as compared to the first theme. Osama observed the culture of Igbo people connected with their natural environment. During the week of peace, when the second wife of Okonkwo cut the branch of a banana tree for her use. He punished her because she violated the set belief of not harming nature. It was like a sin to damage nature in their culture. They also observed a strong connection between the belief system and their nature-oriented Igbo culture. It was the source of strength, peace and brought them together to celebrate various festivals. Saima in particular mentioned the festivals arranged to please the goddess of Earth before the season of plantation. In this way, such cultural events were directly connected with their natural lands and seasons. Sajid called nature the part of their belief system because they worshipped the goddess of nature so that they might get prosperity in future.

It can be argued that change in culture brought social and cultural destructions in both the novels. Saima mentioned the culture of town in past days was closer to nature in *The God of Small Things*. Baby Kochama used to spend ample time looking after her Garden and it was also well decorated and famous all around. With the introduction of electricity and technology in the town, she became more interested in watching TV and finally the garden was destroyed due to her careless attitude towards it. Similarly, Rimsha also observed cultural destruction in the name of social development in the novel. The second generation of the town began to destroy their village green areas and river side by constructing huge buildings, banks and residential areas. Further, they also constructed dam and destroyed their cultural heritage for the growth in tourism and economic purposes. Moreover, Shaukat also found the arrival of white colonizers in Africa shattered their whole lifestyle in *Things Fall Apart*. They destroyed their natural surroundings in the name of development by calling their local culture old and outdated. This thing pushed them away from the natural resources and it brought destruction.

#### **Participants’ Perceptions of Themes and its Connection with Local Culture**

The participants not only discussed the selected themes with reference to the novels but also observed its connections with local context of Vehari the basis of their personal and social experiences. Saima observed the exploitation of nature and environment in the novels and she also found it all around in her local society. Vehari in particular is an agrarian society but the rich lands and highly profitable gardens of mangle and oranges are now being demolished for building colonies, residential areas and city plazas.

The culture connected with nature is found in the early chapters of both novels. Sajid argued that the local people of Vehari also depend upon natural resources like the people of town or Igbo people for their living. In *Things Fall Apart*, various festivals are celebrated to welcome the seasons of farming and harvesting crops. The festival of Besakhi is also celebrated in the local areas of district Vehari before the start of harvesting wheat crops. Similarly, some other festivals like local Punjabi Mela festivals are also celebrated at various occasions as shown in the novel. Importantly, the purpose of these local events is similar to the purpose of African Igbo people, to welcome the seasons

or to start the harvesting of crops. Iqra also found the activity of Kitchen gardening was once popular in the local homes of Vehari. It was like a hobby to look after it for them and they also obtained seasonal fresh vegetables from it. This activity was similar to the gardening of baby Kochamma in the lawn of her home. The involvement of people in technology like using mobile phones and watching TV programs has almost vanished it. These kitchen gardens are also disappearing from society like the garden of baby Kochamma due to their carelessness.

## Discussion

### Humans' Attitude Towards Nature

The research participants perceived a vivid shift of human characters' attitudes towards nature across generations in *The God of Small Things*. They observed some opposing attitudes towards nature between 1960s and future generations. It also aligned with Suresh (2021) observing the culture of the town is strongly connected with the natural world. There came a change in natural conditions with the change in its lifestyle and traditional values. Once, the people were dependent upon the river Meenachal and its natural surroundings but later, the advent of modernization and development led towards the degradation of natural elements. The polluted river because of the dumping of waste symbolizes the detachment of humans from it. It also works as a metaphor for how human actions contribute to the broader natural and environmental disasters. Basically, the learners' past knowledge and local culture have some influence in the process of making meanings of a text (as suggested by Rosenblatt, 1994). So, the participants concern about the destruction of green and river belts along with the settings of the novel was because of the observance of such happening in the surroundings. It also suggests the impact of damaging humans' attitudes on ecological balance and biodiversity.

Though environmental and natural degradation were the serious concerns of participants' perceptions in *The God of Small Things* they also discussed the therapeutic impact of natural world on the life of humans. Particularly, they talked about marginalized characters finding peace and shelter in it. Such perceptions reveal the healing and reviving power of nature. Similarly, Elahi and Khan (2023), observed the tendency of nature to influence humans' moods and behaviors. It also suggests that humans' revival of nature can alleviate the stress of modern life, and it may also improve their physical health. The participants also dominantly observed friendly and interdependent connections between the Igbo community and their natural environment in *Things Fall Apart*. Their relationship with nature was not a physical one but it was the sources of their food, spirituality, and cultural identity. Azra called them "people of the forest". It was similar with Priyanka and Kumaraswamy (2019), considering Igbo community dependent upon nature for various affairs of their lives. It suggests not only the existence of harmonious bond but also shows their dependence on nature for survival.

However, some participants found how this friendly bond of Igbo community with nature was disrupted by British colonizers. Javeria and Rimsha mentioned how colonialism affected adversely both the natural environment and indigenous Igbo culture. Similarly, Sajid also talked about landlords and powerful politicians destroying the local natural environment for their interests. It also suggests how the personal interests of powerful people overrule ecological sustainability and social well-being. It was aligned with Mondal and Lavanya (2021), they called it a power game where the ruling people of society utilize maximum resources without showing any concerns with the lower class.

Though the prevailing sub-theme in humans' attitude towards nature perceived by the participants was of natural exploitation but they also explored the worth of nature in benefiting human beings. Some participants highlighted the benefits humans getting; physical sustenance, food items, raw material, shelter and even spiritual relief. They also observed some characters like Okonkwo, Velutha, and Ammu in what social circumstance they were but friendly with nature. They had harmonious relationships with natural resources and in return, they were also benefited. Though it aligned with Ebim (2021) but Ugwu and Abonyi (2020) had different opinion regarding Okonkwo by calling him antagonist to nature. It also suggests that a friendly and harmonious relationship with nature and the environment may bring prosperity, peace, and cultural integrity.

### Relationship Between Human Culture and Nature

The participants' perceptions regarding the theme relationship between human culture and nature were based upon the interrelationship of nature and cultural practices, the connection of nature with the belief system, and the relationship of their daily lifestyle with the surrounding environment.

The participants observed a profound connection between human culture and nature. Osama in particular highlights the reverence of the Igbo community for nature, where damaging the natural assets in any form was considered the violation of cultural and spiritual beliefs. Such cultural ethos suggests the coexistence of all elements with harmony on this planet Earth. It was aligned with Kumar (2021) and Thakur (2020), finding the spiritual relationship between nature and culture of Igbo community. Further, the occurrence of this kind of a symbiotic relationship would also ensure human development and environmental growth.

Some participants also reveal cultural change being the cause of destructive human attitudes towards their surrounding environment. Particularly, the humans' excessive use of technology led them towards neglecting and deteriorating environmental conditions for their personal gains. The observance of shift in priorities from looking after gardens to watching TV points out a broader social shift where the advancement in technology disrupts humans' connection with nature and the environment. Similarly, St. John (2022) and Regmi (2022) discussed humans' behaviors and life style destroying the natural surroundings. Glotfelty (1996) also talked about "the endangered Earth" in the hands of human beings. So, the research suggests some serious measures should be taken immediately regarding check over technology and urbanization otherwise it would result in broader environmental and natural degradation.

Though the prevailing sub-theme in relationship between human nature and culture perceived by the participants was of some friendly living of the two but some participants also mentioned cultural change coming through colonialism and modernization in *Things Fall Apart* destroyed their natural surroundings and cultural heritage. It suggests that the enforcement of Western ideologies in some local areas of underdeveloped countries may destroy indigenous culture, local set traditions, and environmental conditions. It would also further bring ecological degradation and cultural disintegration.

### **Participants' Perceptions of Themes and their Connection with Local Culture**

The participants not merely perceived themes of ecocriticism in the selected novels but also connected them with their real-world social and personal experiences. Saima in particular connected the exploitation of nature portrayed in the novels with her local experiences in Vehari. She found the conversion of fertile lands and green belts into residential colonies and commercial markets in her surroundings as she perceived it in the novel *The God of Small Things*. It was aligned with St. John (2022) finding how the next generation of town Ayemenem destroyed the surrounding environment for their personal benefits. It suggests that such economic based projects are being launched at the cost of ecological integrity, natural destruction, and sustainable social system.

The participants also found a connection between human culture and nature in the local settings of Vehari as they perceived it the selected novels. Sajid in particular talked about the local agrarian culture depending upon nature and its elements like the people of town Ayemenem and Igbo African people. The local festival celebrations like Besakhi or local Punjabi Mela have resemblance to the festivals organized by Igbo people to welcome the harvesting and natural seasons. Similarly, Neupane (2022) and Danlami (2020) also discussed the importance of festivals in the lives of Africans and how these festivals keep the community united. Importantly, the discussed cultural practices not merely strengthen the relationships of people with the natural world but also make the members realize the worth of ecological balance, and the sustainable existence of all elements in our ecosystem.

### **Conclusion**

The participants perceived and identified the selected themes of ecocriticism: humans' attitude towards nature and the relationship between human culture and nature. Their perceptions were mostly based on their personal experiences in the local settings of Vehari. Participants' most of the perceptions were connected to *The God of Small Things* because it was much closer to the local settings and context of Vehari. and social settings. Whereas, the participants discussed the theme of relationship between human culture and nature in greater number in *Things Fall Apart*. Again, the cultural context was more important because the rituals and festivals mentioned in the novel were much closer to their local festivals and ceremonies. On the basis of such findings, we suggest that fiction portraying local Pakistani culture and context be added to the syllabus at the undergraduate level. It would improve the interest and fictional understanding of students.

In conclusion, both of the selected novels present various modes of relationship between human beings and the natural world. It consists of humans' harmonious attitudes towards destructive natural exploitation. Most of the participants perceive the anthropocentric attitudes of the people of town in *The God of Small Things*. They prefer economic and social development in the town over protecting its natural surroundings. Whereas, most of the participants consider the friendly attitude and spiritual relationship of Igbo society towards the natural world in *Things Fall Apart*. Though the arrival of white colonizers disturbed the symmetry of symbiotic harmony, prior to this, it was part of their belief system not to harm nature and the environment in any case. Overall, the discussion suggests to renewing humans' bond with nature based on ecological development. Humans' friendly attitudes towards nature and the environment would not only alleviate environmental conditions but also improve humans' physical health, moods, and quality of life. Thus, it can be argued that both humans and the environment can be benefited if a sustainable and friendly relationship is developed between the two.

The participants observed a strong relationship between human culture and nature presented in the selected novels. They emphasized promoting nature-oriented cultural traditions and belief systems. It would bring friendliness, sustainability, and mutual interdependence between humans and the environment. They also illustrated some dangerous effects of sudden and unplanned cultural change, urbanization, and social development on human lives and

the surrounding environment. So, the research suggests that it is necessary to educate people regarding environmental issues along with promoting sustainable development and a culture of respect for natural surroundings at the local level in district Vehari. Finally, the perceptions offered by participants in connection with the selected novels address environmental problems of the day, humans' ignorant behaviors towards the natural world, and cultural challenges destroying nature and the environment. It also brings forth the need for developing more friendly and sustainable connections between humans and nature at a broader and local level.

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