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Nature in the Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role and impact of nature on life and literature briefly. A few fairy tales of Andersen are taken up to highlight this. It defines Ecology and Ecocriticism and discusses a few fairy tales of Andersen from that angle. Intimate relationship between the natural and social world is analyzed in various departments of knowledge.

It also discusses the inter-relationships of living things to one another and their surrounding environment; ecosystems, i.e. groups of living things interacting with one another. All creations are an integral part of the universe and a universal spirit binds all. Hence, there is interconnectedness, interdependence and interrelationship. As such, hurting one aspect of this universe is hurting oneself. This unified viewpoint is reflected in the works of many environmentalists, scientists and philosophers of both the West and the East.

Concepts like Gaia theory, the Deep Ecology Movement, the Web of Life are taken up to stress the interconnectedness, interdependence and interrelationship of all living things and even non-living things and also the unity in diversity in life.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Gaia Theory, Fairy Tales

Ecology

Ecology, a Greek word, means the scientific study of interactions among organisms and their environment. It was coined by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel in 1866. It is an interdisciplinary subject which studies the inter-relationships of living things to one another and their surrounding environment. Its scope is wide and it studies ecosystems, i.e. groups of living things interacting with one another. Human beings, animals, plants, rocks, streams, and forests belong to the earth. Man is also a part of the ecosystem, and depends on it for his survival. Man is a product of evolution and nature has played an important role in his evolution.

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development. The literary critic tries to study how this close relationship between nature and society has been textualized by the writers in their works. In this context, two terms have become very important today – ecology and ecocriticism. (Shikha 1) This paper discusses the ecological as well as ecocritical approach to Literature, in general and in fairy tales, in particular.

William Rueckert used the term ‘ecocriticism’ in 1978 in his essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. It is “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of

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literature” (qtd. in Oppermann: Web). Its scope started encompassing all works of arts and literature including poems, stories, novels, film, theatre, architectures and scientific narratives. It borrowed methodologies and approaches from other fields of literary, social and scientific study.

Ecocriticism crosses all the boundaries and encompasses ecology, literature, sociology and science. Ecocritical approach, then, is one that attempts to transcend the duality of art and life, human and the natural, and to work along the principle of interconnections between them. Establishing an ethical and aesthetic ground towards a renewed understanding of both literature and ecology is the purpose of this paper. Ecocriticism offers a unique fusion of literary, scientific, ecological and philosophical perspectives, and also focuses on the political fights or struggles that have to be fought for sustainable living in a sustainable world. Ecocriticism maintains a "triple-allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of critical representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world” (qtd. in Battista : Web). The intrinsic value of nature, leaving the utilitarian approach, has to be realized by people and towards this end ecocriticism strives.

Nature, in the form of forests, flowers, trees and plants and animals, birds and insects, plays a dominant role, an enchanting and enlightening role in many of the fairy tales. Nature gives to all, without expecting anything in return. However, when man crosses the limits and tries to subvert and destroy nature for man’s selfish ends, it erupts in the form of volcanoes, destroys in the form earthquakes, storms, tsunamis and other natural disasters and calamities.

Nature has the power to give endlessly and also the power to teach mankind a lesson when it goes in the wrong direction. Walking with nature is the path to prosperity and happiness. When one dies and one’s body is consigned to the earth, the body decays and becomes one with the soil and thus becoming food for the plants and trees that grow in that place. Likewise, vegetables and fruits, products of plants and trees become food to man.

Sama Veda clearly states it, “I am the food; I am the eater” (qtd. in Joseph: 45). All creation is an integral part of the universe and a universal spirit binds all. As integral parts of the Universal Spirit, there is interconnectedness, interdependence and interrelationship. As such, hurting one aspect of this universe, is hurting oneself. This unified viewpoint is reflected in the works of many environmentalists, scientists and philosophers of both the West and the East. It is essential to achieve peace and harmony not just between peoples but also with nature.

The bio-chemico-physical world is nothing but nature. Mankind is not just intimately connected with nature but is also a part and continuation of it. The relationship between man and nature is laid on this solid foundation. Nature gives man everything he needs. In fact, mankind has to depend on nature for its food, medicine, shelter, clothing and other necessities to survive. So the attitude of man towards nature should be one of reverence, gratitude and cordiality. If human beings in their arrogance think that they can tamper with nature as they please, they will have to pay a heavy price in the form of natural calamities like earthquakes, storms, hurricanes, tornadoes and tsunamis. Hence the onus of treating and using nature fairly lies on human beings. As long as this relationship is laid on the solid foundation of awareness, understanding, reverence, gratitude and love, mankind can prosper and lead a peaceful and harmonious life. *The Nightingale* from Andersen clearly highlights this aspect.

Andersen’s *The Nightingale* is about a real nightingale and an artificial nightingale. It reveals that nature’s creation (or if one is spiritually inclined, God’s creation) is far better than man’s creation. Artificiality can never replace originality. A king, who finds a nightingale, is enchanted by its sweet voice. But when he is presented with a clockwork nightingale, he forgets the real nightingale. “No one had noticed that it had flown away out of the open window, back to the green wood” (HCA 346). When the clockwork nightingale breaks down, the king is no longer able to hear the sweet voice of the

nightingale. The real nightingale reappears and sings in its sweet voice and the king realizes his folly. The relationship between the king and the nightingale is laid on a solid foundation. But when the artificial nightingale enters the scene, this relationship is spoilt. The king ignores the real nightingale. But, when he realizes his folly and accepts the fact that the clockwork nightingale and the real nightingale can never be equal, the real nightingale reappears and their relationship is restored. Human beings are a living testimony to the great truth of interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependence. The three may seem to be synonymous; but there is a subtle difference. If one sees the world as a great web, then all human beings, animals, plants and every other being — whether living or non-living — are different strands in that web and thus interconnected. Man is in the web of universal life and is a part of it. “Everything is connected to everything else” (qtd. in Keefer : Web) says Barry Commoner, an American environmental scientist. Each individual, each creature and each item of matter has their allotted place and they co-exist in the universal web of life. As such they are interconnected and interdependent.

The Gaia Theory asserts that all living organisms are interconnected; the earth is not a machine. It is a living, breathing organism. This theory is ascribed to the famous NASA scientist, James Lovelock. It is the interaction between living things and the earthly environment which has made earth’s atmosphere, and also regulates it. A planet’s biosphere and its physical components are closely integrated. Lovelock refers to the interconnectedness of all things as “a single complex feedback system” (qtd. in Cavemen :Web).

William Golding suggested naming the theory after ‘Gaia’; the Greek Goddess of the Earth, who is mother to the Gods of the heavens and seas. The mountains and all mortal creatures are also her children. The Deep Ecology Movement, an environmental movement, also stresses the concept of interconnectedness.

In the web of life, each strand is connected to the other in some way. This interconnection is essential to sustain life in this universe. Many beings come into one’s life and play a role, which could be big or small, good or bad. At times, even a small being could completely change the course of one’s life; this often happens in the fairy tale. The life of the main character, the hero or the heroine is completely changed by someone or something insignificant. Further, in day-to-day life, one comes across a lot of ordinary people like neighbours and pet animals playing a role in one’s life. Yet people go their way without even noticing or acknowledging. It is a common practice everywhere in the world, that in times of sorrow and pain, neighbours, even strangers try to assuage the pain, suffering and sorrow with kind words for they innately feel the interconnectedness, and as a result, are able to empathize with the sufferers.

Creative writers and artists, so also great souls have this expanded vision of life. They are able to view the world as a whole and the human beings, animals, plants and everything that exists in the world as parts of that whole. It is want of breadth of vision that separates one from the others and makes one think everything is different and disconnected. This isolated or narrow outlook has to be overcome to avoid being self-centered and selfish.

Swami Vivekananda expresses his view, “Expansion is life, contraction is death. Love is life, hatred is death” (qtd. in Chattopadhyaya : 177). Man commences his life, so to say, as a dot. Then the dot becomes a circle to include his mother and the father. It widens further to include his sisters and brothers; it still further widens to include friends and relatives; the circle thus goes on widening including neighbours; then people of the village, town or city; then the state; then the country; after that the continent, the world and the universe at last. When one realizes this oneness, this interconnectedness and the inter-relationship, only then, one will find fulfillment and peace of mind, and life becomes more meaningful. Literature is not an esoteric or ethereal presence but one capable of playing a role in a complicated global pattern where everything – matter, energy and ideas – can interact. *The Tinderbox*,

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The Fir Tree, Last Dream of the Old Oak, from Andersen discuss how fairy tales inform children in an unobtrusive way the interconnectedness, the inter-relationship and the interdependence of man and nature. Moreover, they stand out as a matter of routine and as something quite natural.

In Andersen's *The Tinderbox*, a poor soldier promises a witch to retrieve gold and a magic tinderbox hidden in the hallow tree, but he goes back on his words and kills the witch when she refuses to divulge the secret of the tinderbox. He keeps the treasures to himself and gains control over the three monstrous dogs which guarded the treasure. He learns about the princess of the kingdom, who is locked up because of the prophecy that she would marry only a common soldier. Seeking the help of the monstrous dogs, he succeeds in bringing the princess to his place. He falls in love with her at first sight. When he is caught and sentenced to death, he escapes with the help of the dogs, after killing the king, queen and the courtiers. Finally, he gets the crown and the princess. The coming of the soldier into the life of the witch results in her death, whereas due to the witch, the poor soldier becomes rich, marries the princess and becomes the king. The life of the soldier, the witch, the princess, the king, the queen, the courtiers, three monstrous dogs and the tinderbox are all interwoven and interconnected, as each plays a role in the life of the other.

Nature is a great teacher. If only one shows due respect and regard to it, nature can reveal greater truths of life and teach one many life-lessons. All one needs is a humble heart, with the yearning to learn and a will to progress by the teachings. Thus, one of the relationships between man and nature is that of a teacher and student.

We humans are intimately connected—with every breath we take, every sip of liquid we drink, and every morsel of food we eat—to the surrounding bio-chemico-physical world. We are as vortices in a flux of energy and materials, distinguishable only as ephemeral structures in that flux. We cannot—that is, we should not—conceive of ourselves as in any way independent of the natural environment. Rather we are continuous with it. The protection of human health and wellbeing is indistinguishable from the protection of environmental health and wellbeing. (Callicott Web).

Many of man's present day predicaments reveal the truth that his relationship with nature is strained and the ethical, aesthetic and moral dilemmas stem mainly from this. The corrective could be going back to nature with an attitude of reverence and love. If the relationship between man and nature becomes close and friendly, then some solutions can be found to today's self-imposed problems of man. Nature has influenced many writers and artists. Very often it is the landscape of childhood that imprints itself indelibly on the creative imagination. "Nature informs the stories and the stories inform what one sees in nature. [...]"

Nature and fairy stories have a symbiotic relationship" (Maithaland Web). Without an understanding-relationship and broad-mindedness, mankind can kill each other and destroy the planet. Though these facts are simple, they need to be reiterated in this world which is heading towards disaster through terrorism, fundamentalism and avarice.

Literature can play a vital role in creating awareness among people about the importance of maintaining good relationship not only with people and nations but also with nature. Vannucci, quotes Atharva Veda, "Nature is to be understood as a friend, revered as mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child"(qtd. in Religaialatour : Web). If one strives, one can easily find some relationship or the other with each other. Inter-relationship could be that of mother-child, teacher-student, savior-saved, master-servant and mutual friendship and many more.

The need to relate to others is an innate trait of human beings. They crave for love, affection and closeness. They have to relate to people to develop intimacy and closeness. It comes easily to many

children to call people, even strangers, depending upon their age by some relationship or the other like grandpa, grandma, uncle, aunty, brother or sister.

In tales like *The Fir Tree*, nature becomes a teacher to mankind. So the relationship between the reader and nature is that of a student and teacher. The Fir Tree is the story of a tree that has big dreams of its future, and loses its present and misses the joy and beautiful wonders everyday brings. It always lives in the future dreaming big dreams not heeding to the counsel of well-wishers who insist that he should live in the present, enjoying the present. Finally, when it realizes its folly, it is too late, for it has been cut for Christmas decoration. Though initially, it feels elated being the center of attraction with all its decorations, its heart plummets when it realises that its life is going to be short-lived. It sighs and recalls with sadness, the joys and blessings it missed. "Now that was past, and the tree's life was past, and the story is past too: past! past!"(HCA 247). As it fears, it is thrown away and burnt after the Christmas season. This is a great lesson for human beings. There is joy, happiness, beauty, enchantment, little and small things to enjoy in everyday life. One must learn to live life fully and enjoy the things of joy that one comes across. It is futile to lose the present for the sake of an uncertain future. Thus, this tale holds a lesson for all. Nature acts as a teacher, and is teaching this lesson to the fir tree through the sunbeam and the wind. It is also a lesson for human beings on how to lead a serene and joyful life by living in the present.

In the *Last Dream of the Old Oak*, Ephemera, an insect plays a vital role. It lives just for a day but lives every moment of its life in joy and happiness. It sees beauty everywhere and loves what it sees. When time comes, it gently lays itself on the grass and peacefully passes away. Thus, Ephemera lives just for a day, born in the morning and dying in the evening. Countless Ephemeras have come and gone like this. On the contrary, the oak tree lives for long years and after growing old, ages with despair and does not know what to make of its remaining life. Before the watching eyes of the old oak tree, many lives come into being and disappear without a trace. The old oak tree watches all but learns the secret of life from Ephemera. Ephemera says to the tree, "You have thousands of my days; but I have thousands of moments, in which I can be merry and happy"(HCA 535). Life is full of little joys and happiness and when one realizes this secret of life, one is not disturbed by unnecessary cares and worries. The oak tree that dreams its days also will come to an end one day. Having learnt the lesson from Ephemera, it wishes not only for its happiness but also wants to ensure all its companions on earth like blue flower, wild apple tree also find happiness. Its heart has grown large and tender that it finds happiness in the happiness of its companions. Here the dream meets reality. A storm strikes down the three sixty five year old oak tree. On the face of it, it is a tale of the oak tree and Ephemera. But human beings have much in common with the old oak tree in many respects. For the discerning eye, nature holds a lesson for all. The religious motif here is that everybody born has to die one day. If he leads a good religious life with love, kindness and compassion towards all, then his life is redeemed, and starts with the Father in Heaven. This is an inspiration to all human beings to lead a worthy life like the oak tree. Even at its fall, people mourn for it and feel its absence. It doesn't matter how long one lives; all that matters is, how one lives. The past is already over and the future is uncertain and as such, the present only is real. If one uses the present correctly and properly, a beautiful future is guaranteed. When one reaches the future then one can look back at the past with satisfaction; for, it is the present which has become the past as well as the future. Thus, nature is a teacher in this tale. The Ephemera and the oak tree are not just friends; their relationship is that of teacher-student, as the Ephemera teaches the oak tree the transitory nature of life, finding peace and happiness by living in the present.

Fritj of Capra considers the world as an integrated whole, rather than a dissociated collection of parts and recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena. He sees the world as a "complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole" (qtd. in Vonscheidt : 208).

There is a sort of interdependence among species in the ecosystem. Even the most exalted creature must depend upon those lower on the scale for their very existence; man and worm alike live to

preserve each other's life. If one goes up one step further, one is bound to see the interdependence of all beings. "Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it and because of this everything is sanctified, including man and the terrifying aspects of nature itself, such as glaciers, landslides, earthquakes, storms"(Vanucci Web).

Animals are a compelling part of the human experience of the natural world. We can see evidence for this in the preponderance of animal images and metaphors in human mythology, folktales, art, creative stories, and other products of the mind, across many cultures. Indeed, one could argue that every segment of the natural world — plants, weather, landforms, waters, and so on – offers something surpassing and singular to the lives of people. [...] One of the reasons animals are so fascinating to us is that they are highly responsive and offer many dynamic opportunities for interaction. We are social creatures, and animals appeal to our propensity to interact socially. As millions of pet owners and other animal fans can testify, animals provide intriguing and gratifying challenges that expand our abilities to understand them. (qtd. in Kahn:153)

Further, most of the human population depends on animals for its food. Vegetarians depend on plants, trees, vegetables and fruits for their food. Plants and trees give human beings oxygen also, without which they cannot survive. Further, the carbon dioxide exhaled by human beings is absorbed by the plant kingdom. So they clean up the atmosphere to make life sustainable for human beings. Pet animals play a very important role in the lives of many. They give comfort, support and love, playing a soothing role in one's life. When some form of nature like animals, insects, birds, fish, trees, plants come to the rescue of the hero or heroine and he or she in turn saves them; there is interdependence. In other words, there is mutual dependence and that makes the story.

In fairy tales, plants and animals act just like human beings and communicate with each other, playing their allotted roles without much ado. It proves that all living beings form a part of the universal web. Man has not woven the web of life. He is but one thread. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. This metaphor is important because in a web, hierarchies don't exist; all strands share the same plane, and movement in any part of the web affects every other part of the web. [...] This model seeks to educate children in a type of ecological consciousness that places humans alongside – not above – other living and non-living things and seeks to inspire them individually to live more lightly on the planet in whatever small ways they can. (qtd. in Dobrin : 218).

The fact that hierarchies don't exist in nature comes out plainly in many fairy tales. Non-human beings play a great role to save the hero or heroine; some of these acts, if one thinks deeply, cannot be carried out by human beings. So each is great in its own place and it is true that in the web of life, all are equal in a broader and wider sense. Even if one strand is weak, the web can easily get damaged. Likewise, in the universe, the different life forms constitute various strands and no strand is unimportant or unnecessary. Even non-living things have roles to play. In the present-day self-centered life, generally one does not care for others; only when one is useful and one's help is required, one has some consideration; otherwise, generally one totally ignores others.

The inner core of all beings is the same, though the outer core varies. The Bhagwad Gita also says, that one should look at all with equanimity. "The wise look with a equal eye on a Brahmana endowed with a learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an eater of dogs" (qtd. in Vireswarananda :119).

In *The Conceited Apple Branch*, the apple tree learns this lesson slowly. First the sunbeam caresses with love and care all the beings including the lonely dandelions and the apple tree. It sees no difference. The sunbeam tries to convince the apple tree of this fact. But the conceited apple branch refuses to believe it. It sees for itself how much joy the dandelions bring to little children and how an old

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woman picks up the dandelions for preparing her tea and for earning money by selling them to a chemist. Then the countess brings the lowly dandelions home with love and care and places them in a vase near the apple branch: See, she exclaimed, how wonderfully God has made this little flower. I will paint it with the apple-branch together. Every one admires the beauty of the apple-bough; but this humble flower has been endowed by Heaven with another kind of loveliness; and although they differ in appearance, both are the children of the realms of beauty. Then the sunbeam kissed the lowly flower, and he kissed the blooming apple-branch, upon whose leaves appeared a rosy blush.(HCA 297).

The apple branch realizes how useful a life the dandelions live. Its pride collapses and it realizes the truthfulness of the message of the sunbeam. Variety is the spice of life and every life has its own unique use and nothing is a waste. Further, when one looks at all with equanimity, one finds happiness. This is a wonderful story especially for young readers who can inculcate this truth in this story and apply it in their own life. One of the things that has made this world miserable is class conflict. The feeling of inferiority and superiority poisons the world. Actually there is no need for any of these. An all embracing-vision, fellow-feeling and compassion are antidotes to this evil.

In Andersen's *A Beetle*, a dung beetle from the emperor's stable goes around talking to all kinds of animals and plants. It is jealous of the emperor's horse which has golden shoes. The beetle also wants to wear golden shoes. The farrier makes fun of the beetle when it tells him that it also wants to wear golden shoes. The beetle then travels along and has many misadventures and has many near-fatal experiences; finally, it returns to the stable and lands on the horse. "Well," he said, "here I am, seated on the emperor's favorite horse,—sitting upon him as if I were the emperor himself. But what was it the farrier asked me? Ah, I remember now,—that's a good thought,—he asked me why the golden shoes were given to the horse. The answer is quite clear to me, now. They were given to the horse on my account"(HCA 121). And this reflection puts the beetle into a good temper. The sun's rays also come streaming into the stable, and shine upon him, and make the place lively and bright. "Travelling expands the mind very much," said the beetle. "The world is not so bad after all, if you know how to take things as they come" (HCA 121). The beetle in his travel meets with many travails and feels fortunate to return safely to the king's stable. As the last line of the story indicates, one has to take things as they come. Nature provides one according to one's station and position in life. In the web of life, each has its place and each is important in its own way; there is no point in comparing oneself with others and feeling miserable.

In *The Farmyard Cock and Weather Cock*, a farmyard cock and a weathercock living in the same farm argue who is better of the two. Both of them are arrogant and think of themselves as superior beings. The weathercock despises all, especially the yard cock. The rooster brags. The hens and the chickens cluck and chirp and become very proud of their yard cock. In this tale, there is another character which is the cucumber, which seems to be realistic. Its great quality is it is not egoistic. It is able to appreciate and admire the good qualities of others.

Allen also stresses the unity in diversity of life. The different colours, shapes and forms may seem to make everything different. But in the inner core of being, all things are the same. Allen expresses this view in the following lines:

'There are birds of many colors — red, blue green, yellow — yet is all one bird.
There are horses of many colors — brown, black, yellow, white — yet it is all
one horse. So cattle, so all living things — animals, flowers, and trees. So men:
in this land where once there were only Indians are now men of every color —
white, black, yellow, red — yet all one people.(262)

The Butterfly Effect highlights this mutual cooperation among the parts of the whole. The concept of the butterfly effect is attributed to Edward Norton Lorenz, a mathematician and meteorologist, who was one of the first proponents of chaos theory. It is a scientific theory that a single occurrence, no

matter however small, can change the course of the universe forever. The name is derived from the metaphorical example of the details of a hurricane (exact time of formation, exact path taken) being influenced by minor perturbations such as the flapping of the wings of a distant butterfly several weeks earlier. The phrase refers to the idea that a butterfly's wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that may ultimately alter the path of a tornado or delay, accelerate or even prevent the occurrence of a tornado in another location.(qtd.in Christensen : Web)

The universe is a whole and it influences and is influenced by the different roles played by its parts. Further, the connection more often than not is not visible or even observable. In other words, the ecosystem works on the mutual cooperation and working of its parts, which could be tiny, small or big.

This concept can be seen in many fairy tales. A small character, human or animal or plant, could change the course of the tale or the life of the hero or heroine. The ecosystem is sustained as a whole because of the interplay of its various constituents.

Fairy tales inspire empathy in children for small creatures and plants. When one's heart is attuned to nature, feelings of harmony with one's fellow beings are intensified too. All that one needs is an open mind and child-like innocence to perceive this oneness. All creatures are indispensable to retain the beauty and health of the planet. Fairy tales reveal a dynamic web of relations and that every object of nature is invested with high significance.

Nothing is inconsequential. Children are instinctively drawn towards the denizens of nature and they empathize with them easily. Fairy tales equip children with knowledge of the environment, prompting empathy for ecological connections between themselves and other lives on earth.

Empathy brings all beings closer. When one is able to place oneself in another's place and feel the other's suffering as one's own, and not stopping at that, and proceeds to alleviate the other's suffering, one becomes a noble soul and makes the world a joyful place to live in. For what is behind empathy is love, kindness and compassion. *Little Ida's Flowers*, *The Daisy* from Andersen highlight the ennobling quality of empathy.

Even predators could be changed by kindness and help. There is some intrinsic value in every being: living or non-living. Every being has got some unique quality or unique talent. Technically, living beings can be classified according to the number of senses they possess; human beings are superior because they are endowed with six senses; some have less. Still, their intrinsic value cannot be ignored. So also among human beings, one may be lowly-placed, some may be very highly placed; and some may be in-between. But everybody has some intrinsic value and hence disrespecting or disregarding one on the above basis is wrong. One's worth is based on what one contributes to society and for the welfare of others. Further, the innate goodness and noble qualities alone make one superior. "Nature provides all with everything they need. When man starts abusing and exploiting this relationship, problems arise... in truth, man is not protecting Nature; Nature is protecting man"(Wangland Web).

When man becomes highly selfish and thinks everything is created for him and that he can do whatever he pleases without worrying about the consequences or thinking about the impact his actions can have on others, he is making a grave mistake. This great truth has been realized by great thinkers, especially ecocritics and they suggest that one should change the anthropocentric or man-centered attitude to eco-centric one. Otherwise, grave consequences are sure to follow. Kahn states succinctly this idea:

Anthropocentric reasoning is based on how effects to the environment affect human beings, including appeals to human welfare, personal interests, and aesthetics. Ecocentric reasoning is based on how the natural environment has moral standing that is at least partly independent of its value as human commodity, including that nature has rights or has intrinsic value. (16)

For world peace, progress and prosperity, the relationship between people and nations should be based on solid foundations like love, kindness, compassion, understanding, fellow-feeling and flexibility. It is a known fact that one cannot expect uniformity everywhere; what is possible is unity in diversity. As a matter of fact, uniformity would mean monotony and boredom. In fact, this variety and diversity make life pleasant, interesting, colorful and beautiful. Diversity is very much there in the scheme of nature and has to be accepted as a reality.

Partnership of all beings in a direct or an indirect way, diversity of the ecosystem and the need for flexibility for survival have to be understood and appreciated. (Joseph 209) The above principles are not only for children but also for adults. When man realizes his oneness with universe, he ascends to the highest scale in the spiritual ladder and his life becomes meaningful and fruitful. Peace, harmony and serenity ensue. Contentment, not of the individual, but of the society as a whole, is an ideal goal to live up to. Life processes, interactions and adaptations, the movement of materials and energy through living communities, the development of ecosystems, and the abundance and distribution of organisms and biodiversity in the context of the environment, make a fascinating study.

Tales with talking animals, birds, insects and plants and trees, all objects of nature always have a fascination for children, which explain the popularity of fairy tales to date. The importance of fairy tales lies in imparting useful lessons in ecology in an unobtrusive way. As nature play many roles: amusing, bewitching, loving, exciting and even horrifying roles, children have developed a fascination for nature. Children's writers instinctively know that animals have a special place in the lives of children. Often children keenly watch birds, insects and animals and develop a kind of kinship with them.

Even if children do not know the word, biodiversity, they innately possess this sense of diversity and easily appreciate it. The fact that children are instinctively closer to nature is echoed in many fairy tales. Animal stories in fairy tales bring children closer to nature at their most profound and healing level. Fairy tales draw the attention of children to the present-day ecological degeneration and create an awareness of the need to maintain the ecological balance. Man, in his quest for development, often fails to notice that he is actually digging his own grave.

The experiences of the natural world through fairy tales help children to navigate perilous issues in later life. When coupled with direct contact with nearby nature, these symbolic encounters provide extraordinary opportunities for growth and development. Many inanimate objects of nature come to life in the imagination of children.

Nature's emotional salience for the child also derives from its role in fantasy and imagination as much as from direct, literal or tactile contacts. Nature is profoundly populated with creatures and habitats occurring in the realm of children's stories, myths, fables, tales, and dreams. These encounters provide a multitude of affective opportunities for engagement, discovery, creativity, joy, wonder, revelation, adventure, surprise and more. (qtd. in Dobrin:128)

The fact that children, find immense joy and a sense of wonder in fairy tales is wellknown and attested by many a parent and writer. Reading fairy tales enhances their passion for life. Fairy tales increase their enthusiasm for reading and hearing stories. Many parents, who really love their children, make it a point to devote time in reading fairy tales to the children as bedtime stories. Children's love for fairy tales is natural. "Carson found enthusiasm and passion for life, emotions essential to learning and personality formation, greatly benefiting from immersion and creative interaction with the diversity and mystery of nature. Another writer, Rachel Sebha suggests, the natural world provides children with "an unflinching source of stimulation" (qtd. in Kahn:127).

One can find great and noble ideas and concepts echoed in many fairy tales of the east and the west. These ideas are not only universal, but also time-tested and valuable and are worth remembering and following. One can say that the love of nature is carried forward from time immemorial to the present day through various vehicles and fairy tales are one of them. So whoever reads the fairy tales are bound to catch these great ideas.

“Children develop an awareness of nature and its importance for life to sustain on this earth. The relationship of humans to nature, the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis and how language and literature transmit values are the main concern of ecocritics”(Joseph 76). The relationship between the environment and the various characters are interwoven skillfully in many fairy tales that they take the children closer to nature. They awaken a love of nature in children that they learn to love nature as it is. Children visualize and fantasize that the diverse characters come to life in their imagination and occupy their minds for a long time. They thus pick up vital lessons whose usefulness is lifelong and far-reaching.

Environmental education starts for children before they start attending school, if elders at home tell them fascinating fairy tales which bring them closer to nature and realize how important nature is to life. When children have access to fairy tales, knowingly or unknowingly their environmental education commences. This is further strengthened when they play outdoor finding closeness to trees, plants and pet animals.

Environmental education in the formative years of a child’s life is necessary so as to inculcate in the child a lifelong attitude of love and respect for the environment. Such experiences also shape children’s values and behavioral patterns towards nature and the environment. Further, interaction with nature and the environment is significant for healthy development of children. (Joseph 60)

It is reiterated that fairy tales educate the children in an unobtrusive way. They help to inculcate in children, a love and respect for nature and environment. The interconnectedness, inter-relationship and interdependence of life and nature are revealed to children in a subtle way by fairy tales.

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