

A Study of Anthropocentrism: an Egoistic Tool with Reference to Yann Martel's Life of Pi

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the element of Anthropocentrism one of the branches of Environmental Ethics on Yann Martel's Life of Pi. Anthropocentrism is an ethical value which considered humans to be the most essential thing in the world. Human beings tend to move by Ego Centred instead of Eco Centred and this way of approach towards life is known as Anthropocentrism. In this novel, the title itself shows the narrow-mindedness of homosepiens because this novel as a whole, examine the life of many species like the life of a hyena, an orang-utan and zebra lost its lives in the game of survival and the life of 450 pounds Bengal Tiger Richard Parker. But the life of Pi, human beings is more focused than the others mentioned above. The anthropocentric way of analysing the novel interprets the world in terms of human beings experience.

KEYWORDS: Environmental Ethics, Anthropocentrism, Ego Centred and Eco Centred.

Introduction

Anthropocentrism is an ethical value which considered humans to be the most essential thing in the world/ earth. Therefore Anthropocentrism is a monistic entity. This always forms a superiority circle by giving more priority to one set of a group, i.e., human. This study provides a detailed view of the concept anthropocentrism with reference to the settings in which the story take place. Though the main focus of the study is Anthropocentrism, this study also touches upon the characters that appeared in the novel which is becoming an endangered species.

An Account of Endangered Species in the Novel

Any species which exist only in small numbers because of human beings exploitation, climate changes are endangered species. The endangered species present in novels are Orang-utan, Hyena, Zebra and Tiger.

Orang-utan: It is a kind of ape. This orang-utan is a mammal which has the habit to live in trees. These endangered species were seen in Asia. As stated by San Diego Zoo, the habitat of the orang-utan in Borneo forest and Sumatra forest has faded away because of the plantation of palm oil. Orang-utan is similar in the size of a human. Female orang-utan is about 114 cm (45 in inches) whereas; males are 136 cm (54 in inches). The average weight is above 37kg and 87 kg for female and male respectively. Orang-utan mostly lives in the forest of Borneo and Sumatra. In Malay, Orang-utan means "man of the forest." As national geographic stated that orang-utan spends its time in a dense tree. They sleep in a thick branch and use the leaves as umbrellas.

Hyena: *Crocuta Crocuta* (scientific name of hyena) is a carnivorous animal that lives in the part of Africa and Asia. It belongs to the family of the dog. It resembles a dog, but it is more vigorous than a dog. There are four different species seen in Asia. There are Brown Hyena; Spotted hyena; Aardwolf and Stripped hyena. It is also known as “scavenger mammals” because most of the mammals eat the other animals’ prey, but hyena catches its food. After getting enough food, hyena calls another hyena through its laugh like screaming and its length up to three distant miles.

Zebra: The native of zebra in Africa, It closely resembles donkeys and horses. All the three belong to the same genus, “Equus.” According to the report of San Diego Zoo, the zebra has white and black coats; however, zebra also has a black skin below its white coat. As in human, every fingerprint has uniqueness likewise every stripe of zebra is unique and each species of zebra live in their territory. Zebra eat both the leaves and twigs. As African wildlife foundation surveyed it travels nearly 1,800 miles for food. Female zebra carrying their young ones approximately 12 to 14 months in their womb and its lifespan is around 25 years.

Tiger: One of the Species of cat family is a Tiger. It is the most dangerous species in that cat family. Even in Tiger, there are nine families. They are Bengal Tiger, south Chinese, Siberian, Sumatran, Indochinese, Bali, Caspian, Malayan, and Javan Tiger. Tiger mostly eats wild animals by hunting but some of the old Tigers especially when they are injured; they eat both domestic animals and sometimes humans too. The Tiger which is described in the novel is Bengal Tiger. The population of Bengal Tigers is around 2000 and it can be seen only in Southeast Asia, Russia (Asia) and China. The Bengal Tiger is the national animal of India. The original size ranges from 400 pounds to 500 pounds. Even for a section, it consumes 40kg food substance. IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) included it as the most endangered species.

Correlation between Human Beings and Animals

In nature, human beings and animals were not a separate entity. Both are commonly called as living beings. Only because of the sense they differ from each other. Due to the development in science, human beings gradually deviated from the other animals and practiced to live a separate life. Charles Darwin formulated the theory of evolution; humans are evolved from apes. Still, there will be a debate on this theory. Apart from this, this theory holds physical development. From this perspective, it is probable that human beings aren’t separated. They are like an updated form of monkeys. In so many aspects, the similarities between human beings and a non-human being are measured, especially in emotion. Human is a social animal who formulated their own needs according to their wish. This does not mean they are different. Every species had its territory and lived according to their desire. Thus, the changes occur in the action of each animal, not in their intrinsic values. This research also figures out some of the essential qualities which generalize human beings and animals and also insists on the deviation, i.e., the food chain.

All the animals are interconnected including the social animals. But when it comes to the food chain, as an authoritative group, human beings separate him from others and place him on the top. This is popularly known as the anthropocentric attitude

of a human. Generally, the food chains are producers, consumers and decomposers. The producers refer to the natural elements which give the food substance and the decomposer refers the microorganisms which are also a living being who eat the decaying objects in the earth. The second most important part of the food chain is consumers who get the opportunity to eat the food. They are again divided into three types. They are Primary consumers, secondary consumers and tertiary consumers. Only in these stage human beings is considered to be a different entity, but in nature, it is not true.

Human beings can be primary consumers because they eat green plants in so many ways. They choose raw plants as a basic source of energy. For example, Durva grass and Bermuda grass are rich in nutrients. They used to regulate the digestive process and increase the immune system and also used to regulate the sugar levels. Thus, human beings consume it by boiling in water. Things like fruits, vegetables, leaves (in raw), the stem of the plant (banana tree stem) and petals of the flowers are rich in medicinal values and eat as raw. Hence human beings can be called herbivores animals.

The secondary consumer, this type of literary means the consumer which consumes the herbivores animal. Human beings act as carnivore's animals and eat animals like goat, chicken, mouse. This thing balances their cholesterol level and stabilises the rhythm of the heart. Goat meat reduces the chance of getting coronary heart disease and also cancer. Therefore, human beings can also be carnivores.

The tertiary consumers in the entire ecosystem are snake, fish, seal and eagle which consume the secondary consumers like fish, rat, snake, and owl, wildcat. Subsequently, human beings are also eating the animals mentioned in the secondary consumer's column. By eating these things, human beings placed in top carnivores list too.

It is the egoistic approach to social animals. They consume all the things in different manners where they differ from the animals. Because animals consume it in a raw manner, human beings are eat in both raw and cooked. Despite this, human beings also mingle with animals and the animals also correlate with them. In ancient days, the relationship between human beings and animals, are different from the present day scenario. But in this paper, the researcher gives the correlation between human beings and animals seen in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*. In chapter 4, through the narration of Pi Patel, the period of the novel is revealed,

India on November 1, 1954. One civic achievement called for another. A portion of the grounds of the Pondicherry Botanical Garden was made available rent-free for an exciting business opportunity and-lo and behold-India had a brand new zoo, designed and run according to the most modern, biologically sound principles. (9)

Only when there was an economic crisis on Pi Patel family, his father decided to build a zoo. Even the description of it shows the anthropocentric nature of human beings in general. The verbal intensifier 'run' indicates the materialistic attitude of the human beings society. He runs a zoo and also run behind the money. They give more descriptive words to qualify the zoo, but there is no sign to qualify and describe the animals present in that zoo. "The most modern, biologically sound principles."(9). It shows the attitude of

human beings towards money in this competitive world. To win the society and to shine in the world, they use the animals as a tool to travel to their ends. But the real bonding of animals and human beings are explored through the relation among the zoo animals and Pi Patel. It resembles the way how ancient people lead their life with the animals.

Throughout the novel, Pi is made to be accompanying animals. In his childhood, Pi spends most of his time in the zoo. His routine life was accompanied by activities of the zoo animals. Through an elaborate description of the zoo, the bond between Pi and zoo animals were pictured.

In zoos, as in nature, the best times to visit are sunrise and sunset. That is when most animals come to life... They sing their songs. They turn to each other and perform their rites... I spent more hours than I can count a quiet witness to the highly mannered, manifold expressions of life that grace our planet. (10)

These lines express the real bond between nature and other living beings. In addition to that, it also pictures the dynamic world. This quote has these two different ideas. One is the concept of Bio-centricism; every creature lives their life according to natural law. This law doesn't mean the rules and regulation but the norms of a happy life. 'In zoos,' (10) here, the zoo symbolizes the whole world (earth) which looks more energetic in the sunrise time. All the animals start a day with the happiest thought and work hard as well as in evening they enjoy the success behind the whole day and also give respect to their god for this successful day through rites and rituals. These things not only explain the zoo life instead of the life of living creature as a whole. The second thought which presents in the quote was about human beings. When human beings enjoyed nature, they can live a meaningful life and respect nature. But when there is a change, they started to find the meaning, faith, happy, love within themselves. They made nature to be inferior to the non-living objects and made their life a mechanised life, "Highly mannered, manifold expressions of life." (10) Human beings started to live their own life and this is a sign of it.

This correlation between human beings and animals has dualistic thought. First one is the bond between them and the second one is the gap between them. On behalf of the food chain, human beings created the gap between animals and themselves. This action is done by human's desire as domestic and wild. If it is domestic, all the animals are considered to be harmless and human beings treat them as their pets. The second type is harmful, wild animals which can create disturbance in human beings life. Such animals are a lion, Tiger, wild snake, cat, cheetah, fox, ox, wild elephant, etc. Even there would be a bond between human beings and animals (both domestic and wild animals) in this novel. In the second part of the novel, Pi Patel correlates with the Richard Parker (a wild Bengal Tiger), a man-eater animal. But at one point of time, Richard Parker saved the life of Pi Patel:

I heard the merest clicking of claws against the bottom of the boat, no more than the sound of a pair of spectacles falling to the floor, and the next moment my dear brother shrieked in my face as I've never heard a man shriek before...He gave me a life, my own, but at the expense of taking one. (139)

Is it possible for a man-eater animal to save a man and become a life giver? Certainly, it is possible in this novel- a factual proof. This shows the dynamic nature of

the propounded theory. Every animal and living beings as a whole has intrinsic value. Every creature in the natural world would be merciful to their lovable ones. It is not specific to human beings alone because even human beings become merciless when the situation forces him. "You're damn right your heart is with me!" he said, "And your liver and your flesh!"(139). When the cook met Pi, he looked at him as his food. Is any humane seen in this humans meeting? This explains the bond between human beings and human beings instead of human beings and animals because this is more valuable than the relationship within the human.

For their survival, human beings can do anything at any level. They will live in the suffering of others. This might be the root cause of building their tertiary by forgetting all their values, uniqueness, spiritual and become a machine who doesn't know anything but processed for the sake of processing. The cook's words were the reference for this statement, "Seek food where food is to be found."(135)...Eat a boot? What an idea... You eat cigarettes-why, not a boot?"(137). But it was not in the case of Richard Parker's action. As a Bengal Tiger, He consumes 40 kg amount of food for a section. But Richard Parker changes the circumstance by saving a man from a man. This was a true love of Richard Parker. Without eating much on their Pacific voyage, he could have saved Pi Patel from a cannibal and he also left him alone from its hungry tide. This showed the quality of living beings as a whole. There would not be any intrinsic value for human beings separately, because the man-eater Tiger became the life-giver of Pi: "This was the terrible cost of Richard Parker. He gave me a life, my own," (139).

In chapter seven, Pi said, "Rhinos are Social animals."(16). These phrases have expressed the relationship between human beings and animals. And the above segments dealt with the relation between human beings and human. The bond of human beings expressed the cannibalism instead the bond of animals expressed the inseparable bond between them. This deviation is needed to run the plot because nowadays in the name of anthropocentrism human beings destroyed many species. For example in the case of cow and bull, we need them bull because we need milk. It is for human beings strength. This shows the self-mindedness of human beings. Even in this competitive mind of the people, there could be an inseparable bond between the animals: "When we got Peak, a young wild male, he was showing signs of suffering from isolation and he was eating less and less... Peak and the herd of goats became inseparable, even when Summit arrived..." (16) Though they were different species, they become inseparable. Once they get attracted, "When the rhinos bathed, the goats stood around the muddy pool, and when the goats ate in their corner, Peak and Summit stood next to them like guards."(16).

This shows the dynamic nature of human beings and the intrinsic attitude of an animal. True bond is meant for pure and protective whereas, humans bond are dynamic and for productive.

Conclusion

In 227 days of voyages in the huge Pacific Ocean, Pi happened to learn the nature and live nature. The story possesses survival as a core of life. Human beings are the product of nature. As a mother, nature taught them whatever they need in a different manner protective as well as destructive. But it depends on the attitude of a human being because he is the only creature who can distract nature. Every deed has the consequence of it. The roof of all the consequence is Anthropocentrism.

On the whole, Anthropocentrism was not a bad agent of nature. Everything has its limit if anyone crosses it, the outcome will affect both sides. So the study exhibits the need for Eco-centrism by explaining the consequences of anthropocentrism by Yann Martel's Life of Pi.

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