THE PROBLEMATICS OF PERSONAL ECO-IDENTITY IN THE SELECTED MALAYSIAN NOVELS IN ENGLISH

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DEDICATION

Specially for my *Ayah* and *Ibu*,

To whose material penury then I owe my intellectual enrichment now — *ad infinitum*, and through whose circumstantial misfortune of educational paucity then I revel in the cerebral felicity of knowledge-seeking now — *in saecula saeculorum*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Indeed, my initially mild flirtations with the 'nature' of nature at the start of this project have spilled surprisingly over into a passionate and intense inquiry about the various aspects of its interconnectedness with humanity. Granted, this endeavour alone does not suffice, though it hopefully adds constructively to the wealth of existing body of knowledge on human and nature or their near congeners within the scholarly remit of Malaysian literature in English. It is my genuine aspiration that the time thus far spent on elucidating the multiperspectival intricacies entailing the ontological conjunction between human and non-human is worthy of use in my venture into projecting the view of humanity and nature much as being remarkably variable across their respective species as being remarkably similar, nevertheless, within a unitary species — in virtue of their co-constitution of being; equal in treatment and fair in the dispensation of justice following any mistreatments. On this note, a special acknowledgment must, therefore, go exclusively and in its entirety to Emeritus Professor Datin Dr. Ruzy Suliza Hashim of VIZJA University, Warsaw, Poland, a learned figure in Malaysian English literary scholarship, whose judicious ideas and critical observations I have drawn upon but, due to the misfortune of ineluctable constraints, could not accord the exhaustive discussions she rightfully merits. Allow me to be the first to admit that I have attempted at dealing discursively with her polished intellectual discourses less than I ought to have done justice to in this thesis, and must, with great humility, offer my deepest apology therefor. On this point, I must hasten to plead in defence of such glaring lacunae and my unavoidable indiscretion — such as remain are wholly my own responsibility to bear — that all manner of synthetic exercise demonstrated in this work is strictly tethered to the objectives towards which this thesis aims than it could possibly aspire to accommodate in any other fashions imaginable. Likewise, I embrace with an open heart and accept with a clear conscience all forms of healthy and scholarly animadversion in response to the arguments which the tone of this thesis intends to register. I can only hope that those who will readily accept this justification, even if only in the matter of the thoughts I have provoked, the discourses I have produced, or the postulations I have canvassed, will, despite the burning controversies to which the complexity of my research area is inevitably subject, be unstinting in their time to appreciate my assayed efforts in providing the 'natural' access to its intelligibility and the 'humane' comprehension of its definability. Verily, in my abiding passion to penetrate further into the beauty of literary knowledge, I do and shall forever stand guided, *deo volente*.

ABSTRACT

In Malaysian English literary and critical discourse, the role of nature is often framed through broad themes such as environmental degradation, land development, and national identity, *inter alia*. What is frequently overlooked, however, is how individual relationships with the natural world shape personal eco-identity — particularly in the contexts marked by colonial displacement, spiritual beliefs, and individuals' daily survival. This thesis addresses such gap by examining how personal eco-identity is formed in selected Malaysian English literary novels. The study is guided by three key objectives: first, to examine how nature is represented in selected Malaysian novels written in English and how these representations contribute to the construction of personal eco-identity within the historical and socio-political contexts, second, to explore the ways in which conflict, emotional response, spiritual belief, and interpersonal dynamics inform the formation of these personal eco-identities, and third, to analyse how individual characters' relationships with the natural world are shaped through affective, behavioural, and experiential engagements. Drawing on the close textual readings of *Jungle of Hope* by Keris Mas, *Yalpanam* by Shivani Sivagurunathan, *No Harvest but a Thorn* by Shahnon Ahmad, *Between Lives* by K.S. Maniam, and *Long Road to Merdeka* by Kamarul Zaman Ariff, the thesis traces how nature functions not merely as a backdrop or resource, but as a dynamic force in the shaping of self. These engagements — spiritual, emotional, and practical — unfold across five thematic strands: **(i)** survival and sustenance, **(ii)** dominance and materialistic quest, **(iii)** emotion and affect, **(iv)** spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices, and **(v)** dynamics of inter-human relationships. Situated within a composite of frameworks comprising postcolonial ecocriticism and ecopsychology, hitherto termed as the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity, this thesis argues that identity in these texts is neither static nor autonomous but continually shaped through reciprocal relations with the environment. Foregrounding its contribution to ecocriticism, ecopsychology, and Malaysian literary studies by advancing the concept of personal eco-identity, nature is no longer viewed not a passive setting but appreciated, instead, as a responsive presence — one that influences, participates in, and reflects the shades and contours of human life — bringing attention to the oft-overlooked textures of such environmentally morphed identity — how it is felt, enacted, and negotiated in relation to land, belief, memory, and community.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH PATHWAY

Chapter 1 introduces the study's rationale, outlining the gap in existing Malaysian English literary scholarship with regard to environmental identity. The chapter frames the thesis within postcolonial ecocritical and ecopsychological perspectives, setting the foundation for examining the ways in which nature influences personal eco-identity in selected Malaysian novels written in English. **Chapter 2** reviews relevant literature on identity, place attachment, environmental psychology, and Malaysian English literary production. It maps the theoretical terrain by integrating postcolonial ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology, demonstrating how the dualism between human mind and nature can be overcome through literary analysis. It also identifies the gap in current scholarship surrounding personal eco-identity. **Chapter 3** outlines the concepts and methodological framework using the representation—internalisation—enactment model, replete with the explanation on the rationale behind novel selection and the interpretive strategies used. The study employs a qualitative literary analysis by way of close textual analysis navigated by the hitherto theorised Framework of Personal Eco-Identity with a strong emphasis on thematic reading, ecological symbolism, and character development. **Chapters 4** and **5** present the analysis of close textual readings of five selected novels — *No Harvest but a Thorn*, *Jungle of Hope*, *Between Lives*, *Long Road to Merdeka,* and *Yalpanam*. They each analyse how nature functions as a key element in the formation of personal eco-identities and how the vast concourse of historical trauma, emotional attachment, and spiritual longing informs the shaping of individuals' ecologically

influenced selves. **Chapter 6** foregrounds the scholarly implications of this study, both extant and futurable.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Understanding the roots of environmental identity in Malaysian literature in English requires more than an ecological reading — it demands a conjoint reflection of cultural, historical, and psychological reckonings. At the heart of this thesis, therefore, lies the pertinent question — how do colonial histories, environmental disruptions, and literary narratives converge to shape a sense of personal eco-identity? By way of exordium, this chapter introduces the contextual framework underpinning this study, setting the intellectual groundwork in place for a focused inquiry into the selected Malaysian literary novels written in English. Three fundamental issues establish this foundation: **(i)** the notion of environmental identity formed through an immersive interaction with and experiential exposure to nature, **(ii)** the evolution and challenges of Malaysian environmentalism evident in the state of Malaysia's ecological status quo, and **(iii)** the research potentials in the investigation into the interplay between Malaysia's ecological trajectory and environmentally mediated identity in the works of Malaysian literature in English. Building on the foundational understanding of personal eco-identity on these accounts, the close textual readings of *Jungle of Hope* by Keris Mas, *Yalpanam* by Shivani Sivagurunathan, *No Harvest but a Thorn* by Shahnon Ahmad, *Between Lives* by K.S. Maniam, and *Long Road to Merdeka* by Kamarul Zaman Ariff, attempts to unearth how nature functions not only as a backdrop or resource, but is also mobilised as an impelling force in the formation of self. The analysis of personal eco-identity construction through the textual agency of these novels delves into the portrayal and appreciation of nature by means of human-nature interrelationship within Malaysian English literary texts,

examining important interconnections between human, culture, and ecology. 'Nature' in the context of this thesis refers to the non-human world and analysed through its inosculating relationship with the fictitious human characters in the selected corpus and the effect of this interconnectedness on human lives, culture, and ecology grounded in the contexts of coloniality and indigeneity.

1.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

Environmental identity refers to the self-concept that arises from significant engagement with the natural environment. It illustrates the interconnectedness between cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes that develop when individuals interact with their environment, positioning this type of identity, therefore, within the realm of ecopsychology (Clayton 2003). Clayton et al. (2021) contend that environmental identity is a dynamic and developing aspect of individuals where their personal consciousness is fundamentally anchored in the spatial, historical, and ethical elements of their interaction with the environment. Environmentally-influenced human identity is linked to the notion that one's behavioural attitudes are consequent upon his attachment to nature where every aspect of flora and fauna is considered in the construction and reflection of self (Nakhortova-Bochaver and Mukhortova 2020). This perspective perceives human identity as relationally entrenched within nature, formed by lived experiences, ecological memory, and emotional attachment, rather than considering the self as separate from it.

This study draws principally on the ecocritical framework that challenges dualistic separations between human and non-human realms. Within the study of environmental identity, the construct of human-nature reciprocal formation is

further investigated in order to comprehend environmental importance in the portrayal of individuals' inherent qualities, traits, expressions, subscribed belief system, and appearance which form part of his identity (Salazar et al. 2021). The concepts of intra-action and "entangled agencies", as posited by Karen Barad (2011: 130), accentuate the interdependence between human and their environment, where identity is co-constructed through ongoing engagement. Within this context, environmental identity is not static but emerges through varying processes of interrelation. It is further informed by what Daniel Baxter and Luc Pelletier (2019) describe as an internalisation of phenomenological experiences in nature that shapes the individual's self-understanding. Further, ecofeminist and posthumanist critiques highlight the gendered and hierarchical structures embedded in human-nature co-constitutive relation. Greeta Gaard (2020), a prominent ecocritical scholar, articulates how these binaries often mirror societal structures of dominance and subjugation, positioning nature, like women, as subordinate. The dismantling of such binaries allows for a more inclusive ecological ontology — one in which identity is grounded in reciprocity, embodiment, and environmental ethics (Bennett 2010).

The tension between anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives is equally significant in discussions concerning environmental thought. Anthropocentrism, rooted in colonial and capitalist epistemologies, prioritises human needs and positions nature as a resource to be managed and exploited. In contrast, biocentrism, as advanced by thinkers such as Paul Taylor (1987) and Arne Naess (1973), asserts the moral equivalence of all life forms and champions ecological egalitarianism. These competing frameworks inform the literary constructions of personal eco-identity that this thesis explores.

This theoretical triangulation, that is, the three abovementioned focal issues, is further enriched by insights from postcolonial ecocriticism, which exposes how ecological degradation often intersects with histories of imperialism and from the environmental justice theory, framing access to a liveable environment as ethical and political imperatives. In this light, environmental identity becomes not merely a personal experience of place but also a socially and historically embedded position negotiated through power relations, trauma, memory, and cultural imagination — the details of which are broadly canvassed, by way of close textual analysis, in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

1.2.2 MALAYSIA'S ECOLOGICAL STATUS QUO

The dynamism of Malaysian environmentalism in matters of ecological preservation and its unfortunate degradation has its historical genesis in the British colonial period. During the British colonial occupation in the mid of the nineteenth century, approximately 95% of the land in Malaysia, then Malaya, was heavily forested (Brookfield, Potter and Byron 1995). Much of the British colonial preoccupation was devoted to the maximal capitalisation of land with which Malaya then was abundantly blessed, alongside a great wealth of natural resources which, in the colonial eyes, served as a perfect choice for the need of industrialising Europe. The beauty of Malayan forestry dovetails with a view shared by Alfred Wallace (1869), a historian, who describes the Malayan landscape as "ranges of hill and valley everywhere covered with interminable forest, with glistening rivers winding among them" (Wallace 1869: 266). The population of Malaya principally in the states of Negeri Sembilan, Kedah, and Kelantan had installed themselves mainly in the lower river valleys or wet-rice plains fitting perfectly for rice cultivation. Hugh Clifford (1897) notes the following in his

amazement at the seemingly intricate jungle where its ecological structure appears all the more challenging by the complex network of rivers:

> If you could strip any river basin, in the Peninsular, of its forests, and could then lay bare its water-system, you could find that it presented, on a gigantic scale, an appearance very similar to that of the skeleton leaf. The main river would represent the midrib, the principal tributaries falling into it would supply the place of the branching spines; and the myriad tiny streams and rivulets would be numberless delicate veins of the leaf. All the spaces and interstices, which in the skeleton are found between midrib and spine, and spine and vein, are, in the river basin, wide tracts of forest-clad country, intersected, and cut up, across, and through and through, by the rivers and streams of the most lavish water-system in the world (Clifford 1897: 18; cited in Roff 1967: 117).

It is further recorded that Governor Andrew Clarke, who spearheaded the British expeditionary mission in Peninsular Malaya, had noticed that Malaya was a land of European economic opportunities especially with its rich and well-endowed tropical forestry almost immediately after commencing his botanical exploration into Malaya's fresh and unadulterated tropics (Andaya and Andaya 2016). His excitement was shared by the then British Resident of Perak, Hugh Low (Andaya and Andaya 2016), who was equally enthralled at the bright prospect of the Malayan forests. This consequently led to the engagement of the British naturalists-cum-administrators to initiate the pioneering project of pooling natural resources for the sole purposes of imperial gain. The emergence of colonial control over the ecological management in Malaya by way of thoroughgoing reform in forestry affairs had since resulted in drastically enriching the contours of socio-

ecological transformations which later shaped the environmental profile that Malaysia presents itself today.

It is crucial to note that at this juncture, the British intrusion into the environmental landscape, intent on its interference with the ecological status quo in Malaya was not unmet with local resistance. Various armed protests staged by the locals whose livelihood was direly reliant on the proceeds from the Malayan forests had ensued and due to colonialist interventions, the locals' means of survival appeared to be adversely compromised by the colonial law which constrained their access to the forested areas. These interventions then progressively escalated to colonial invasion into the land on which they dwelled. One significant instance is demonstrable in the rebellion led by a national warrior, Dato' Bahaman from 1891 to 1895 in Pahang (Kathiritamby-Wells 2005) and another, in the ardent defiance led by a local Islamic scholar, Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong, who, acting on behalf of forty-three other peasants, had refused to succumb to the newly-implemented British system requiring a land permit to be obtained in order for the farmers to cultivate their paddy fields (Mohideen 2000). The uprisal of collective discontent amongst Malay farmers over various unjust land-related laws and policies enacted by the British in different parts of Malaya which clamped down the generation-long tradition of autonomous self-cultivation eventually took place in Terengganu in 1928, organised by Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong, although it bears mention that, on this score, the colonial authority at the time had hastened to put a stop to it "swiftly and ruthlessly by British guns" (Idris 2000: 8).

The imperial environmental mindset during the colonial period was wholly galvanised by the Britons' trailblazing desire to prevail in botanical studies and scientific discovery that were vibrant throughout the Empire. Grounded

intrinsically in the values of European Enlightenment, the exploration into botanical studies and novel scientific discoveries had moulded the colonial mindset of human embedded superiority over non-living beings in the name of the development of human mind using any available resources solely for human benefit. Nature, in this instance, is deemed to be a creature, absent of rationality and, *ipso facto*, inferior to human (Geertz 1983). The colonised people, in the eyes of the coloniser, as well as nature are likewise regarded as irrational and "uncivilised beings", desperate for help to have them immediately restored to rationality, humanity, and civilisation (Adams and Mulligan 2003: 7). This pursuit is rapaciously advanced at the cost of the Malays and the aboriginal tribes whose survival and continuity of sustenance depend primally on the forests and the proceeds therein. Not only are the forests their dwelling where basic necessities are met through the trades of marketable jungle produce (Maxwell 1960), they also serve fundamentally as a source of formation of human identity that is shaped largely by the belief in nature as a "giving environment" (Bird-David 1990: 192). Nature, in the eyes of these locals, provides a spiritual strength through which the indigenous populace of the Malayan forests inculcate the "common stock of human emotions, capable of feeling longing, affection, loneliness and despair" (Lye 2005: 255), formed through spatial co-existence between and amongst them. Noting environmental import of the forest to the Malays, the following observation is instructive:

> The true Malays will not dwell within, but are not happy if they dwell far from the forest. The eat the foods of the civilised folks, but they intermingle these with the food of the forest. The forest gives them timber for house and household goods, drugs for days of sickness, flowers and scents for days of festival, dark and deadly poison for those deeds of revenge and potent charms for the hunter of animals and the lover of pretty women! And Moslems though he

> be, from the forests of Malaya, the Malay, like the Semang and Sakai, derives no small portion of his religious belief, dreading, yet propitiating, the elemental forces with which he has peopled their depths (Long 1928: 37 cited in Kathiritamby-Wells 2005: 192).

It bears mentioning that the British dominion over Malayan economy achieved at the costly price of natural resources does not cease *in toto* upon its independence in 1957. Forested land continues to serve as an economic resource upon independence through logging exercises, supplanting the traditional agricultural practice in plantation which is dimly viewed as unproductive and wanting of profits (Hurst 1990). The repercussions of environmental development brought forth by the British on local terrain have continued to dominate the administrative governance of Malaysia's environmental laws and policies. Such is so due to the legacy of British economic system that was implemented during the colonial regime which continues to preserve the structure and practices of environmental regulations at present, relying principally on the capitalisation of proceeds derived enormously from natural resources (Brookfield 1994). It is claimed that the post-independence environmental economy is but "essential economic preconditions which were laid down during the colonial years" (Overton 1994: 113), signalling promisingly "the in-depth transformation of Malaysian society…consciously planned by a developmentalist state, which attempted a radical change of direction from the one set by British" (Embong 1996: 67). Political leaders and lawmakers, shaped efficaciously by such colonial mindset, influence, and method of generating the country's economy, have been more than ready to fashion their political thinking after the British model of capitalistic economy, finding no emergent need for any critical evaluation of the environment and society as well as of the importance to appreciate the imperatives of human-nature unity, whether the symbiosis of their co-subsistence *vel non* may potentially benefit or harm one another (Idris 2000).

Despite the prevailing drive in leadership for the management of the environment purely for economic benefits, the commitment to the protection of nature remains optimistically firm. The dedication to the preservation of Malaysian natural heritage has prompted the establishment of the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), founded during the colonial period in Malaya circa 1940 whose members initially consisted of British expatriates, with its publications on the promotion of environmental education and conservation awareness in extremely prolific aggregate (Zainal 2019). Chief amongst its contribution is the society's forthright remonstrance against the deforestation of the Endau-Rompin Forest in the 1970s, its unwavering support for the preservation of the Kuala Selangor Nature Park in the 1980s, and its dogged insistence on gazetting the Royal Belum State Park in Perak in 2007 (Malaysian Nature Society). The mushrooming of environmental movements in Malaysia has since become more rapid with the establishment of other NGOs such as the Consumer Association of Penang (CAP) in 1970, WWF-Malaysia in 1972, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) in 1977, and the Malaysian Governmental NGOs (MENGOs) whose collective involvements have been widely recognised as the frontiers of Malaysian environmental movements, committed categorically to their advisory roles as an instrumental medium of check and balance in the governmental as well as political decisions affecting the environment (Ramakrishna 2004). MENGOs, in particular, are driven by their motives of environmental advocacy by way of conducting research and holding consultations with various government agencies including, but not limited to, EcoKnights, Borneo Resources Institute Malaysia (BRIMAS), Environmental Protection Society Malaysia (EPSM), Water Watch Penang (WWP), and Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SUSDEN) on top of its lobbying engagement with the media (Mohd and Lee 1999). These MENGOs are joined by esteemed members of professional calibre in scientific expertise, experience, skills, and knowledge where they engage with the government in terms of providing input regarding environmental policies.

Although MENGOs are instrumental in their contributions to environmental landscape in Malaysia, evidenced by the high-scale support from which they receive, regionally and internally, there is an alarm of concern regarding the extent to which these MENGOs are fully capable of meeting the desired aim of Malaysia's development and sustainability plans (Vincent and Mohamed Ali 2005). This doubt surfaces on the making of legislative provisions contained in the Penal Code, the Society Act 1996, and the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012, replacing the Internal Security Act 1960, which restricts any voices of dissent, thereby calling into question the government's decision-making wisdom in environmental matters. Despite persistent recommendations that a refined policy be legislated for an effective integration of land use (Wyatt-Smith 1962; Muhammad Jabil 1983), the continued absence of more stringent laws to regulate and exercise control over the use of land only appears to accentuate Malaysia's deficiency in ensuring a sustainable environment and manifests, as a result, a crippling impediment to the ideals of effectively conjoined livelihood to be shared both by the environment and the people (Kathirithamby-Wells 2005). Such patent legislative vulnerability reflected in the welter of environmental crimes and in the string of wilful inflictions of environmental harm caused by its perpetrators (Mustafa and Mohamed 2015) warrants an urgent revisioning of law to remedy the legal loopholes that continue to exist in their compromised states (Clifford 1998).

Malaysia's environmental issues have been one of nation-shaking import due to the nationwide controversies surrounding the concern on the implementation of laws and policies governing environmental sustainability beginning from the country's incipient industrialisation in the 1980s (Mohd Hasnu and Muhammad 2022). The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019) reveals that human activities such as emissions caused by motor vehicles, manufacturing industries, and power plants are the major roots of Malaysia's air pollution. Water

pollution, too, is no stranger to environmental imbroglio faced by Malaysians in general. In 2019, illegal chemical waste dumping was discovered in Kim Kim River, Johor, resulting in the immediate hospitalisation of 5800 casualties due to breathing difficulties and other twenty-five victims who were hurried into intensive care (Bernama 2020). This is corroborated further by the discovery made by the Malaysia Environmental Performance Index, the findings of which reveal that Malaysia, in 2020, ranked as a "very low" country index, putting it shamefully at the fifty-sixth position out of sixty-one countries, with an overall aggregate score of 27.78 (Environmental Performance Index 2020: 1). These troubling incidences are attributable to the fact that in spite of various governmental green technology incentives, more stringent laws and legal enforcements, albeit in place, are unfortunately not exhaustively implemented (Mohd Hasnu and Muhammad 2022), leaving Malaysia's hope for an improved environmental status quo very much to be desired.

To this end, environmental activism has since surfaced through countless demonstrations and protests, with their respective members avidly denouncing these environmentally cataclysmic projects. These challenges are viewed as "new democratic politics" (Loh 2009: 5), catalysed by the civilians' hunger for democratic reforms, governance, accountability, and justice (Bowie 2004; Weiss and Hassan 2004). In 2011, a group of 200 people in Kuantan, filled with frustration over the disposal of radioactive waste orchestrated by Australia's Lynas Corporation, heralded their remonstrative chorus against the government-endorsed radiation exposure which caused life-threatening effects on the people's safety and health as well as harm on the environment (Gooch 2012). Similarly, in 2012, a rally joined by thousands of supporters in Pengerang was organised in their opposition to a RM60 billion project by the government-owned gas company, Petronas, which was projected to affect the livelihood of many fishermen and farmers (Rao 2018). Notwithstanding these spates of opposition, it is still

maintained, nevertheless, that "the problem with the environmental law in Malaysia is not the lack of laws. Instead, it is the lack of true political will to put those laws to their full use" (Sharom 2002: 877). The same is echoed in equal force by the erstwhile judge of the Federal Court in Malaysia, His Lordship Justice (as he then was) Abdull Hamid Embong (2015), who remarks that "there is no lack of legislations on the environmental laws in Malaysia and that the Government of Malaysia is serious in fighting against the environment offenders" (Embong 2015: 9), citing at least thirty-three existing legislations, primary of which is the Environmental Quality Act 1974, which provides for various regulations, orders, and rules for the preservation of the environment. Therefore, notwithstanding a litany of laws in place, environmental protection remains in poor taste purportedly due to loose enforcement.

In general, the reality of environmentalism in Malaysia has evolved into a steadying social and political force, having largely departed from the imperial outlook which views the natural environment solely through its capitalistic lens and from its desire to quench the Empire's thirst for economic needs. Its mobilising apparatuses such as the government, institutions, MENGOs, and grassroots activists are working hand in hand in their concerted pledge to overcome environmental malady. It is important to note that, viewed thus, literary activism in Malaysia, as explained below, can be perceived as an active agent in the promotion of environmental preservation.

1.2.3 RESEARCH POTENTIALS ON PERSONAL ECO-IDENTITY IN THE TRADITION OF MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

In the examination of the environmentally-influenced self, Malaysian novels written in English are useful in demonstrating the multiperspectival manifestations of environmental identity arising from the spirit of environmentalism, or the lack thereof. This is achievable by integrating natural elements into the historical and contemporary narratives in order to portray how the construction of personal eco-identity is perceived and conceptualised through a multitude of stories and the effects of environmental exploitation on the self. This study presents extensive and intimate ways in which the natural world in the selected Malaysian novels written in English analysed in this thesis is foregrounded from the pre-independence perspectives. This leads to the construction of a historically informed environmental identity, examined by identifying and categorising the depiction of the natural environment in each novel across Malaysia's pre-independence era.

The production of Malaysia's nature-writing in English is rich in the sentiments of interconnectedness between human and non-living beings. Such is visibly demonstrable in Muhammad Haji Salleh's poems (Ahmed and Hashim 2012) where emphasis on natural significance is unmistakeable in his concern over ecological disruptions as a result of human failure to appreciate the intertwined imperatives of human co-existence with the natural world. Poet Shirley Geok-lin Lim prolifically writes poetry on nature, placing it at the intersection of "place, identity, society, and gender" (Yeow 2011: 22). Other works of famous Malaysian writers, A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra are examined in Muhammad Syaukat bin Mustafa Kamal's seminal book (2013), *The Poetry of A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra: A Comparative Study in Ecocriticism*, where he finds that both A. Samad

Said and Cecil Rajendra remove human superiority in challenging human-non-human binary.

It is the reality of Malaysia's environmental state combined with the "imagined reality" of nature staged through the creative works of Malaysian writers in English novels that the notion of personal eco-identity is brought into focus as it draws on the idea that relates nature to "a person's self-understanding as an integrated component of the natural environment, and thus has the potential to influence any behaviour that an individual perceives as environmentally relevant or having environmental impact" (Clayton et al. 2021: 7). Grace Nelles and Mary Ressler (2023) refer to human connectedness to nature by way of cultural practices or behaviours as human appreciation and recognition of the essential relationship between humanity and nature influence human behavioural tendencies, leading consequently to the formation of environmentally guided identity. The understanding of self from this perspective may be better grasped through a careful investigation into the notion of personal eco-identity by comparing the reality of Malaysia's ecological context against the narratorial descriptions within Malaysia's literary texts written in English. Such comparison enables better comprehension in human behavioural predisposition that is largely and primordially predicated upon the environmental bearings on which individuals have by identifying themselves intrinsically and intuitively with nature.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Postcolonial literary criticism has long challenged dominant Eurocentric narratives that universalise experience and marginalise the cultural and historical specificities of colonised societies. As Peter Barry (2017: 181) argues, one of the central aims of postcolonial criticism is to contest the assumption that great literature is "timeless and universal", a claim that risks erasing regional and national differences in favour of a supposedly global standard. Postcolonial writing thus functions as a form of resistance — against homogenisation, against invisibility, and against the ideological legacy of the empire. This resistance also extends to environmental imaginaries, which are often shaped by colonial histories of land appropriation, ecological degradation, and the silencing of indigenous ecological knowledge and experiences.

The imposition of imperial control over landscapes and livelihoods is not merely material, but also psychological and symbolic. As Graham Huggan and Hellen Tiffin (2015: 153) observe, colonial discourse often masquerades as ecological stewardship, masking its "development's destructive tendencies" under a rhetoric of progress. Literature emerging from postcolonial contexts frequently reveals how colonialism restructures not only land use and ownership, but also the very ways people understand their relationship with nature. Environmental concerns in postcolonial narratives, therefore, are not separable from questions of cultural survival, memory, and identity.

Anent Malaysian literary works written in English, there has been a growing interest in how the environment is represented, yet critical attention often remains focused on communal identity or national consciousness. Less explored

are the issues revolving around individual conflicts of livelihood and intimate, affective as well as spiritual connections between individuals and their environments — the subtle ways in which land and human survival intersect in the formation of personal eco-identities. Upamanyu Mukherjee (2010) reminds us that colonial violence is often inscribed on the body of the land itself and the destruction of local ecologies mirrors the fragmentation of personal and cultural identities. To read the environment in Malaysian postcolonial fiction is, therefore, to read both a landscape and a 'lifescape'. In essence, this study focuses on the construction of literary characters' personal eco-identity in the selected Malaysian novels in English by imbricating ecopsychological nuances into ecocritical perspectives against the narratives set in the pre-independence period to articulate how the shaping of ecological selves is placed neatly in the intersection between postcolonial and environmental philosophies during such period. Human mind is oftentimes situated in the environment in which it perceives and the history of time during which it experiences. *Ipso facto*, the display of behaviours flowing psychologically from the embracement of identity is associated, incidentally or otherwise, with both environmental and historical influences. This study, on this ground, explores such scholarly novelty by examining the effects on which both environment and history are contributory to the construction of human's environmentally influenced identity. The convergence of postcolonial ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology in this study is a novel exploration undergirded by postcolonial literary philosophies as it attempts to fill the scholarly lacunae presently extant in the field of Malaysian literature in English.

This study, in essence, aims to investigate the environmentally-themed postcolonial narratives in Malaysian literary fiction in English which offer a rich yet underexamined avenue for understanding the construction of identity through ecological interaction. Drawing on the intersection of ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, the research explores how characters in the selected Malaysian novels in

English navigate emotional, spiritual, and historical relationships with nature by virtue and on the strength of the notion of mutual constitution, appearing, in effect, as a conceptual epiphenomenon of the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity presented in Chapter 3. These interactions are not merely thematic embellishments — they constitute a narrative core through which self is imagined, tested, and asserted. The study addresses a critical gap by shifting its focus towards the ways personal eco-identity is shaped through the textures of survival, ritual, memory, and personal resistance within ecologically colonial settings.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to probe into the representation of natural environment as a device by which to analyse the construct of personal eco-identity, embodied in the literary characters of the selected novels by Malaysian authors written in English. To this end, the present research attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how nature is represented in the corpus and how such representations contribute to the construction of personal eco-identities within historical and socio-political contexts.

2. To explore how conflicts, emotional responses, spiritual beliefs, and inter-human dynamics inform the formation of personal eco-identities in pre-independence Malaysian narratives.

3. To analyse how personal eco-identities are shaped through affective, behavioural, and experiential engagements with the environment.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions are formulated to accomplish the objectives of the study:

1. How is nature represented within the historical and socio-political contexts of the selected Malaysian novels in English, and how do these representations shape the formation of personal eco-identities?

2. In what ways do emotional responses, spiritual beliefs, and ecological memory function as internal mechanisms in the formation of personal eco-identities in the selected narratives?

3. How do behavioural engagements with the natural environment and interpersonal dynamics further constitute and express the personal eco-identities of individual characters?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The investigation into the manifestation of personal eco-identity in the literary works written by Malaysian authors in English may potentially prove significant in the scholarship of Malaysian literature in English as it not only probes into the construct of personal eco-identity based on the considerations derived purely from the aspects in literary ecocriticism but as an interdisciplinary project where the foundational underpinnings on which the construct of personal eco-identity is framed are broadened extensively to include other pertinent strands — that of identity studies within ecopsychology. This research is a novel contribution to the

Malaysian eco-identity writing in English. It is observed that literary contributions made by the Malaysian postcolonial writers are enormous with important environmental concerns and themes raised, critiqued, and even challenged in their respective works, especially concerning those of liberation, nationalism, and nation-building, such as those written by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, whose nature-themed poems place natural environment at the centre of overarching discourses on "place, identity, society, and gender" (Yeow 2011: 22). Equally salient is the fact that in the realm of Malaysian environmentally-themed identity writing, Malaysian authors' mutual concentration appears to be directed primarily at the rethinking of national identity "with a uniquely Malayan consciousness, one that would give a "common identity" to the diverse population of Malaya" (Vengadasamy 2011: 103). The issue of human identity construction as a result of their environmental experience during the pre-independence period and the reflections of its maintenance, appreciation, or neglect, in this connection, appear pronouncedly insufficient in the scholarship of Malaysian literature in English, necessitating, therefore, an urgent scholarly intervention congruent with the purpose of this thesis.

In addition, the study of personal eco-identity in the selected novels of Malaysian writers in English paves an insightful way to deepen our understanding of heterogeneous identities, transcending those merely formed by social or cultural factors. The focus of this thesis on the literary narratives foregrounded in the colonial period is crucial due to its foundational importance in deepening both of our appreciation and apperception of the genesis of human ecological self during colonial times and the accompanying historical, cultural, and social impetuses to its construction. It sets a historically precise context in place for future studies of identity that may succeed therefrom, especially those of post-independence period as it provides an insight *ex post facto* into which the study environmental identity in the modern world may then be best understood.

All things considered, this study presents an invaluable opportunity to explore a processual formulation of identity by studying the characters' psyches in perceiving their lived experiences during this critical period of historical gravity through the elements of natural environment which culminate, consequently, in the formation of their environmentally-constructed identities or personal eco-identities.

1.7 RESEARCH CORPUS

This study focuses on close textual analysis by approaching the theme of identity construction through the elements of natural environments. In so doing, it explores the works of Malaysian postcolonial writers in English, to wit, Shahnon Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* (1972), Keris Mas' *Jungle of Hope* (1986), K.S. Maniam's *Between Lives* (2003), Kamarul Zaman Ariff's *Long Road to Merdeka* (2006), and Shivani Sivagurunathan's *Yalpanam* (2021). The main criterion for the selection of these works is the relevance and applicability of these narratives to the historical context, namely, the pre-independence period of Malaya, in order to understand the environmental reflections, forming the epicentre of identity construction that this study seeks to unfold. For ease of reference, the following table is presented in the order of the year in which these novels were published:

Title	Name of Author	Year of Publication
No Harvest but a Thorn	Shahnon Ahmad	1972
Jungle of Hope	Keris Mas	1986
Between Lives	K.S. Maniam	2003
Long Road to Merdeka	Kamarul Zaman Ariff	2006
Yalpanam	Shivani Sivagurunathan	2021

Table 1.1 Identification of the Research Corpus

1.7.1 *No Harvest but a Thorn* (1972) by Shahnon Ahmad

Against the intense agrarian life in Malaya, *No Harvest but a Thorn* portrays a challenging spectacle of human struggle with unceasing cycle of natural plagues, poverty, traditions, and death from which the novel's protagonist, Lahuma, cannot break free physically, but over which he and his family have triumphed spiritually. Pertinently, the novel highlights the family's continuous battle for survival against the mounting societal challenges and impersonal forces of nature. In Lahuma's desperation to maintain a meagre subsistence for his family by means of traditional farming which appears to be his only source of income, his only resource are his physical strength and emotional support from his wife, Jeha, as well as all their seven daughters. Despite his unending struggle and minimal reward, he seeks solace and emotional strength in the belief that any such impossibilities can be surmounted through the divine aid of the Almighty. The author's use of natural environment, exhibiting it as hostile and unpredictable, is

explored in order to observe its ecopsychological implications and influences on the character's conception of self. The elements of nature, acting both as an antagonist and a physical setting, are scrutinised at length so as to discern the characters' formation of personal eco-identities reflected in its eclectic themes of fate, endurance, and vulnerability.

1.7.2 *Jungle of Hope* (1986) by Keris Mas

Set against the period of pre-independence Malaya, *Jungle of Hope* by Keris Mas is a telling narration of two brothers' conflict over their clashing views on tradition as against modernity. Pak Kia, adamant about preserving the decade-long practice of traditional farming in his ancestral land, is forced to confront the contrasting attitude of his brother, Zaidi, who is prepared to eschew his traditional way of life in his full readiness to embrace modern changes and development. The misfortune of heavy flood in their village further adds to their family conflict where a forced relocation away from his land appears to be the only choice left for the continuation of Pak Kia's preferred agrarian lifestyle in which the portrayal of nature begins to navigate the processual and gradual construction of Pak Kia as well as other characters' personal eco-identities. Identity construction is examined by dint of a panoply of challenges and struggles in developing the new land in Janda Baik and in conserving a traditional socio-economic landscape strictly by rural survival. The exploration into the characters' personal eco-identities, therefore, are undertaken by observing the dichotomy of progress and tradition and through the questioning of the community's shared anxiety in and objection to modernisation, thereby underscoring the themes of hope, renewal, and emancipation from the feudal control shaped by British imperialism which lie at the heart of human resilience in protecting their 'natural territory'.

1.7.3 *Between Lives* (2003) by K.S. Maniam

Set primarily in a natural landscape, K.S. Maniam's *Between Lives* tells the story of an old and traditional woman, Sellamma, whose land in the forest shapes her sense of self and those around her. The novel exhibits the Malayan Indian's endless battle against social hardships and economic restraints in order to secure a viable livelihood and to find a sense of belonging in the pre-independence Malaya. The novel begins with Sumitra's involvement in Sellamma's life whose assigned task is to relocate Sellamma to a welfare house due to old age. Challenge presents itself as she discovers the reasons of Sellamma's reluctance to leave her land, subsequently shifting her focus since to defend the latter's right to the ownership of her land. Constant portrayals of nature and its emotional significance in Sellamma's life foreground the focus of the novel as they make visible Sellamma's eternal struggles in the aftermath of rapid urban modernisation which subsequently shape her and other characters' personal eco-identities. A journey to self-exploration and identity through the characters' environmental experiences in the novel is accentuated through the author's depiction of the characters' formative involvement with nature where the natural landscape lends its ecopsychological credence to the characters' both discovery and recovery of self, mirroring, in effect, the comingling of physical and emotional aspect of human identity actuated by the inherent entanglement of nature in its formation.

1.7.4 *Long Road to Merdeka* (2006) by Kamarul Zaman Ariff

The narrative of *Long Road to Merdeka* by Kamarul Zaman Ariff turns primarily on the biracial friendship, and later, courtship, between a Malay boy, Omar, and his Indian confidante, Ananti, with whom the former discovers the beauty of their village and the harmonious life shared by all villagers in spite of various challenges during the British colonial period. The story in the novel revolves around Omar and Ananti's relationship instilled through a wealth of their experience amassed in various fascinating encounters and incidents which take place in Kampung Sungai Serai. Natural elements in the novel indispensably form a fertile and 'storied' ground on which Omar and Ananti's characterisations are developed and investigated so as to uncover the influential aspect of physical environment in contributing to their respective personal eco-identities. Other characters' behavioural tendencies are observed, to this end, on the strength of natural landscape as an agentic trigger in constructing these identities. Through the villagers' strong sense of attachment to the natural environment in Kampung Sungai Serai, their personal eco-identities are examined by way of juxtaposing the otherwise duality of nature and human lives and probing into the constitutive outcome of this human-nature consilience in predicting the personal eco-identities of the novel's characters.

1.7.5 *Yalpanam* (2021) by Shivani Sivagurunathan

Shivani Sivagurunathan's novel, *Yalpanam*, traces the journey of its main character, Pushpanayagi, in her quest to self-discovery and wholeness. Pushpanayagi, a 185-year-old-ascetic and recluse, and living alone in the house of Yalpanam, develops an unlikely friendship with her 18-year-old-neighbour, Maxim Cheah, whose chance encounter with the former leads both of them to an expedition where they learn to reconcile the past in order to negotiate the present. In the course of their friendship, they find themselves introspectively transported to Pushpanayagi's vivid reminiscence of her life back in the 19th century colonial Malaya where she recounts her memory of her British lepidopterist husband, his crestfallen first wife who fatally succumbs to suicide, and later his high-spirited second wife as well as their opium-addicted Malay attendant. Sivagurunathan employs natural environment as a strategic device by which to investigate the inherent quality of nature in galvanising the manifestations of its characters' personal eco-identities. Through the tropical landscape of Coal Island during British colonial rule — its dense foliage, sultry heat, and unpredictable weather — and all manner of emotional undercurrents that come with it, the characters' states of mind are scrutinised and their actions, observed through the natural elements that shape human eco-behaviours and identities, thereby enabling the characters to define themselves within their natural space and through the imbrication of nature into their personal lives.

1.8 JUSTIFICATION OF THE SELECTION OF THE CORPUS

These novels are selected as the primary corpus for this study primarily and crucially due to their portrayal of natural environment and their effects on the lives of characters in each novel. In these selected texts, multifarious instances of environmental interaction are demonstrated to bring about salient environmental impacts on the characters' construction of self in the form of environmentally influenced identities. Varied manifestations of environmental identity are exposed in the manner in which the characters internalise their psyches through constant interactions with the natural world, instilling, as a result, a strong sense of awareness of environmental relevance in their lives, and by extension, their sense of being. There appears to be vivid evidence of environmental elements by which the characters' personhood is heavily influenced which is consistently frequent in occurrence throughout the build-up of the narrative in each novel.

Apart from the environmental concern as the core focus of the writers, equally important is the fact that these literary texts represent the quintessential consciousness of colonised Malayans from racially diverse and colourful cultural traditions spanning across different decades regarding the roles of nature in the literary characters' lives during the pre-independence era. Ecological awakening of the characters' minds in terms of how their identities are shaped stems, to a significant degree, from the characters' introspective observation on how nature is indispensably interconnected to the promise of assured survival. Therefore, the nexus between the characters and nature is explored in every text so as to enable the investigation into the numerous means by which human experiences are negotiated in order to explore the intrinsic interrelationship between human and nature.

It is worth noting that Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* (1972) and Keris Mas' *Jungle of Hope* (1986) are the English renditions of *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* and *Rimba Harapan* respectively, both of which are translated from their original versions in Malay by Adibah Amin. Even though these two selected texts were initially written in Malay, their inclusion in this study is methodologically justified through their use in authoritative English translations. The central issue in this thesis is not one of dialectical style or philological comparison, but that of the production of personal eco-identity as understood in the narrative representations of land, livelihood, survival, and human-nature dynamics in colonial contexts. The analytic attention, therefore, lies in the thematic frames, character experience, and ecological imaginaries that remain conceptually intact across translation. In addition, the translated texts have occupied a recognised location amongst Malaysian literatures with which Anglophone readerships and academic discourse are capable of engaging alongside the materials already published in English. Their presence reflects the multilingual nature of Malaysian literary production and does not reinforce linguistic binaries in considering common ecological histories. Translation here operates not as a distortion of meaning but as a vehicle for the circulation of cultures through which environmental consciousness and identity can traverse linguistic divides.

In short, all textual analyses in this study are conducted with reference to the English translations specified and the interpretive claims are confined to narrative, thematic, and relational dimensions rather than stylistic or linguistic particularities of the source language. The writing world in Malaysia encompasses both Malay and English literature and employing them in this thesis shows consideration of the Malaysian mindset rather than those whose reading materials are limited to Malaysian Literature written only in English.

Hence, the aforementioned selected literary texts; Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* (1972), Keris Mas' *Jungle of Hope* (1986), Maniam's *Between Lives* (2003), Ariff's *Long Road to Merdeka* (2006), and Sivagurunathan's *Yalpanam* (2021), are, on balance, appropriate texts for the purposes of meeting the research objectives and of answering the research questions of this study. Attempts have been made to scrutinise how all these selected literary texts, hinging pertinently on a distinct historical era, *id est*, the Malayan pre-independence era, have provided stark evidence of environmentally predisposed identity construction as a result of the characters' sustained identifications with, exposures to, and inclusion in the natural world.

In the course of exploring the processual development of identity construction, the wide-ranging facets of environmental dimensions are markedly recognised which prove invaluable in aiding the constructional comprehension of personal eco-identity. Such exploration involves a careful navigation of the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity and its application to the analysis of the literary characters in the selected novels where several concepts in both ecocriticism and identity within ecopsychology are co-conceptualised in order to theorise the notion of mutual constitution which vitally embodies the characters' manifestations of personal eco-identity, details on which are explicated in great length in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. This is further aided by the by the research design of close textual analysis where the interlinked imperatives of both human and nature are investigated using the representation—internalisation—enactment model denoting the appraisal of the representation of environmental theme in order to observe the internalisation of the characters' ecological consciousness, from which the construction of their personal eco-identities appears to be further solidified by their respective environmental attitudes, behaviours, and actions.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations shape the scope of this research. It is confined to the domains of postcolonial ecocriticism and identity within ecopsychology. The analysis prioritises historical settings to identify and examine environmental identity through the lens of ecocritical theory. Specifically, it focuses on literary works by Malaysian post-independence writers in English, with narratives addressing or set during the pre-independence era. Thus, the scope excludes literary works by pre-independence writers, limiting exploration to a specific subset of Malaysian literature in English.

Additionally, the investigation of identity construction centres solely on the natural environment as a tool for shaping the characters' personal eco-identities, excluding other perspectives such as gender and feminist theories, *inter alia*. The formation of personal eco-identity sought to be analysed in this thesis does not take into account other aforementioned perspectives and that the putative formation thereof is derived purely from the esemplastic theories in literary ecocriticism and identity within ecopsychology, focusing only on the intra-psychic and phenomenological mechanisms of the human-nature bond as detailed in the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity in Chapter 3. Whilst other theoretical approaches are admittedly important dimensions in many ecocritical and postcolonial analyses, there are methodological reasons for excluding gender-centred analysis, for instance, as it pertains to the study's focus on personal eco-identity as a process shaped through affective, behavioural, and ecological engagement rather than through social identity categories. Making gender explicitly central to the analysis would require sustained engagement with the ecofeminist theory and intersectional frameworks,

which would reorient the thesis towards questions of gendered power relations rather than ecological identity formation per se. In order to avoid theoretical dilution and ensure analytical clarity, the study restricts its focus to personal eco-identity whilst recognising that gender remains an embedded, though not foregrounded, dimension of the narratives examined.

Importantly, a significant limitation lies in the size of the corpus, as Malaysian literary works in English addressing pre-independence narratives of nature are relatively scarce. Amongst the extensive postcolonial writings by Malaysian authors in English across various genres, this analysis includes only five novels, omitting poetry, short stories, novellas, and plays. These novels were selected for their relevance to personal eco-identity, with its scrutiny tethered strictly to historical settings where such identity is negotiated, constructed, and valued. Despite these constraints, this work remains a valuable contribution to literary scholarship in ecocriticism, addressing an underexamined dimension of identity construction at the intersection of ecopsychology and postcolonial ecocriticism in Malaysian literature in English. Therefore, this research should be regarded as a focused endeavour rather than one overly limited by constraints.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is subsumed into six chapters. **Chapter 1** provides the general and introductory overview of the study consisting mainly of the notion of environmentalism in general and the dynamism of Malaysian environmentalism as well as the lived reality of Malaysia's environmental present state of affairs. **Chapter 2** presents the review of previous academic research revolving around the discussions concerning the concepts, theories, and critiques of ecocriticism, ecopsychology, postcolonialism, and identity within Malaysian literature in English. **Chapter 3** discusses the proposed conceptual framework of eco-identity studies called 'The Framework of Personal Eco-Identity' which incorporates the fields of literary ecocriticism of postcoloniality and identity studies within ecopsychology. In this chapter, it will be shown that such framework reveals five thematic strands or manifestations of personal eco-identity as a result of this conceptual conjunction between literary ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology. Also, the methodology of this study by way of close textual analysis is explained in this chapter. The notion of personal eco-identity is explored in **Chapters 4** and **5** by textually analysing the said thematic strands or manifestations of the literary characters' personal eco-identity through the cumulative series of experiences and interaction between human and non-human. To this end, I have applied to the corpus the Framework of Personal Eco-Identities grounded securely in the theorised notion of mutual constitution arising from the embodied consilience inherent in both human and nature as a collective whole. **Chapter 6** presents a conclusion of this thesis proper.

1.11 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

In summation, Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, outlining the context, breadth, and scope of the research. This study essentially probes into the construction of the characters' identities in the selected Malaysian novels written in English from an eco-identity perspectives using the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity formulated to reflect the constitutive web of entanglement between literary ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology so as to facilitate the understanding of environmentally affected identity formation positioned at the interface of coloniality and indigeneity. To further investigate this construct, it examines the idea of embodied interconnectedness inhering within the human mind as well as the natural world and that of how the natural environment, predominantly marked by these environmental factors, generates the literary characters' personal eco-identities. The parameter and structure of this thesis are demarcated in this chapter, offering a visible direction to which this research is carefully navigated. The succeeding chapter provides the literature review of the study comprising these areas: **(i)** environmentalism and ecopsychology, **(ii)** the literary theory of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies, **(iii)** the construct of identity and place attachment, **(iv)** the notion of environmental identity, and **(v)** the discursive analyses on the themes of identity and environment articulated in the literary works of Malaysian authors written in English. In discussing the reciprocity of human-nature relation and analysing, subsequently, environmentally mediated identity, I have since standardised terminology to avoid stylistic drift and to maintain conceptual coherence. In theoretical discussions, I employ the term 'human' to align with ecocritical and ecopsychological frameworks, reserving 'humans' or 'human beings' only when the need for specificity or ethical emphasis arises.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of the literature pertaining to the environment and identity leading, ultimately, to the works of Malaysian authors written in English in both areas of environmental and identity writings. The chapter is divided into four central segments, namely, a review of **(i)** environmentalism, literary theory of ecocriticism and postcoloniality, **(ii)** identity and place attachment, **(iii)** ecopsychology and environmental identity, and **(iv)** environmental and identity writing in Malaysian literature in English as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below. The circle of engagement (Mydin and Hashim 2012) illustrated below is used for this purpose indicating that the review is undertaken from layer to layer where the review moves transitionally from the inner (micro) circle to the outer (macro) circle with an ultimate aim of identifying the gap in the literary scholarship of personal eco-identity in the English literary works by Malaysian authors.

To begin with, the review covers the scholarship of ecocriticism as a literary theory as well as the state of global environmentalism in the context of postcolonial studies. It is then followed by the psychological aspect of identity construction. Its review is carried out to gain insight into a sense of spatial attachment which informs the processual formation of individual place identity and its maintenance and/or departure as a result of one's experiential exposure and attachment to place from which his place identity is consequently formed. The analysis continues with the aspect of environmental identity within the field of ecopsychology constructed from one's discerned observation of and experience with the natural

environment influencing his identity. Finally, the notions of environment and identity are discussed from the tradition of Malaysian literature in English where the characters' attitudinal tendencies and behaviours as a bipartite outcome of cognitive observation of and physical interactions with nature are scrutinised from various social aspects, in strict relation to the framework of Malaysian literature in English. Perhaps, it is apposite to pause and reflect that although it appears that a number of theoretical notions are reviewed and that they can also be potentially applied to the corpus, ultimately, the present research aims to apply these notions strictly in relation to the investigation of the relation between human and nature in the context of personal eco-identities construction in the selected works. By situating the study on these four areas of scrutiny, this chapter is instructive in identifying the existing gap in the scholarship of Malaysian literature in English and, by extension, in addressing the notion of personal eco-identity in the Malaysian literary narratives set against the pre-independence era, so as to present the distinct ecocritical dimension of ecologically influenced identity peculiar to this particular period.

In summary, the organisation of Chapter 2 is dealt with by the compartmentalisation of the following sections: Section 2.2 presents the reviews on the scholarly works on the subjects of environmentalism, ecocriticism, and postcoloniality respectively. Section 2.3 deals with the analysis on identity and place attachment. Whilst Section 2.4 is dedicated to the examination on ecopsychology and environmental identity, Section 2.5 concentrates on the literary works relating to identity and environmental writing in the context of Malaysian literature in English. Section 2.6 focuses on how the gap in the research is addressed and finally, Section 2.7 offers a summary of the entirety of literature review in this chapter.

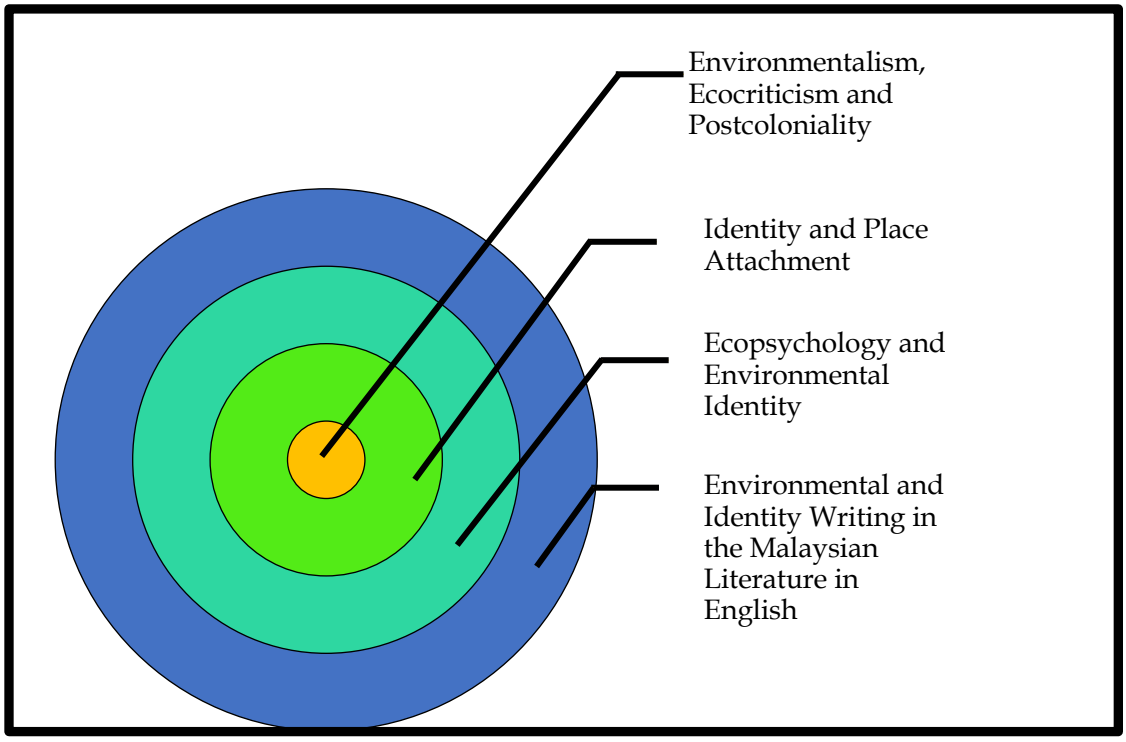


Figure 2.1 Circle of Engagement in Reviewing Ecocriticism and Identity in the Works of Malaysian Literature in English

2.2 ENVIRONMENTALISM, ECOCRITICISM, AND POSTCOLONIALITY

This section provides an important explication regarding environmentalism involving, *inter alia*, the dynamics of which environmental discourses evolve since its inception to the present day and the gradation of environmental discourses from merely revolving around the issues of ecology and sustainability to the multiperspectival dyads of practical and cultural characteristics of environmental preservation so as to address ecological concerns using literary ecocritical and postcolonial lenses. The organisation of this section shall be in the following

manner: Section 2.2.1 deals with the evolution of environmental discourses, followed by Section 2.2.2 which offers a considerable insight into the concerns on ecological modernisation and the birth of literary ecocriticism, and subsequently, the ecological impacts on postcolonial ecocriticism in Section 2.2.3.

2.2.1 The Evolution of Environmental Discourses

Oftentimes, the global environmental landscape is depicted in vague terms, coloured by various political ideologies such as 'ecologism', 'conservationism', and 'environmentalism' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015). These terms, whilst ethically motivated, are frequently used interchangeably and somewhat inaccurately within different environmental discourses. These movements are steadfast in their unequivocal challenge against the Western perspectives regarding the roles of nature primarily as a tool for economic gains (Huggan and Tiffin 2015). This shift in environmental awareness has its roots in these movements' remonstrance against the Western capitalistic drive to commercialise nature, striving, therefore, for a balance between modern development and environmental sustainability, where economic growth is pursued alongside the goals of environmental conservation and protection.

Significant challenges, however, continue to persist in appreciating the conceptual distinctions and boundaries between 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism'. On the one hand, Anthony Giddens (1994) differentiates them by noting that environmentalism is reformist whilst ecologism is revolutionary. Sharing the same sentiment, Murray Bookchin (1990) characterises environmentalism as primarily adjusting current institutions and values rather than transforming them. On the other hand, Andrew Dobson (1990: 112) aligns

"ecology" closely with the green movement, contrasting it with environmentalism's "managerial" approach, which assumes that environmental issues can be resolved without drastic changes in current values or consumption patterns. Despite these terminological subtleties, both movements are unified, nevertheless, by their communal focus and efforts towards securing a stable environment free from degradation and exploitation.

Indeed, intense exploitations of nature began in the second half of the 20th century under the pretext of human development, where a stunning consternation was especially felt at the scale of environmental destructions bearing on the much-embattled lifeforms with which human cohabited this Earth. This observation is echoed by Peter Hay (2002: 220) who argues that human decisions are severely criticised for their human ego-centric obsessions with the bureaucracy and politics of human capitalism "in the name of transcendental human progression" where the notion of environmental modernisation perpetuates the agenda which utilises the environment as a tool by which modern advancement in social engineering and industrial success is objectively measured. The crescendo of ecological modernisation in espousing for green capitalism has since been heralded to promote many businesses with clear capitalistic intent, purporting to affect positive changes in order to address the far-reaching repercussions of ecological crisis. This notion has been extensively theorised as "the discourse that recognises the structural character of the environmental problem but nonetheless assumes that existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalise care for the environment" (Hajer 1995: 172). The import of ecological modernisation is long realised and attempted to be materialised by way of corporate endeavours between the government and industry stakeholders in finding a fair ground on which cooperative solutions to the environmental issues can be sought (Gouldson and Murphy 1997). It requires "high environmental standards" of environmental care to be effectively discharged so as to secure and maintain a safe environmental

status quo, besides embracing "potentials for new specialist industries and sectors, with the possibility of substantial employment growth" (Boland 1994: 138). These forms of institutionalised care, observes Albert Weale (1992: 113), explicitly provide a countermeasure to the Marxist view that romanticises the idea of a "pristine environment", unmarred by the perversity of human hands, denouncing unequivocally the materialisation of capitalistic demands from excessive environmental resources which pose a grave threat to the Earth.

Likewise, Paul Shepard's (1982: 100) thesis declaims that the widespread culture of western environmental exploitation is greatly attributable to humans' design in "dis-embedding" themselves from nature. Alan Drengson (1992) offers his insight to similar effect when he scorns the human annihilation of nature, accusing humanity of "latent ecological unconsciousness" (Drengson 1992: 1). Similarly, Edward Wilson (1993), a prominent biologist, echoes this sentiment where he argues that "there is an innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms" (Wilson 1993: 36). Here, Wilson expresses his instinctual dismay at human's superficial attention only to the environmental benefits for other human, without a scintilla of regard to the environment itself, holding it alarmingly concerning. The impulse to advocate for the rights to existence, which ought to apply with equal force to other non-human, has culminated in mounting disputes against the general assumption, common in the traditions of Western environmental thought, which problematises the notion of 'right behaviours'. This notion arguably concentrates solely on human behaviours and manners fitting to human ability in their superintendence of ecological management and in balancing environmental sustainability exclusively for the continuity of human subsistence.

The question which then shapes the values concerning the impacts of burgeoning industrialisation on non-human denizens of the Earth did not come into prominence until the 1960s when Aldo Leopold in his books, *A Sand County Almanac* and *Sketches Here and There* (1968), reopens the discussions on land ethics, especially that which concerns the looming prospect of environmental destruction in proximate consequence to the raging practices of wildlife commodification. The political debates surrounding the unease of environmental doom by many environmental philosophers lie not only in human action, but, more alarmingly, in human inaction. Sheer indifference to the interests of the natural environment demonstrates the arrogance and sense of human entitlement over non-human, evident in their unstinted profligacy to amass the stock of human capital at the cost of nature. Human assumption of superior ecological hierarchy impels the already urgent need to reappraise the hitherto ingrained belief in moral standing, placing nature as a servant, encumbered with full expectation of subservience, and on whom categorical obligations from the non-human other are enjoined in order to overcome human exigency. The most fundamental re-evaluation of human philosophy regarding the arbitrary treatment towards the environment is needed to refrain, nay bar humanity, from acting (or not acting) in any way it deems proper towards the non-human occupants of this planet. In John Livingston's (1991) compelling book, *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation*, quotes of which are reproduced below, he makes a compelling argument on the need to justify wildlife preservation other than for its own sake:

> There can be no 'rational' argument for wildlife preservation, just as there can be logical explanation of quality experience. It now seems to me that argument itself — in the sense of reasonable dialogue — is not only inappropriate to our subject matter but also may be destructive of it. There is no 'logic' in feeling, in experiencing, in

> states of being. Yet, these same phenomena appear to be the prerequisite for wildlife preservation (Livingston 1991: 58).

Attitudinal tendencies towards the environment have not always been positive where the non-human element is left entirely out of the equation. Tracing the historical routes, it would only lead us to the discovery of human environmental misbehaviours during the pre-civilisation era — those "of escaping wilderness, of establishing mastery over it through fire, clearing, cropping, domestication of animals and so on" (Hay 2002: 221). Such is the mentality which aligns with the pre-industrialised humans whose constant conundrum faced daily is that of sustenance and survival. The wilderness that is deemed life-threatening, laden with death-inducing disasters and pervasive with poisonous animals, is conquered and restructured to fit into the purpose of human sustenance and survival. This brings us, therefore, to the notion of anthropocentrism, placing humankind as the superior being within the network of ecological relationships with other species, ardent in their patronising view towards non-human, inasmuch as it is "usually a question of those holding power extending their privileges to others" (Marshall 1992: 256). Human ethics in the environmental ministration must, without fail, be extended in this discourse to include matters of ethical steps in which environmental preservation must, of necessity, take into due and commensurate account of other non-human lives. Andrew McLaughlin (1993), in his assent to the shared moral and ethical currency to be accorded, rightfully, to both human and non-human, makes the following dictum:

> As long as we assume that we are fundamentally different from the rest of nature, then we would seem to be left only with the possibility of raising a claim that there is some sort of intrinsic value in nonhuman nature as a restraint on humanity's action. However, if we

> accept that we are part of nature, that we are submerged within the unfolding of life, then the need for the theoretical construct of 'intrinsic value' diminishes (McLaughlin 1993: 145).

Human superiority is embraced fully due to human's assumption of themselves as 'being better' than other creatures, breeding only, as a result, hubristic assumptions and misplaced regard in priding themselves as a master of the Earth who are mightily ensconced on the pedestal of ecology whose primary agenda is to move selfishly onward and forward in reasserting the claim of ownership of the world through maximum utilisation of the natural resources, designed specifically for and exclusively only to themselves. No regard is had to the fact that non-human, too, are "teleological" (Callicott 1986: 155) in nature — having purports, desires and interests in preserving their integrity and in determining their own destinies. These traits are as crucial to non-human as to human in determining their own directions and functionality in life. Indeed, respect for nature is neither sourced nor derived from human discretion. Rather, it is inalienable and intrinsic, consonant with what Paul Taylor (1987:164) calls an "ultimate moral attitude", where its core belief lies in the following:

> (a) Humans are members of the Earth's Community of Life in the same sense and on the same basic terms in which other living things are members of the Community.
>
> (b) The human species, along with all other species, are integral elements in a system of interdependence such that the survival of each living things, as well as its chances of faring well or poorly, is determined not only by the physical

conditions of its environment, but also by its relationships to other living things.

(c) Organisms are teleological centres of life in the sense that each is a unique individual pursuing its own good in its own way.

(d) Humans are not inherently superior to other living things.

The respect for nature inculcated by the subscription to the attitude recommended above serves indispensably as a reminder to the standard of right conduct and appropriate character for human and can be deployed as a yardstick of accountability for those in wilful breach of its adherence. Despite Taylor's emphatic recommendation on the needful reconstruction of ecological balance between human and non-human, environmental ethics remain woefully embattled in the human-oriented hierarchy where priority appears to be biased towards human, thereby glossing over the non-human as an equally teleologically striving moral subject. Evidenced in Holmes Rolston III's (1988) controversial take on the binary order of ecological importance, he argues that in matters of moral conflict between sentient beings — human and non-human — human interests shall and must always prevail over the latter, reasoning that "humans are in the world ethically, as no other animal is. Humans are in the world cognitively at linguistic, deliberative, self-conscious levels equalled by no other animal. Humans are in the world critically, as nothing else is" (Rolston III 1988: 195). Perhaps, it is instructive to call to mind the reminder by Warwick Fox (1992) which resonates with today's view of environmentalism as a mere polemics where environmental worry is couched only in a humanistic trajectory — "when we see the non-human world as there to be damned, farmed, pulped, slaughtered and so on and whenever we argue that the non-human world should be conserved or preserved because of its use value to humans" (Fox 1992: 10).

In order to understand the evolution of environmental thought, one is to come face to face with the deep tensions in how human relate to the world around them. Whilst movements like environmentalism and ecologism have brought a great many important ideas to light, many remain tied to the fundamentally human-prioritising way of thinking where nature is valued mainly for what it can offer to us. But as thinkers like Wilson, Leopold, Taylor, and others have urged, the natural world is not just a backdrop to human progress. Rather, it is a living, breathing network of life in which we, too, are participants — equal and not grand masters. The growing call for a shift from human-dominant to biocentric ethics is not just about redefining policy or theory. It is about reawakening our emotional and moral connection to the more-than-human world. If we continue to measure worth solely by utility, we risk overlooking the quiet, essential truth — that every living being has its own purpose, its own path, and its own claim to exist. The future of environmental ethics may well depend on our willingness to see ourselves not above nature, but parallel to it.

2.2.2 Concerns on Ecological Modernisation and the Birth of Ecocriticism

One might argue that environmental crises would provoke the widespread of unease and galvanise the issues relating to ecology and sustainability primarily into public concern, warranting the urgency of scientific debates rather than literary discourses. However, practical contributions to practical environmental solutions may, on the surface, appear questionable too. Indeed, it is conceded that "public debates about global warming typically involve climatologists and glaciologists rather than poets or literary critics" (Garrard 2007: 371). Such view notwithstanding, it is of equal importance that human characters be included in the imperatives of ecological exploration as soon as one begins to investigate human accountability and involvements in the misfortune of ecological

mismanagement. Whilst technological enhancement and experimental exploration may potentially provide a practical solution to the problems in ecology, a much broader discussion concerning the human aspect in tackling the issue is essentially needed and these discourses must not omit to include the "features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in society" (Passmore 1974: 106). Greg Garrard (2004) proposes that through a multiplicity of multidimensional discourses on nature, due recognition can be accorded to the mutually constitutive characters of science and human culture to address environmental concern. Pollution, for instance, requires practical efforts through toxicological assessment and advanced amelioration of technology "but the definition of what counts as pollution is a cultural question that depends as much on shifting values and priorities as on actual emissions of toxic substance" (Garrard 2004: 112).

Viewed from this angle, there appears to be a significant environmental anxiety as a result of much bigger moral, political, and cultural challenges flowing from human's excessive consumption on a very large scale. Although technological advancements and experimental explorations may provide a practical solution to ecological problems, it is crucial to have a broader cultural discussion that does not overlook the social features that result from our interactions with nature (Passmore 1974). Garrard (2004) argues that by acknowledging the interconnected relationship between practical and cultural aspects, we may engage in the multifaceted and diverse discussions about nature. Granted, pollution necessitates practical endeavours such as toxicological evaluation and sophisticated improvement of technology. However, as Garrard opines above, the determination of what qualifies as pollution is a matter influenced by cultural factors, relying on changing values and priorities alongside the actual release of harmful substances.

Ecocriticism, against this backdrop, seeks to address the organic association of these patent dyads — practical and cultural characteristics in addressing the concerns in ecology. The term 'ecocriticism' implies the literacy not only in the ecological study which examines merely the species-habitat relations but looks with circumspect eyes at "its complicity in what it attacks", even though one is predisposed to "cast nature and culture as opposites, they, in fact, constantly intermingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream" (Howarth 1996: 80). The complicity, in this context, refers to the contributory liability found in human's action for their collusion with a litany of ecological problems which they face at present. Its proponent, also the movement founder in the United States of America, Cheryl Glotfelty, describes ecocriticism as "a study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an Earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty 1996: xviii).

Ecocriticism does not solely focus on human association with nature. It also examines the harmony between human and non-human on the basis of mutual respect and in the spirit of complementarity. It questions the potential cultural and social domains in which both human and non-human find themselves and the adverse effects of environmentally ineffectual policymaking on the future of the world. Pippa Marland (2013) views ecocriticism as "an umbrella term for a range of critical approaches that explore the representation in literature (and other cultural forms) of the relationship between the human and the non-human, largely from the perspective of anxieties around humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere" (Marland 2013: 857). As this definition suggests, ecocriticism affords an environmental dimension in the discursive debates on nature in literary works. The exploration initiated by ecocritics into the representation of nature in literature

aims to highlight the social and cultural dilemmas surrounding not only human, but other occupants in the ecosystem, as it attempts at presenting the connection between the state of human mind and the inevitable implications of human's materialistic and capital-driven schemes for self-enrichment at the expense of other beings — the environment and its natural inhabitants.

Ecocriticism can, therefore, be said to aim at examining the interconnectedness of practical and cultural aspects in relation to ecological issues. It essentially refers to a form of literacy that goes beyond studying the relationship between species and their habitats, involving a critical examination of how ecological study is involved in the very things it critiques. Despite the tendency to view nature and culture as opposites, ecocriticism espouses a view that they constantly interact and influence each other. Ecocriticism, as stated above, is similar to feminist criticism and Marxist critique in that it analyses language and literature through a lens that is mindful of gender and economic class. However, ecocriticism specifically focuses on an Earth-focused viewpoint in the study of literature, exploring the fair and mutual relationship between humanity and environment as complementary equals.

Marland (2013) views ecocriticism as a broad category of critical methods that examines how literature and other cultural forms present the possible interconnection between human and the natural world, with a particular focus on humanity's harmful effects on the Earth's ecosystems as it adds an environmental perspective to the discussion about nature in literature. Ecocritics are solidified in their determination in the question of how nature is represented in literature in order to bring attention to the social and cultural problems that arise from human actions in the ecosystem. Such exploration seeks to demonstrate the link between human mentality and the negative consequences of humanity's materialistic and

profit-focused pursuits, which endanger not only other fellow human but also the environment and its wildlife.

Ecocriticism, in its relative novelty as a literary scholarship, has since evolved in a significant way, where its scholars have embarked on a sophisticated literary endeavour to accentuate the linkage between "literary criticism and theory with the ecological issues at large" (Glotfelty 1996: xxii). The shared view that we live in a world pregnant with environmental crises have prompted ecocritical proponents to reformulate and renegotiate the ways in which nature and humanity coexist, and arising therefrom, find rather immediately that the human-non-human symbiosis is culturally determined. In literary narratives, spatial backdrop is often deployed to portray various environmental conditions, human's modes of living, and identity. This strategy paves a way for the ecocritics "to unravel and critique the conceptualisations that have been so damaging and to identify traces of those 'better ways of imaging' where we find them" (Buell 2005: 104). Anchored in an Earth-rooted paradigm, ecocriticism gains its literary currency through scholarly discussions and its clarion call to probe into the "crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relations to it" (Buell 1995: 2). In so doing, ecocriticism outlines a careful reframing of human's modes and functions as inhabitants of the Earth with equal regard for non-human creatures as co-residents of the ecological world. The vibrant emergence in environmental awareness has its historical precedent in the rise of literary consciousness dating as far back as the 1970s, which provides a useful backdrop to the ecocritical field, hailed since as "modern environmentalism" (Garrard 2004: 114). The Western Literature Association (WLE), which later expanded into the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) Association, was pivotal in advocating the ecocritical interest in American literary scholarship. It eventually evolved into a global movement

with its professional branches in the United Kingdom and Japan, amongst others (Barry 2009).

Despite having gained prominence in North America in the 1990s, the significance of ecocriticism as a literary theory in the domain of postcolonial studies has just recently been acknowledged. The review of postcolonial-ecocritical works would not be whole without first revisiting the trailblazing contribution by Glen Love (1996). Love's exploration into ecocriticism at a global level has led him to the conclusion that the Western American ecological literature is far from unique and that eco-works originating from other countries such as Africa, Australia, New England, Europe, Canada as well as South and Central America are also worthy of attention. Focus should be expended on producing more multidisciplinary works from multiple geographical locations investigating similar issues. Armed with a wealth of ecocritical insights through this design, Love recognises the viability of literary ecocriticism in globalising environmental approaches to environmental investigation, extending it to the postcolonial world. The significance of ecocriticism in postcolonial studies has been well observed by Anthony Vital and Hans Erney (2006), asserting that postcolonial ecocriticism is primarily aimed at nurturing literary-critical aptitudes. A nature-driven awareness through human behaviours and actions, which this thesis seeks to unfold, would allow postcolonial critics to deliberate on literatures that are intricately woven with political, cultural, and biological nuances.

One primal example of a fruitful integration between ecocriticism and postcolonialism is that of Megan Casey's research (2007). Casey asserts the dual utility of ecocriticism in postcolonial research, to wit, as an analytical method and a platform through which postcolonial eco-texts can be read. According to her, it is rather expected that the two sub-fields have taken longer to merge following

their respective emergences, primarily owing to their tendency to oppose each other in terms of academic style, theoretical stand, and relative concerns. Huggan and Tiffin (2010) contribute to the ecocritical-postcolonial discourses by exploring the complex relationship between human, non-human, and nature, and by introducing a post-humanist approach to the growing field. Apart from putting the environment at the front and centre, ecocritical writers also tangibly link postcolonial and environmental issues based on their historical evolution in literature. They assert that postcolonial ecocriticism primarily sets out to question the notion of progress as imagined by the Western world in literature — How are development and colonialism historically linked? What is the direction of development in a globalised and postcolonial world? Does the future hold a place for such development? Where does the natural world fit in? What values do postcolonial ecocriticism add to the enduring deliberations on postcolonial development?

Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (2010) argue that in the spirit of 'globalising' literary ecocriticism, experts from all over the world have come together in pursuit of this end. From the very beginning, ecocriticism has been confronted with criticisms for disregarding the ideas about nature and environmentalism and merely focusing on colonialism per se. Likewise, postcolonial discourse has also been accused of turning its back on ecological concerns due to being heavily preoccupied with a sentiment of nationalism and identity theories. To bridge these divides, scholars have come to an agreement that in the struggle for global justice and sustainability, ecocriticism and postcolonial theories must be approached jointly. The discourse on postcolonial ecocriticism finds significance in the work of Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley (2011), amongst others. These authors uncover the human-environment nexus by meaningfully reviewing literatures from all over the colonised nations including South Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, and the Caribbean. Amongst the topical themes scrutinised

include culture and horticulture, arboriculture and deforestation, animal lives, and the military-tourism link. These literary works have expanded the use of ecocriticism in the postcolonial setting to show the way in which postcolonial ecocriticism encompasses more than just the literary analysis of nature but also the effects of colonialism on the people and their respective natural environments. Ecocriticism is therefore presented as a theory fervently committed to enacting changes through an analysis of the ways in which postcolonial literary texts tackle environmental issues on a worldwide scale.

Since its inception, the evolution of ecocriticism as a literary field has undergone three major phases; 'the first wave', 'the second wave', and 'the third wave'. Its first wave, largely prominent in the United States of America, sees the dedication of ecocritics to the hermeneutical investigation into literature that carries the undertones of environmental values demonstrable in literary forms. Lawrence Buell (1995: 7-8) in *The Environmental Imagination* postulates the following "ingredients" of an environmentally-orientated writing:

i. The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.

ii. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.

iii. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.

iv. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.

The "ethical orientation" canvassed by Buell highlights an important element entrenched in ecocriticism where ecocritical writings are armed with "a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell 1995: 295), seeking to redefine a broader interaction with other co-residents of the world and serving as a "counter-canon" in literature "which are seen to model a more ecologically sustainable mode of being and dwelling in the world than that which has predominated in the lived reality of the modern era" (Rigby 2002: 164). Ecocritical focus during its first wave had championed environmental causes through non-fiction nature writings. Environmental imaginations elicited through the works of John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Mary Austin, Annie Dillard, and Wendell Berry have been widely glorified for the quality of their engagement with pastoral landscape, wilderness, apocalypse, animals, and dwelling which critics laud as a genuine and "celebratory" reflection of the legacy of American Transcendentalism (Head 2000: 238).

Anthropocentrism, on the other hand, appears to be the major theme which foregrounds the second wave of ecocriticism, where its critics begin to re-conceptualise the place of human in the hierarchy of priority within the ecosystem, in which biospheric interest is aligned in equal vigour to human. The trajectory of ecological modernity in the second wave of ecocriticism must not be valued wholly from the perspectives of human development and the success of technological advancement. Rather, it ought to be derived from "grounding ourselves in the dark of our deeper selves" (Snyder 1999: 112) in order that we may "rediscover our profound connection with the 'more-than-human' world" (Abram 1996: 184). In simpler terms, the biocentric perspective during the second wave of ecocriticism proposing a "biospheric egalitarianism" (Naess 1973: 97), asserting that the scourge to the existing environmental challenges, is salvageable only through our readiness to negotiate the outlook of our hierarchical attitude towards the natural world and that "if we identify ourselves within a broader circle of

living things, then our societal problems may also find solution" (Eckersley 1992: 134).

In response to the call for environmental protection, the third wave of ecocriticism has since emerged to analyse the global and neo-bioregionalist conceptions of place, post-national, post-ethnic insights of the environment as well as the concept of "animality" (Slovic, Swarnalatha and Sarveswaran 2015: 141). Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic (2009) describe the advent of ecocriticism's third wave as a development that "recognises ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries" and "explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint" (Adamson and Slovic 2009: 14). Ursula Heise (2008), in describing the origin of this strand, argues that this wave of ecocriticism strives to "model forms of cultural imagination and understanding that reach beyond the nation and around the globe" by way of "deterritorialization", noting that "the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place" (Heise 2008: 6). According to Heise, the concept of deterritorialisation invoking environmental imagination necessitates a well strategised scheme in order "to envision how ecologically-based advocacy on behalf of the non-human world as well as on behalf of greater socioenvironmental justice might be formulated in terms that are premised no longer as primarily on ties to local places but on ties to territories and systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole" (Heise 2008: 10).

The parameters of conventional ecocriticism which employs constructivist approaches to literary writings have been broadened farther beginning from its second wave to incorporate issues of class, race, gender, and environmental justice transcending the narratives of imperialism and nationalism. Despite a barrage of

criticisms alleging ecocriticism as being a movement privileging only white American scholars with their focus exclusively expended on the American literary canons, this movement continues to progress beyond its thematic remit of nature by offering "deep green views of ecological interconnectedness that directly challenge human-centred perspectives on the world" (O'Brien 2009: 1 cited in Carrigan 2011: 352; in Nichols 2011: 103; in Vadde 2011: 569). The infusion of ecocriticism, later dubbed "critical interventionism" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 155), into the realm of postcolonialism has since proliferated and drawn great inspiration of many prominent literary scholars and activists across the globe such as Vandana Shiva, Ramachandra Guha, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Arundhati Roy (James 2012), actively producing books and critical anthologies on the discursive exploration into postcolonialism and ecocriticism in prolific extravagance on the themes of class, gender, race, and geography. It can also be seen in the works of Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran's *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015), Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Laura Wright's *Wilderness into Civilised Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (2010), Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (2010), Roos and Hunt's *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (2010), and Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010). They are mostly concerned about the environmental discourses relating to a myriad of problems which, albeit varied, appear constant in their universal concern, *scilicet*, that of colonisation where all material proceeds amassed and appropriated by the colonial masters have caused irretrievable damages to the environment and the colonised human subjects who have been rendered impoverished, both economically and socially, through the series of systemic environmental degradation.

2.2.3 Ecological Impacts on Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Postcolonial ecocriticism engages literary narratives of "historically produced discourse" as a tool of representation which involves the "developmentalisation of the Third World, [and] its progressive insertion into a regime of thought and practice in which certain interventions for the eradication of poverty became central to the late capitalist world order", aiming in earnest at "consolidating the social, cultural, and political authority of the postcolonial world" (Escobar 1995: 24). The primary task of postcolonial ecocritics has been to contest and offer a viable alternative to the Western notion of civilisation and development by asking "how to understand and give voice to others or to experiences that [which] seems impervious to our understanding; how to attend to differences without appropriating it or distorting it; how to hear and acknowledge what it may be possible to say" (Weil 2010: 11). In the same vein, the prevalence of ecological threats has moved postcolonial ecocriticism to function collectively as "more than a simple extension of postcolonial methodologies into the realm of the human material world; it must [also] reckon with the ways in which ecology does not always work with the frames of human time and political interest" (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 181). The "frames" mentioned by DeLoughrey and Handley above refer to human activities affecting nature, underscoring the relative connection between human and nature, and emphasising that the Earth, whilst its destiny is determined under human dictate, is far from being exclusive to the concern and interest of human (Spivak 2003; Chakrabarty 2009). Following the grim description of global climate change by the postcolonial ecocritics, pictured as "the ecological trauma of our age" (Morton 2013: 8-9), it is therefore appropriate to observe the dire state of environment as a hyper-phenomenon straddling across a vast expanse of geographical space and operating across multiple scales of historical period (Clark 2010; Chakrabarty 2012; Morton 2013). This requires an urgent revisioning of an ecological conception which duly considers the relative

ties between history, nature, and culture so that postcolonial approaches to ecocriticism are able to ensure its effective advocacy for environmental justice. Indeed, this is achievable by way of recognising that the cultural differences — characterised pronouncedly by the unfair distribution of natural resources and the constancy of coerced displacement of the colonised subjects at the unconscionable behest of colonial power — must be taken into due account in securing ecological resilience and sustainability.

Postcolonial ecocritics' pursuit to this end begins with these foremost questions: "What is development? How should it be defined and measured, and whose interests does it serve?" and "to what extent have postcolonial writers, in doubling as cultural and environmental activists, been successful in pursuing an anti- or counter-developmental approach?" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 29). Indeed, questions of development are complex and heavily taxed with considerable ambiguity, "adapted to the different needs of those who use it, and shot through with self-congratulation and condescension, based as it all too often is on the enormous cultural assumptions and presumptions of the west" (Black 1999: 165). A German sociologist, Wolfgang Sachs (1997) argues that international debates on development are merely political, with the stakeholders tending to orient themselves to "the rise and fall of political sensibilities within the [affluent] Northern countries" — the United States of America in particular — which consequently breed an unbridled enthusiasm for the growth in economy that reflects "the West's desire to restart the economic machine after a devastating war" where "the emphasis on manpower planning echoed American fears after the shock of Sputnik in 1957; the discovery of basic needs was stimulated by President [Lyndon B.] Johnson's domestic war on poverty in the 1960s; and so, too, for [contemporary] concerns about worldwide inequality; what development means depends on how rich nations feel" (Sachs 1997: 26).

The notion of development in the context of postcolonial ecocriticism has been further problematised by its critics who, on raising the question pertinent to the supposed ownership of such development, argue that development is above all one which belongs to human and that which is assumed to be their sole entitlement respecting the benefits and proceeds arising from the optimal capitalisation of the countries' natural resources. Styling itself after the archaic model of imperialism, "modern development" consistently seeks to contrive ways to achieve the goal and aspiration of modern society by way of continued collusion between the government and gargantuan transnational corporations whose profits are procured for the exclusive benefit of and favour for human (Spybey 1996: 1; cited in Esteva 1997: 15). In so achieving, human pursuit of such development requires an active "removal of [those] major sources of unfreedom" (Sen 2000: 192) which would otherwise restrict the quality and scope of human's everyday affairs, leading to instances of social instability, poverty, and political unrest. Such avid gravitation to human interest, benefits, and entitlement to the comfort of modernity, cautions a Peruvian former diplomat, Oswaldo de Rivero (2001), merely widens the social and economic schism between the rich and the poor, and perpetuates a "socio-economic apartheid" (de Rivero 2001: 23-24).

Within the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism lies the model which challenges these colonial and colonialist mentalities "stamped by [the] overvaluation of industrial societies and a [corresponding] devaluation of subsistence-based communities" (Saunders 2002: 19). In Laura Wright's seminal work, *Wilderness into Civilised Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (2010), she launches a comprehensive interrogation into the representation of fictional landscapes and various other environmental concerns by the postcolonial writers. In her confrontation against the impractical viability of Western environmentalist models, Wright amplifies the non-Western voices by putting to the fore the narratives of colonialisation and its direct impact on local ecology, stressing on the

importance of the achievability of human-nature equity through the environmental justice framework seen in the works of native writers that have since been canonised as postcolonial locus classicus such as Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2014), Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness* (2000), Joy William's *The Quick and The Dead* (2000), J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Keri Hulme's *Bone People* (1984), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966). The understanding of the natural environment interwoven aptly by both geographical and historical underpinnings in Wright's analyses exposes the humanity's design "just as a latest ruse deployed by the apostles of development ideology to ward off criticisms of development's destructive tendencies" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 157).

Huggan and Tiffin deem it vital to exercise prudence in presupposing that the desire for development per se "(1) is not necessarily antithetical to human equality or (2) does not ride roughshod over local humans and environmental interests in the attempt to secure preferential conditions for international trade. Just how colonialist is this system?" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 33). This 'colonialist system' is evident in the historical association between imperial expansion and the intensive act of capitalist production which leads to a gaping divide in the distribution of a country's natural resources (Larraín 1989: 132). As a result, the prospect of an uneven development for the colonised nations may potentially materialise. These colonialised people, having succumbed to imperial duress, are forced into making way for the lucrative prospect of international trade (Havinden and Meredith 1996). The vigour in economic practices characterised by human drive for development operates under the illusion of well-meaning attempt to salvage the ruins occasioned by the colonial occupation "to create the more advantageous economic and political conditions that might allow historically marginalised or exploited peoples to work towards building their own future

while consolidating their own individual and collective human rights" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 32). In response to this, Gustavo Esteva (1997) firmly believes that any form of development masquerading as progress implies the notion of "colonising anti-colonialism" which stigmatises the countries doomed with poverty, equating them to being politically and socially backward, and serves as "a reminder of what [these countries] are not" (Esteva 1997: 10). Development, thus perceived in what Andrew Apter calls an "oil-capitalism's predatory alliance with the nation-state" and "a 'false face' in which development is yet another stratagem to further strategic political and economic interests" (Apter 1998: 140), appears to be a classic exemplar of human practices, deeply invested in the primary goal of exploiting natural resources under a refined and ostentatious veneer of positive economic betterment for the local populace.

In conclusion, over the past decades, ecocriticism has since developed remarkably as a new subject in the postcolonial context. Both literary writers and scholars who specialise in ecocriticism and postcolonial studies have respectively advanced their invaluable contributions to the ongoing discourses on ecological perspectives in postcolonial literature. On this matter, it is evident that further research is justifiably needed in the area of ecocritical studies encompassing the diverse works of Malaysian literature produced in English and that these works incorporating constant utilisation of natural elements in investigating the construction of identity require an ecocritical review backgrounded indispensably by Malaysia's rich ecological context so as to enable an exhaustive analysis on the construct of personal eco-identity through the useful aids of both ecocritical and postcolonial lenses to which this present study is primally oriented alongside other pertinent concepts central to identity studies within ecopsychology.

2.3 IDENTITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

This section touches on the foundational underpinnings of identity construction which is formed through unique personal and social traits, each stemming distinctively from individual and shared characteristics and dynamics respectively. The construction of both personal and social identities is explained together with an intersecting attribute of place which contributes to the formation of personal and social identity construction in relation to nature as a 'place' by which such identity is elementally influenced. The organisation of this section shall be in the following manner: Section 2.3.1 deals with the conceptual elucidation on the notions of personal and social identity, followed by Section 2.3.2 exploring the roles of place in identity construction. Section 2.3.3 accordingly provides an overview on the formation of identity in relation to place attachment.

2.3.1 The Concept of Identity: Personal and Social

Identity bears distinctive testament to who we are, either as an individual or a member of a group. Whether in the capacity of our individual self or that of membership in a particular group, through a series of experiences and interactions with our physical surroundings and people, we constantly ask ourselves "who am I?" and "who are we?" (Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx 2011: 13). The founding scholar in the study of identity, William James (1982) famously conceptualises in the following declamation the structure of self by acknowledging that self-formation is underscored by the sheer closeness between what is 'us' and what is 'ours', analogously likening it to an instance where the dispossession of things we hold most sacred may be as tormenting as if one were dispossessed of his own self:

> In its widest possible sense, a man's Me is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his land and horses, and yacht and back account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down — not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all (James 1892: 238).

Characteristics or unique conceptions of an individual's personal constitution are traditionally understood as 'personal identity' and likewise 'group identity', which involve the appreciation of collective traits embraced between members within social groups. Oftentimes, references to group identity are made in frequent contemporaneity to 'social identity'. Social identity connotes a sense of subscription to mutual values in terms of united ideals and principles which are shaped on the strength of each other's common beliefs and shared similarities within the same group, or one which makes them archetypically dissimilar to other members of a different faction due to the differences in or the departure from their shared values or beliefs. The majority of scholars agree that a person's subscription to his identity is motivated by the human desire to maintain self-esteem and secure positive self-regard (Sedikides and Strube 1997; Pyszczynski, Solomon and Greenberg 2015). Likewise, potential gains are likely to be sacrificed in the event that they clash with self-esteem (Kwang and Swann 2010). Within the domain of psychology, the construct of identity is structured in order to understand the implicit and explicit meanings of our tendencies, behaviours, and actions through various psychological processes and the personal as well as the social consequences of these processes (Breakwell 1986; 1992; 1994; 1996). Given the broad parameter in identity studies, it is perhaps unavoidable that its gradation to the wealth of other disciplines which include, but not limited

to, cross-cultural studies of contemporary psychology (Smith 2011; Wan 2015), political theory (Crenshaw 1991; Calhoun 1994), sociology (Giddens 1991; Woodward 2002), anthropology (Cohen 1994; Sökefeld 1999), gender studies (Butler 1990; Segal 2010), and philosophy (Noonan 1993; Appiah 2005), extending beyond the mere confines of personality and social psychology.

Although the personal-social dichotomy may, on the surface, appear distinct (Brewer 1991; Triandis 1995; Guisinger and Blatt 2008), on closer inspection, however, the conceptual distinctions between personal and social identities tend to converge into one unified horizon. One's personal identity, notwithstanding his unique individual distinctiveness which characterises his personal traits, possesses "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1978: 237). By implication, the conception of personal-self which suggests a manifestation of one's personal identity is derived from the fluidity of attributes emanating from other multiple constructed and social factors that, in more ways than one, contradict each other (Vignoles, Schwartz, Luyckx 2011). Therefore, tied to this, a case can be made that personal and social identities are, in fact, two interconnected subsets, both of which are placed under the unitary umbrella of identity (Trafimow, Triandis and Goto 1991).

Through the process of identification, a person's identity is expanded beyond his existing self. As he moves beyond the province of his physical body and psychological traits, he predisposes others to acknowledge him as 'personally' distinct and he, in the like effect, allows himself to be reckoned with such "part of the self" (Belk 1988: 153). Extensive research has attested to the importance of interpersonal as well as social processes in contributing to the personal self-

conception of individuals (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Swann and Bosson 2008). It is the confluence of personal and social attributes occurring at multifaceted levels that gives identity its complex dynamics and results in the variety of behaviours depending on their social and cultural demographics (Shotter and Gergen 1989; Rattansi and Pheonix 2005). Vivian Vignoles (2017) believes that the construction and maintenance of identity primarily involve social interaction at the interface of intrapsychic and sociocultural processes and that "focusing on any of these levels in isolation leads to a reductionist and impoverished view of what matters about identity" (Vignoles 2017: 10). Group distinctiveness accentuating self-definition suggests a motivating force that influences the "similarity-attraction hypothesis of intergroup relations" (Jetten, Spears and Postmes 2004: 870). Classifying identity, whether personal or social, merely as a single unit is therefore problematic as it ignores the integrative elements of individuality and society in the examination on identity. Such omission risks depriving its exploration into identity, both in personal and social senses, of its maximum theoretical potential.

In articulating the effect of identification on identity, Henry Tajfel and John Turner (1979) concur that identity is constructed on the spectrum of human interaction which varies from purely interpersonal to purely intergroup. Interpersonal interaction involves the identification of self as separate individuals with neither recognition to identification with social categories nor values relatable to other social groups. The opposite is notably observable in the intergroup interaction where a person's attributes are viewed as representative of the group to which he belongs, where individualising qualities inherent in his personal identity undergo a sure decline and are in turn overwhelmed by the salience of his membership in that particular group. Famously theorised as a social identity theory, human identity is argued to rest on several foundational assumptions, the foremost of which is that an individual views himself, and subsequently acts, as an individual person, and, at other times, as a member of a

particular group which characterises a departure from personal to social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Along this interpersonal-intergroup continuum lies another assumption that one's identity, from personal to social, is founded upon the cognitive, affective, and evaluative consequences of self-concept. This means that a person is constantly cognisant of the need for positive distinctiveness in their dealings with and perceptions of other groups which is done by way of "social categorisation, group evaluation, and the value of group memberships for the self-concept to constitute an individual's social identity" (Trepte and Loy 2017: 6). A positive social identity comes with a reward of positive conviction in a person's self-esteem.

Apart from identification, further studies have shown that categorisation has the potential of changing the view that one holds of himself and others, where the movement from the interpersonal to the intergroup end of the identity continuum results in how people seek to identify with themselves and with each other, through similarities in expectations, motives, goals, and shared history amongst members in the same category (Oakes, Turner and Haslam 1991; Lea, Spears and Watt 2007). The portrayal of these common attributes accentuates the idea of not only how people are defined and understood as their individual selves, but also as a group, for "when category distinctions are salient, people perceptually enhance similarities within the group ('we're all the same') and enhance differences among the group ('we're different from them')" (Hornsey 2008: 213). Through the process of identification and categorisation taking place in the intergroup interaction, social meaning is formed and an individual becomes comfortable about who or what he is and what to think, feel, say, or do (Hogg 2000). Likewise, the facets of group identification and categorisation have also looked considerably at the extent to which individual identity differs from group identity. Numerous methods of social identification have since been theorised to observe the various ways in which identity conflicts exist in a group member who

feels less connected to his group including self-categorisation, group self-esteem, and group commitment (Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk 1999), self-investment (consisting of satisfaction, centrality, and solidarity) (Leach et al. 2008), identification and disidentification (Becker and Tausch 2014), and commitment, importance, deference, and superiority (Roccas et al. 2008).

There have been series of experiments, the outcomes of which demonstrate that relational identification and categorisation prompt an individual to view others as he or she identifies with himself or herself (Aron et al. 1991). Especially in the context of romantic relationships, the self-other overlap is strongly evident in its association with intimacy, closeness, and affection due to the inclusion of others in the self, engendering the reciprocity of feelings between the partners who are driven, as a group, to the maintenance and longevity of their relationships (Aron, Aron and Smollan 1992; Aron and Fraley 1999; Aron et al. 2004; Le et al. 2010). The central idea in the construction of identity is largely derived from the social or group categories, operating similarly in the case of self-evaluation. Just as individuals attempt to assert themselves positively or strive to remain relevant in the domain they care about (Wills 1981), they, too, as group members, will make an effort to ensure that the group with which they identify is positively distinctive from other groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Similarly, just as individuals will strategise appropriate means of defence when confronted with threats that would potentially undermine their personal self-integrity and self-esteem (Breakwell 1988; Sherman and Cohen 2006), they, too, as group members, will hasten to mobilise their defence strategies in preserving the maintenance of their social identity in order to restore the group's positive distinctiveness when it is undermined or threatened. This is achieved by means of social competition, individual mobility, intergroup discrimination, social discrimination, and various other schemes to fight against any attempts to subvert the boundaries of their

group identity (Ellemers 1993; Marques and Páez 1994; Mummendey et al. 1999; Hunter et al. 2005; Jetten et al. 2005; van Rijswijk, Haslam and Ellemers 2006).

2.3.2 Roles of Place in Identity Construction

One psychological offshoot in the personal-social dichotomy of identity is the emerging theorisation of identity as an extension of the self-concept which includes the dimension of identity arising from the individual's affiliation with his physical environment. An attachment to place, developing thereafter into a deep sense of belonging which shapes the individual's identity of place is a form of sub-identity like that of gender or racial identity (Gerson, Stueve and Fisher 1977). This occurs because of the cohesive strength between the social and spatial aspects which influence the conception of one's personal self (Uzzel, Pol and Badenas 2002). Physical environment including place has a robust influence on human development and their identity (Chawla 1992; Hart 1979; Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff 1983; Moore 1989). The aspect of place in constructing identity has been broadly explored by Harold Proshansky (1978) guided by the following definition:

> Those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioural tendencies and skills relevant to this environment (Proshansky 1978: 158).

The dimension of physicality, according to Proshansky, in terms of place in which human dwells plays an equally pivotal role in forming individuals' identity and that it is not constrained solely by the influence of social relations between the

people within the place. In other words, place appears to be one of the integrative tools by which to facilitate further examinations of the place-related aspects which contribute to the formation of individuals' place identity. The oft-referred term "place identity" has since gained scholarly prominence in the realm of environmental research in the 2000s (Lewicka 2011: 218). Also, it is worth clarifying that research into the affective bonds between place and human dates as far back as the 1960s (Giulani 2003; Hammit, Kyle and Oh 2009), "used in the literature to emphasise the physical environment's impact on identity, referring to a high degree of 'place attachment'" (Hauge 2007: 51). The construct of place attachment has been widely recognised by psychological theorists (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001; Scannel and Gifford 2010a) as multidimensional, consisting of place dependence (Stokols and Shumaker 1981), place affect (Kals and Maes 2002), place identity (Proshansky 1978), and place social bonding (Scannel and Gifford 2010a; 2010b). The implication of affective bond developed from the profound attachment to place has been approached in the realm of environmental psychology, leading to the positive evaluation of the human-space relationship, contributing, therefore, to the formation of place-based identity (Russel and Snodgrass 1987). Such discovery is echoed to the like effect in the following observation:

> The study of affect in close relationships is simultaneously a fascinating, yet exasperating experience. On the one hand, because most human beings describe their close relationships in terms of their feelings and emotions (love, hate, fear, anger, contempt, gratitude, and so on), one has a sense that, of all possible theoretical and empirical approaches to close relationships, the affective is possibly the most basic and the most meaningful. On the other hand, the affective approach is also, without doubt, one of the most

> difficult areas in psychology to conceptualise, analyse, and theorize about in a meaningful way (Fitness and Strongman 1991: 188).

Rather than viewed as a separate component of identity, it is argued that any facet of identity will, to a larger degree, contain place-associated implications as "there is no social identity that is not also place-related or thing-related" (Graumann 1983: 315; cited in Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 1996). By incorporating Tajfel and Turner's (1979) theory of social identity, the aspect of place has been extensively interrogated in order to observe whether changes in the spatial environment produce an effect on the formation of identity amongst all members in a community involved in the transition (Speller, Lyons and Twigger-Ross 2002). Evidence found in the affirmative using the principles of continuity and distinctiveness demonstrates the importance of place and its influence in the maintenance and enhancement of identity (Korpela 1989; Devine-Wright and Lyons 1997), prompting other researchers to probe into the unique intersection between an attachment to place and people's behavioural tendencies which has a strong influence on identity (Spencer 2002; Moore 2002). Place attachment involves a progressive process that inculcates an affective bond to any given geographical areas and the meaningful significance ascribed to that bond (Giulani and Feldman 1993). A person's place of residence proves to be an instructive catalyst in developing the affection for the place where his sense of being and belonging is concretised and eventually becomes "one anchor of his or her identity" (Hay 1998: 17).

Place identity is coined to bring to the fore the salience and significance of spatial environment in moulding human conception of self, across all ages beginning from infancy all the way to adulthood (Sobel 1990). The entirety of human existence witnesses the inseparable and interrelated aspects of place-

people integration ranging from emotions, affects, and feelings — either positive or negative — which conduce, in consequence, to cognition evidenced in their action (Altman and Low 1992; Jorgensen and Stedman 2001). This attachment is rooted in the sense of affinity which develops progressively from the naturalistic tendency of an infant, for instance, who sees his mother as a safe shelter (Bowlby 1982, 1991). The infant's early experience formed through the parent-child bond is not necessarily interpersonal, but that which signifies a spatial relationship as the parent is, in the eyes of the infant, a symbol of security and comfort (Mennen and O'Keefee 2005), culminating in the child's initial cognitive representation of self through the symbolic house in which his safety is assured. The sense of place attachment observed in adults has its psychological origin in their childhood place experience (Cobb 1977; Pearce 1977; Hester and O'Donnell 1987; Cooper 1992). By investigating the qualitative differences in an adult's self-concept with respect to their attachment to place, it appears that their account of present spatial attachment is fraught with emotions, feelings, and meanings that are hugely shaped by the perception of their childhood place attachment and is further intensified by the rich repertoire of sociocultural experiences gained through the passage of time, subconsciously influencing the manner in which his identity is formed, projected, and maintained (Massey 1994; Cobb 1977; Sebba 1991).

2.3.3 Formation of Identity in Relation to Place Attachment

Studies conceptualising place attachment as a psychological fillip to the formation and maintenance of identity have revealed a relative connection between physical environment and collective behavioural tendencies shown by the members of a community. A cooperative participation in neighbourhood protection characterises an aspect of place attachment which provides for a psychological basis in the cultivation of identity (Manzo and Perkins 2006). The appraisal of

physical and psychological characteristics embedded in spatial environment implies how the psychological structure of self is shaped by and emerges from one's perception of his attachment to his place. Eugene Rochberg-Halton's (1984) concept of self-involvement in physical environment is instructive of the evaluation of self and identity through human participation in any acts that the physical aspect of the place demands or is able to accommodate in order to assess the extent to which they share an affinity with their respective places. In his conviction of the growth of self through the agency of self-involvement, he posits that place, assumed metaphorically as an article of belonging, is indeed influential in identity formation, achievable on the strength of continuous interaction — bodily and mentally — with it. Spatial interaction may also take place in the form of the "bonds and emotional experiences with places" (Relph 1976: 87) and the degree of "phenomenological sensitivity" to which we ascribe to the said place (Altman and Low 1992: 32). Clare Cooper (1976) too, approves of Rochberg-Halton's notion of "self-dialogue" as a form of self-involvement, arguably capable of morphing an individual's place identity, arguing that "in trying to comprehend the most basic of archetype — self —, to give it concrete substance, man grasps at physical forms or symbols which are close and meaningful to him, and which are visible and definable" (Cooper 1976: 441).

Seymour Epstein's (1983) theoretical postulation regarding the symbiosis of place attachment and emotions presents that the physical environment including all objects and subjects therein can be used as a tool for exploring the state of emotional pleasure and pain, the varying levels of self-esteem perceived in each individual within a place, and the characteristics of one's manifestation of self. Emotional factor, deemed crucially as a contributing factor in the development of individuals' place identity, substantiates the theoretical claim on its significant role in enhancing an individual's place attachment as his behaviour develops and is developed to form an identity that is derived from his integration into the physical

environment, instilled by the emotional affection that motivates his attachment, noting that "there is no action and no thought that is not affectively motivated" (Basch 1988: 176; cited in Tuan 1974; Kaplan and Kaplan 1982; Russel and Snodgrass 1987; Wohlwill and Heft 1987). Physical space, in Epstein's view, lays an apt foundation in the formation of place identity as it consists of the contemporaneous "cognitions of those physical settings and parts of the physical environment, in or with which an individual — consciously or unconsciously — regulates his experience in maintaining his sense of self" (Korpela 1989: 240). Therefore, place and identity are not forces of opposite dynamics, but viewed in their integrative sense, are a compatible confluence of both physical images and emotions due to their interconnectedness in the regulation of self on the strength of this relativity, whether in a physically confined setting such as home or in the more general context, any tangible surrounding in which one finds himself, both physically and emotionally.

In theorising the nexus between emotion and place attachment, a psychological theorist, Judith Lichtenberg (1989), postulates that human behaviour is inspired by the motivational drives, namely the attachment-affiliation system and the exploration-assertion system, "designed to promote the fulfilment and regulation of basic needs" (Lichtenberg 1989: 204). The attachment-affiliation system inspires care-seeking behaviour and motivates proximity whilst the exploration-assertion system motivates a close association with the physical environment. Places, acting as one of the most dominant agents in rendering human emotion definable, provide a fulfilling "experience of exploration and agency in the world which produces positively affected sense of efficacy and competence" (Morgan 2009: 6). This suggests that human behaviour actuated by the motivational spur of spatial attachment will, in all likelihood, produce a positively distinctive affect towards the place as a result. Apropos of the construct of place identity, the tripartite dimension of spatial attachment, human, and

emotion, when considered not in a contextually disjunctive manner, presents an insightful framework on how one's ties to place give rise to the formation of identity where emotion is centrally situated in the interplay between human and place (Inalhan, Yang and Weber 2021), and is such "which also incorporates cognitive and behavioural components" in the construct of place identity (Turton 2016: 1). This is congruent with Leila Scannel and Robert Gifford's (2010a: 4) theoretical model of person-process-place which, in their attempt to organise the various conceptualisations of place attachment, identifies the three distinct but interconnected dimensions — those of person, psychological process, and place. Below is the clarification:

1. The person dimension distinguishes individual and group-assigned meaning of place.

2. The psychological process dimension distinguishes the affective, behavioural, and cognitive emotions involved in the process of place attachment.

3. The place dimension distinguishes the social and physical characteristics of a place which in turns contributes to the bond that people develop with the place.

In postlude, it bears reminding that although the tripartite dimension above posits the contributing variables in the process of place attachment, it is nevertheless not to be deemed as a conclusive framework because the salience of these variables rests on the general type and scale of the environment. In the instance of urban neighbourhood, markedly separate variables are involved in studying the residents' attachment to provincial recreational areas (Bonaiuto,

Fornara and Bonnes 1999). Hence, it is important that the analysis on place attachment be conducted by not merely factoring in place as a general phenomenon, but one which is undertaken by way of its demographically specific contextualisation (Turton 2016). On this score, in contextualising demography in the present study, the Malaysian place-based context is properly considered wherein its investigation appears replete with an in-depth insight into the integration of human attachment to place, hypothesised to be a contributing factor in the formation of the literary characters' personal eco-identities during the pre-independence era.

2.4 ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

This section discusses the concept of ecopsychology and the ground-breaking contributions of its seminal theorists to their ecopsychological studies on the human and non-human relationship in order to appreciate the therapeutic potentials resulting from this interaction, especially in terms of trauma healing and fostering ecological consciousness. This explanation also extends to the portrayal of such interconnectedness in the production of ecopsychologically-oriented literary works, thereby demystifying human-nature's hitherto normalised dualism. The explanation of environmental identity is also provided in bringing to the fore the ramifications of ecological unconsciousness and in highlighting the formation and accentuation of selfhood by virtue of nature. The organisation of this section shall be in the following manner: Section 2.4.1 sheds light on the introduction to ecopsychology, followed by Section 2.4.2 delineating how ecopsychology breaks the dyads of mind (human) and matter (non-human). Section 2.4.3 clarifies the therapeutic benefits of human-non-human interrelationship in overcoming trauma and in accommodating the trauma-

recovery process. Section 2.4.4 offers the theoretical and conceptual understanding of the notion of environmental identity.

2.4.1 Introduction to Ecopsychology

In ecopsychology, the human-nature interaction is studied using ecological and psychological principles, with the aim of developing and understanding strategies for improving such relationship. It is important because this relationship can lead to the creation of sustainable lifestyles and mitigate human detachment from the natural world. Theodore Roszak (2001) first used the phrase "ecopsychology" in *The Voice of the Earth* (Roszak 2001: 184). Environmentalists and psychologists later adopted the phrase in their own respective works. The field of ecopsychology focuses on unearthing the benefits of the human-ecology relationship for psychological trauma healing and rehabilitation. Living in harmony with nature — a condition where there is a mutually beneficial interaction between human and the environment — is essential for improved emotional and spiritual health. This can be achieved by tapping the human brain's ecological consciousness which is the key step towards recognising the true power of nature. For the purposes of this thesis, both Roszak's (1995) and Andy Fisher's (2013) theories of ecopsychology are used to study the ecological awakening of the literary characters under examination.

The human-nature cohesion can be primarily tapped via animals whose natural traits have been indicated to have therapeutic benefits. According to Roszak (1995), despite the influences exerted upon the human mind by the contemporary world, it remains fundamentally attuned to and informed by the natural world. He adds that ecopsychology aims to remedy human detachment from nature, as opposed to other psychological fields that focus on the human-

human, individual-family, and individual-society relationships. In support of this view, Wilson (1984), highlights human's natural and biological tendencies to connect deeply with nature. According to Fisher (2013), ecopsychology is congruent with the idea of subverting dualism by internally restructuring the mind. One's return to the natural world is only possible when one's mind is already open to the idea. In this sense, eco-consciousness challenges the pervasiveness of dualism. Roszak (1995) in *The Voice of the Earth* asserts that ecological unconscious rests within one's mind, and that free access to it is key to positive mental health. It is within this far region of the human mind that one's ecological intellect is housed, with the harmonisation between the id and the ego determining the success of our evolution. Without such awakening, the said harmonisation would not occur, thus threatening the survival of human race.

The mind must perceive nature and the self as being in harmony in order to remove one's ecological unconsciousness and challenge the notion of dualism. Fisher (2013) urges the importance for the mind to associate nature with a sense of protection and the power to bridge relationships as well as to improve mindfulness via sensory experiences. Human must perceive nature as a healing force and not as an intimidating instigator. This would help revive their sense of life purpose and facilitate their understanding of the natural world and subsequently that of the myriads of benefits it has to offer. Upon such awakening, the mind would be able to connect with the natural inhabitants of the world, including animals. Wayne Pacelle (2011) asserts that humans and animals have an emotional bond. Donna Haraway (2008) describes this bond as being driven by consumption or companionship needs, but mostly for mutual survival. Animals facilitate humans in unearthing their full potentials and in learning new skills and behavioural responses. Such eco-therapy fits nicely within the human realm.

2.4.2 Breaking Dualism through Ecopsychology

Ecopsychology breaks the barrier between the mind and matter; essentially, the internality of the psyche and the externality of nature. It brings forth the notion that the psyche is indeed a part of our natural surroundings and that nature is largely subjective and requires mental perception (Fisher 2013). One's deeply entrenched ecological unconscious can only be awakened when one has the proper insight to do so. This is the perpetual inquiry of ecopsychologists — whether the human mind can break free and reach full realisation of the inherent link between the psyche and the natural world and all its inhabitants? It is only via such mind-matter immersion and integration that both human and nature can mutually enjoy the benefits that each has to offer.

Fisher (2013) in his work *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life* attributes dualism as the primary cause of the mind-matter detachment. According to him, the assumed divisions that underpin modern society do not sit well with ecopsychologists, particularly those related to the nature-human and inner world-outer world divides. Ecopsychology fundamentally takes issue with the inner and outer world dualism, as the isolation of the human mind from the natural world means that the two psyches cannot mutually benefit from one another. Tom Athanasiou (1998: 192) describes this as the interdependence between the "soul" and the "world", whereby one does not exist without the other. Essentially, ecology and psychology would no longer tread on the same path once the mind and nature are viewed in isolation.

Therefore, breaking the barriers of dualism becomes pertinent, turning the psyche inside out and restoring the reciprocity between the soul and nature. A

psychologist, Carl Jung explicates ecopsychology by stating that "our psyche is part of nature and its enigma is limitless" (cited in Kleinman 2008: 118). The outward part of the soul, to wit, nature and the essence of the mind must be unravelled for them to be unified. To this end, Fisher (2013) concurs by stating that the perceived significance of material objects — their depth, mystery, and intentions — is fuelled by their internal state. Only with such inwardness can these objects inspire human imagination and allow such relationship to be effectively formed. The soul of the world represents the internal awareness that permeates everything and is manifested as the innate reality emanating from the world.

George Steiner (2013: 164) further elucidates that "it is the hidden being that gives the rock its dense 'thereness', that makes the heart pause when a kingfisher alights, that makes our own existence inseparable from that of others". Nature is endowed with an intangible inward presence, enriched by its external visibility and charm, ultimately uniting everything that occurs on the brink of reality (Fisher 2013). From this point, one is able to live within the psyche instead of letting it rest idly. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2013) observes, we are all living "out there among things" (2013: 348) with no detachment between human and nature. We form relationships with the world instead of living in isolation.

David Abram (2012) in his work *The Spell of the Sensuous* postulates that our senses as human beings are awakened by the vast natural world, provoking our mind to engage with it. He adds that with such awareness, we initiate the release of the psyche from human imprisonment and restore our link with nature. At this point, we are no longer the sole intelligent beings as intelligence now belongs to the greater nature in which we reside, from the landscapes and ecosystems to the skies, soil, and leaves. Abram further explains that every natural element has a unique mind and psychology. Together, they form a mental state that permits all

living things to share intelligence, progressively unveiling the planet as a level playing field. Such unification "recalls how our human psyches are embedded in and nurtured by the larger psyches of nature" (Fisher 2013: 13). This unravelling of the psyche frees human from their sense of isolation from nature.

According to Fisher (2013), ecopsychology posits that the ecological unconscious can be activated by ceasing at once the prevalence of dualism. Human must restore their connection with nature and that their psyche must be "internalized with the natural world in order to allow significant relationships with other-than-human beings to materialize" (Fisher 2013: 7). Ecopsychology tackles issues related to our happiness, pain, and state of consciousness. It begins with the recognition of a connection between human and nature, thus enabling the issues to be framed within the broader context of human existence.

The key obstacle in defying dualism is the deeply rooted disregard for the psychological value of the human-nature parallel. By recognising this connection, humanity is therefore "granting the natural world psychological status; regarding other-than-human beings as true interactants in life, as ensouled 'others' in their own right, as fellow beings or kin" (Fisher 2013: 8). To achieve this, the natural world needs to be conceptualised in a way that satisfies the purposes of psychological understanding as opposed to representing nature merely as a source of resource or scenic vistas. Nature should no longer be objectified as a foreign entity as it should not set human outside of it but rather an embodied part of nature.

Highlighting a similar view, Shepard (2013: 328) asserts that "the archetypal role of nature — the mineral, plant, and animal world found most complete in

wilderness — is in the development of the individual human personality for it embodies the poetic expression of ways being and relating to others." Lucidity is only attainable once the walls of detachment between human and nature are deconstructed. Dualism has long repressed and fragmentised the society; a challenge that ecopsychology aims to dismantle by restoring the human-nature connection. Charles Taylor asserts that "we need to see ourselves as part of a larger order that can make claims on us" (cited in Hamilton, Gemenne and Bonneuil 2015: 93). Hence, detachment from the natural world is an issue that must be tackled to prevent the major implications that would dawn upon both human and nature.

Loyalty to nature is advocated by naturalistic psychologists in the effort to abolish dualism. According to Fisher (2013: 162), the necessity to view "humans as part of a larger natural order" enables the unification between ecology and psychology. Such togetherness between the two can be achieved by means of a pragmatic approach focusing on both the experience of nature and the nature in experience. This allows for reality to be interpreted in various ways, whereby the broader the perception and interaction, the greater the learning. This confluence propels us forward in life by leveraging on the diversity of nature and the abundance of opportunities it offers.

In describing his passion for nature in *The Island Within* by Richard Nelson (1991), Fisher expresses that "there is nothing in me that is not of the Earth, no split instance of separateness, no particle that disunites me from my surroundings" (Fisher 2013: 157). Yet, there remains traces of detachment between him and nature, causing him to doubt his sense of belonging. In such instance, Fisher (2013: 163) proposes one to establish a "kinship continuum" with nature, denoting the "experience of unity-within-separation, likeness-within-difference, continuity-

within-discontinuity, or identity-within-differentiation". This kinship facilitates the deconstruction of social isolation.

Fisher (2013: 164) adds that a heightened sense of "commonality, solidarity or belonging" to nature further paves the way towards escaping isolation. This leads to a greater sense of affiliation and familiarity with the other natural beings in the environment, enabling human, therefore, to "sense animals (human and non-human), plants, rocks, water, and so on to say that we too are nature" (Fisher 2013: 165). As such, there would no longer be the dualism of "us" versus "others", considering that human can now "contact the world in its sheer and inexhaustible otherness" (Fisher 2013: 166) through the recognition of human-non-human co-constitution, thereby not just elevating, but also uniting the fields of ecology and psychology. Via common "language, myth, custom, and so on as it is collectively interacting with non-human others" (Fisher 2013: 167), human can then break the perceived boundaries and become one with nature.

The dismantling of dualism, appearing as a key tenet of ecopsychology, is echoed in the compelling expression found in literary representations of characters whose identities are shaped through immersive and sensory engagements with the land. In creative texts where jungles, rivers, or coastal spaces are more than just backdrops, nature becomes an interlocutor — animated, reciprocal, and psychologically active. These portrayals resist the Cartesian split between mind and matter, and between interiority and exteriority. Instead, they depict the self as porous and co-constituted with the environment, echoing Fisher's call to restore the kinship continuum between human and non-human others. Malaysian literary works that foreground this fluidity — where protagonists come to 'know' themselves through their relationship with their surroundings — thus enact the very dissolution of dualism that ecopsychology strives to effect. In so dissolving,

they affirm a vision of identity that is ecological, embodied, and profoundly relational.

2.4.3 Therapy and Trauma Recovery through Human-Non-Human Interrelationship in Ecopsychology

Trauma and emotional recovery have been two foremost attentions in the study of ecopsychology. Trauma, being a fairly typical phenomenon amongst individuals, has received major research attention with the aim to understanding the phenomenon better and hence, has proposed practical solutions since. To enrich existing literatures and knowledge on the matter, ecopsychology, insofar as this present study is concerned, sets out to investigate trauma recovery via ecopsychology, using evidences gathered from various selected literary works. Ecopsychology, fundamentally examining the relationship between human and nature, explores the harmonious existence between these two elements which is essential not only for ensuring the spiritual and emotional health of human, but also for the perpetuity of natural survival, thus marking a mutually-beneficial bond.

Although there is yet any solid proof of the benefits of ecopsychology in treating psychological trauma, there are indications of its value in this context. In her work, *Everyday Mysteries: Existential Dimensions of Psychotherapy*, Emmy van Deurzen (1997) posits the significance of examining how one interacts with the physical environment, to wit, one's ecological awareness — an aspect that is often overlooked. This blatant disregard is described by Chellis Glendinning (1995: 47) as an ecopsychological phenomenon of "collective trauma", caused by human's total withdrawal from nature. This disengagement between human and nature is

a material disadvantage for the former, as the latter is believed to offer an abundance of therapeutic benefits. It is at this intersection that ecopsychology plays the role of a conduit, allowing human to appreciate psychology from the natural standpoint.

Prominent scholars with the likes of Roszak, Allen Kanner, Robert Greenway, and Mary Gomes have studied ecopsychology expansively since the 1990s (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner 1995), highlighting the failure of environmentalists in seeing the value of psychology not only for addressing ecological crises but in order to understand the indispensable link of nature to human trauma. Conventional psychologists were more concerned about elucidating various forms of mental illnesses instead of studying the value of nature in easing human and earthly devastations. This detachment between ecology and psychology has become the turning point leading to the development of ecopsychology. Roszak introduced ecopsychology in 1992 to bridge the apparent disparity between the fields of ecology and psychology. Ecopsychology theorises the factors and implications of such disparity, not only with the intention of restoring the human-nature connection, but also with the aim of tapping into the natural potentials in order to understand human trauma (Davis and Canty 2013). According to Roszak, Gomes and Kanner (1995), living in harmony with nature benefits one's spiritual and emotional health, similar to the practices of the indigenous people but without the psychological philosophy of the modern world. Industrialisation and modernisation have indeed caused a rift in the once mutually-beneficial human-nature unity. Therein lies the importance of ecopsychology in attempting to unravel the therapeutic benefits offered by nature to ease human psychological trauma.

Ecopsychology has made substantial contributions to the wealth of literature in respect of the recuperation of human trauma and the nature's effective cure to human emotional misery. For instance, Paola Della Valle's *Eco-psychology in JG Ballard's Fiction* (2017) describes the psychological impacts of modernity and nature on human's negotiation with their painful pasts through the therapeutic agency of nature. The scrutiny on JG Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-rise* (1975) exposes the interweaving of ecopsychology with psychoanalysis in exhibiting the primordially distinctive role of nature as a psychological boost to the enrichment of human character. As asserted by Della Valle (2017), human equilibrium is at stake when human and nature are at odds, adding that our relationship with nature has a substantial effect on our mental health. This means that detachment from nature would significantly destabilise one's psyche.

Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner (1995) in their scholarly contribution, *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, underscore the spiritual and emotional significance of living in harmony with nature, as demonstrated by the native people before the intervention of modern psychological theories. According to them, all branches of psychology are fundamentally ecopsychological, justifying the call by ecopsychologists to restore and preserve the human-nature kinship. Exhibiting support to this notion, Shepard and Glendinning believe that the current detachment from nature is the direct outcome of capitalistic endeavours (Davis and Canty 2013). According to Shepard (2013), arising from the above, human development is impeded as a consequence, with Glendinning, as mentioned above, describing it as "collective trauma" (Glendinning 1995: 47).

The evolution of ecopsychology has entailed greater research attention on therapeutic elements or eco-therapy. The early 2000s saw the beginning of journal publications on this theory, linking human to ecological health. According to

Linda Buzzell and Craig Chalquist (2009), apart from eco-therapy, research attention is also directed at models of nature-based human development and the integration between ecology and psychology for healing and restorative purposes. Thomas Doherty asserts that the ecopsychological theories are now more pragmatic and self-reflective rather than countercultural and holistic (cited in Davis and Canty 2013). Nature's healing properties have been extensively studied for the purpose of treating psychological trauma. As mentioned, Roszak who introduces the term "ecological unconsciousness" in his work, *The Voice of Earth*, describes the essence or psyche of human (Roszak 2001: 57). According to Roszak, as humans co-habit the Earth with other species and beings, there is an ecological implant that describes us, much like our psyche or inner workings. The therapeutic angle of ecopsychology, with this in mind, emphasises that the mind heals when nature is restored. Roszak (1995: 9) explains that "the collective unconscious, at its deepest level, shelters the compacted ecological intelligence of our species…it is this id with which the ego must unite if we are to become a sane species capable of greater evolutionary adventures". The study of ecopsychology, therefore, offers a fresh perspective on how people could re-establish a connection with the natural world and how the emergence of an ecological unconscious contributes to the awareness of environmental balance — not solely for the sake of nature but, to a greater extent, that of human's psychological health.

Roszak adds that the collective unconscious is a storehouse of latent or primordial images inherited from our ancestors, and that the ecological unconscious contains our species' compacted eco-intelligence, which helps human survive through self-adjustment and the creation of systems. It is a documentation of the universe's evolution, dating back to the far-off beginnings of creation itself, i.e., the Big Bang. The human mind is endowed with a sheltering eco-intelligence which arises from the natural system's evolutionary history. Ecopsychology seeks to restore the human-nature bond, much like the objective of other forms of

therapy. Roszak contends that the well-being of the Earth and that of human are inherently interconnected, so much so that both share the same needs and rights. The challenge is in awakening the ecological unconscious so that human can perceive nature in a whole new light. With this alignment, the mind would be able to receive all the benefits of the natural world, resulting in a heightened psychological state.

The insights of ecopsychology, in essence, particularly those of Roszak, Fisher, and Wilson, serve as a crucial theoretical scaffold for interpreting the emotional and psychological dimensions of characterisation in literature. In novels that depict a rupture from the natural world — whether due to colonial displacement, urbanisation, or intergenerational trauma — ecopsychological theories enable us to trace how characters struggle with or move towards ecological consciousness. This is especially resonant in pre-independence and diasporic narratives, where the loss or rediscovery of harmony with nature parallels a psychological search for wholeness. Characters' awakenings to nature, often triggered by sensory experiences or interactions with non-human entities signal a re-alignment with the ecological unconscious, thereby marking key turning points in personal growth or healing. In the upshot, ecopsychology opens a lens through which the reading of nature is not perceived merely as a background or metaphor, but observed as a site of psychic integration and narrative transformation.

In the literary texts under present examination, trauma is often portrayed not solely as a social or historical inheritance, but as a psychic rupture that finds resolution through reconnection with the non-human world. Ecopsychology enriches the analysis of such moments by framing the healing process as not just interpersonal but ecological. When characters retreat into forests, tend gardens, or

form bonds with animals, these are not escapist acts but gestures towards eco-therapeutic realignment. The sense of refuge found in nature — a recurring motif in Malaysian fiction — may be read as a symbolic restoration of the self via the natural environment, underscoring Roszak's idea of the ecological unconscious. This interspecies and environmental intimacy repositions trauma as a gateway to ecological and emotional reintegration, reinforcing how nature functions as both witness and healer in literary narratives.

2.4.4 Environmental Identity

The concept of identity which is fundamental to who we are, either personally or as collective members of a group, is dynamic and multifaceted. It includes all of our views, values, experiences, and social connections as well as our sense of self. Researchers in psychology have examined identity from a vast multifarious angles, including Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory' (Harwood 2020), Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (Kaiser 2020), and Dan McAdams' Narrative Identity Theory (Ergün 2020). Our identities are shaped by the groups to which we belong, be they religious, national, or ethnic. These variables cultivate a cumulative feeling of acceptance and self-worth. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory places a strong emphasis on the contribution of group membership to the creation of identity. It argues that people's self-concepts are shaped partially by the social groups which may, as a result, lead to the perceptual prejudices against the outgroups and potentially cultivate an in-group bias. This idea emphasises on how important social environments and group identities are in the formation of an individual's identity. People undergo crucial phases in their lifetime process to form their identities in which they struggle with the issues of self and their social positions in the world.

Beyond the individual and social segments of identity, the concept of identity itself has a lot to do with the imperatives of the environment. Environmental identity emerges when the natural world becomes an integral part of our self-concept which links to the feeling of connection to a specific place or the broader ecological system. One's personal experiences on account of growing up surrounded by nature, spending time outdoors, or experiencing the beauty of the environment foster a much deeper environmental connection. Many environmental psychologists rely on Mitchell Thomashow's (1995) emphasis on ecology and place attachment whereby the significance of social and cultural interactions can be overshadowed by the interpretation of eco-experiences when exhibiting environmental identity (Simms 2020). This approach to environmental identity is reflected in Thomashow's approach to environmental education and ecological awareness. It is observed that each person forms his environmental identity on an individual basis, reflecting his unique emotional, cognitive, and intuitive perspectives. Stephen Zavestovski (2003: 306) defines environmental identity as "that part of the self that allows individuals to anticipate the reactions of the environment to their behaviours".

According to Dorota Domalewska (2021), the formation of individuals' environmental identity is one of the most important steps in shaping sustainable attitudes and behaviours towards environmental protection. It is this way of connecting to the natural world that attracts our reactions to environmental issues. This identity integration leading to more coherent pro-environmental behaviours and self-regulation is consistent with the evolving change in the notion of environmentally-influenced self-concept. The interaction between these aspects of identity highlights the multifaceted nature of identity. Individuals do not possess personal, social, and environmental identities disparately. Rather, these are complexly inter-relative, in that personal, social, and environmental identities are deeply entwined with each other in constituting the overall identity of an

individual. In the case of radical environmentalism, this frequently results from the complete integration of an environmental identity into a person's personal and social identity (Besthorn 2002) that subsequently leads to more extreme forms of environmental advocacy. The integration between these homogenises other aspects of an identity, thereby creating a unified self that behaves the same way albeit perhaps in different contexts.

Natural environment, in the psychological context of place "is more than just a backdrop to personal and social phenomena, but a distinct way of seeing the world that plays up self-environment relations sometimes overlooked by social researchers" (Cresswell 2003: 84). By way of comparison, just as there are multiple ways in which social factors such as gender, religion, and sexuality may present a particular salience in how a person is predisposed to conceive his personal self — either through the perceived relevance or its immediate and relatable connection to his past experience that ultimately influences his identity — of equal importance is the impact of the of non-social impetus on the definability of his identity, especially that which is securely anchored in his affective bond with the natural world. Human identity shaped by the perspectives of the non-human characteristics such as flora and fauna or any other aspects of ecology draws the "attention to, and interpretation of environmental threat" that "are clearly filtered through a perspective based on the perceiver's identity" (Devine-Wright and Clayton 2010: 268). Natural environment is not merely crucial in the functional purposes on which it serves human, but is likewise "important in itself for the individual" in understanding the ongoing process of human emotional development and self-regulation (Korpela 1989: 249). As human internalisation of environment forms a crucial part in the construction of self (Schultz 2001; Frantz et al. 2005; Arnocky, Stroink and Decicco 2007; Schultz and Tabanico 2007; Olivos-Jara and Aragonés 2014), it is therefore speculated that the ever evolving process of emotions and self-regulation where natural environment is concerned takes

place in the human-non-human interaction as well as from the socially constructed understandings between human and their interaction with the natural world (Chawla 1999).

As identity per se is "a set of meanings attached to the self that serves as a standard of reference that guides behaviour in situations" (Stets and Biga 2003: 410), environmental identity can therefore be defined as a set of environmentally relevant meanings immanent in the self that one projects and sustains in guiding his behaviour in social situations. Self-meaning constructed within the notion of environmental identity is derived from one's relation to environmental reference, uncovered through the "characteristics or attributes that individuals see as representing who they are, how they feel, and what they value" (Stets and Biga 2003: 411) by taking into account the "voices" and the "individuality" that the natural environment possesses. Natural environment, on this score, is perceived in equal effect within the hierarchy of human society and accorded the mutual recognition for its existential values and worth, thereby creating a sense of interdependence and attachment to place, and by extension, nature, as it plays a crucial role affecting "human identity or self-definition" (Clayton and Opotow 2003: 184 cited in Mayer and Frantz 2004: 509; in Schultz et al. 2004: 36). The harmonisation between human individuality and natural environment establishes the degree to which this confluence fosters "nature relatedness" (Nisbet, Zelenski and Murphy 2009: 727) that reifies the significance of the natural environment and alters the typically held view of nature as an irrelevant other by virtue of "a deep and caring for nature which includes a clear recognition of nature's intrinsic value as well as a personal sense of responsibility to protect it from harm" (Perkins 2010: 459).

The manifestation of environmental identity flowing resultantly from this human-nature synergy enables individuals to appreciate the relevance of and salience in the self through such bi-interaction, not solely with nature per se, but also over the various environmental issues affecting both humanity and ecology which, in turn, inculcate and activate environmentally predisposed attitudes, "espoused not, in many cases, because of a belief that they will be listened to, but in order to define oneself by expressing one's fundamental values and ethical standards" (Thompson and Gonzales 1997: 89). In this view, Susan Clayton (2003), in describing the significant connection with the natural environment as a constructive source of human self-concept, belief, values, and behaviour, defines environmental identity as follows:

> An environmental identity is a part of the way in which a person forms his or her self-concept: a sense of connection to some part of the non-human natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or the likeness, that affects the ways in which we perceive and act in the world; a belief that the environment is important to us and an important part of who we are. An environmental identity can be similar to another collective identity (such as national or ethnic identity) by providing us with a sense of connectedness, of being part of a whole, and with the recognition of similarity between ourselves and others. Thus, like a group identity, an environmental identity may vary in definition and importance among individuals (Clayton 2003: 45-46).

Environmental identity conceived through one's experience with, discernment of, and exposure to the environment varies not only in the sense of geographical engagement, but also in one's self-understanding of nature as a fused

component of the environment which has the potential to inspire behaviours perceived as environmentally-relevant or having an environmentally-favourable impact. The environmentally-oriented identity must be clearly distinguished from the socially-constructed identity in that whilst social identity places an emphasis on how people — whether individually or as a collective group — may instil personal behaviours that are in line with the universal norms practiced within the social group, the former stresses on "one's individual self-view and focus on the processes that may lead people to view themselves in relation to a higher order, non-social entity represented by the natural environment" (Clayton et al. 2021: 6). Environmental identity therefore dovetails the idea of personal identity founded in an individual's recognition of the environmental importance to humanity and the salience recognised in the personal, social, or ethical distinctions taking place during the identification process (Sierra-Baron et al. 2023). Clayton's definition above provides an opportunity to observe environmental identity through multiple dimensions — mediating the effect of nature on the state of an individual's emotion as well as the consequence of his exposure to and experience with the natural environment — and not strictly limited to the social aspect which contributes to identity formation. On the assumption that the self is psychologically conceptualised as consisting of two major constituents — the knower and the known — referring to the observer seeking to perceive the content of what is perceived (Ashmore and Jussim 1997), natural environment, *ipso facto*, allows an individual to simultaneously act as a perceptive knower and a more valued known, as nature and its valued existence are anchored in human formulation of self: "we understand ourselves better and like ourselves more" (Clayton 2003: 56). The process of environmental identity construction seen via this integrative lens brings together all pertinent information, beliefs, and feelings about oneself configured through human-nature interaction, which allows human to manifest and maintain their sense of environmental identity and its accompanying autonomy by maintaining, defending, or positioning their sense of selves in the socio-physical world.

Environmental identity has been empirically studied and shown to consistently inhere in human nature, evidenced by human readiness to expend time and financial resources on nature (Bixler and Floyd 1997), and their anathema to political acts or policies that potentially attract adverse ecological effects (Clayton et al. 2021). The scrutiny on human preferences to natural settings over the human-induced ones have also been carefully observed in order to examine the depth of natural effects that may have emotionally affective bearings on human. Positive evaluations have been generously given to natural sceneries over the physically built environment on the ground of profundity in calmness derived from the former (Herzog et al. 1997). Even in the case of the latter, the scene of spatial environment is preferred only when accompanied by natural components such as flowers and trees, because a place distinguished by natural scenes evokes an encouraging sense of liveability amongst its occupants as opposed to one without them (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989). In Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981: 273) extensive investigation on individuals' "meaning of things", it is revealed that natural settings are perceived in equal proportion to those of other physical and social determinants as "embodying personal values", which potentially inculcate the appreciation of individuals' environmental moral norm as they negotiate the physical boundaries of their environment and its connectedness to their emotions, thereby not only placing themselves within these boundaries but also relentlessly defending them against any opposing forces that may potentially disrupt the environmentally-induced happiness originally derived therefrom.

In predicting human behaviour in the context of environmental identity, Clayton (2003) has constructed a scale to evaluate the degree to which nature plays a key role in the definition of self, using the Environmental Identity Scale. The scale is structured based on the discourses of other contributing aspects to the formation of collective social identity such as ethnic and racial identity (Tajfel 1981; Luhtanen

and Crocker 1992; Sellers et al. 1998). These aspects incorporate the salience of identity, one's identification with the group to which he belongs, and the ideology associated with the group that is agreeable to its members. In the context of natural environment, salience is operationalised by examining the extent and significance of an individual's involvement with nature (e.g., "Most of time is spent on nature and in natural settings"). Clayton further postulates that self-identification is identified "through the way in which nature contributes to the collectives with which one identifies (e.g., "I think of myself as a part of nature and not separate from it")" (Clayton 2003: 57). She furthers that one's environmental ideology is evaluated by the advocacy for environmental education and the promotion of a sustainable lifestyle (e.g., 'I subscribe to the moral code of responsible behaviour and action towards the Earth by maintaining a sustainable lifestyle.'). Positive emotions are analysed by probing into how one's enjoyment is obtained through his satisfaction with and aesthetic appreciation for nature (e.g., 'I prefer a moderate house surrounded by verdure to an urban residence with a view of other brick-walled buildings.'). On the assumption that environmental identity is also a psychological offshoot of one's experience with nature, Clayton's scale also includes an autobiographical component — one's reminiscence on his interaction with nature (e.g., 'Almost the entirety of my childhood is spent exploring the jungle.').

Indeed, the theme of emotional and cognitive functioning of nature has been broadly explored to bring to light its significantly restorative effect compared to that of which a built environment is capable on human and their conception of self. For instance, as simple as by walking through nature as opposed to the man-made spatial environment, not only have human emotions been reported to improve markedly, they also demonstrate a solid form of identity by virtue of such exposure to the natural environment, thereby contributing to environmental identity (Berto 2005; Berman, Jonides and Kaplan 2008; Hartig, Mang Mayer et al.

2009; Nisbet and Zelenski 2011; Berman et al. 2012; Bratman et al. 2015). Also, a broad spectrum of environmentalist behaviour is exhibited by the underlying psychological mechanism of environmental identity that impels one's motivational drive in facilitating the ecological transition to an environmentally positive direction. Indeed, Lorraine Whitmarsh and Saffron O'Neill's (2010) seminal work is constructive in illustrating that environmental identity serves as a motivational foundation in encouraging environmentally advantageous behaviours including the promotion of eco-shopping, waste reduction as well as conservation of energy and water. In addition, other studies have found that environmental identity, as a "diverse and evolving topic" (Clayton 2012: 172), deeply entrenched within it "a psychological connection between oneself and the non-human natural environment" (Clayton 2003: 58 cited in Schultz 2002: 69; Stets and Biga 2003: 412), contributes immensely to more diverse variants of identity over and beyond subjective norms, attitudes, and behavioural control of specific socio-cultural aspects as well as demographically-influenced personal identity (Ajzen 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010).

These various aspects of human-nature relations underpinning the construct of individuals' environmental identity have its conceptual origin in what is originally posited by Wilson (1984) and has since been expanded by Stephen Kellert and Wilson (1993) called the biophilia hypothesis. Biophilia hypothesis presupposes that "humans have inherited a genetic tendency to respond to the natural environment in certain ways, particularly with certain emotional responses" (Clayton 2003: 59). This "genetic tendency", argues Peter Kahn (1997: 30), is elemental and innately inherent in human predisposition to connect with other non-human organisms for the sake of human cognitive awareness and general emotional wellbeing including improved self-confidence, physical fitness, serenity, and survival. Such hypothesis has since given birth to a wide spectrum of other concepts which primarily view the connection between human emotions

such as familiarity, intimacy, affection, and the sense of oneness as a form of affective bond and emotional affinity towards nature (Kals, Schumacher and Montada 1999; Mayer and McPherson Frantz 2004; Hinds and Sparks 2008). Further explorations into biophilia hypothesis have yielded a fascinating discovery of pro-environmental behaviours as an accompanying effect of one's environmental identity, reflecting the imperative roles of nature which affect the way in which people become deeply attached to the protection, preservation, and maintenance of nature (Stern and Dietz 1994; de Groot and Steg 2010).

Pro-environmental behaviour refers to actions that seek to minimise the negative impacts on nature such as preserving and preventing damages to natural environment as well as promoting any improvements to it (Kolmuss and Agyeman 2002). Pro-environmental behaviour is driven by the moral obligation and belief in one's personal responsibility to create an awareness of the ensuing consequences of people's undesirable behaviour towards the environment (Bamberg and Möser 2007; Steg and Vlek 2009). It is perceived not as a multi-dimensional, but rather a uni-dimensional concept because the environmentally-positive behaviours are said to be underpinned by a common, unitary goal, that is to protect the environment (Kaiser and Wilson 2004).

Indeed, the study of environmental identity in predicting pro-environmental behaviour has developed prolifically over the past decades (Dagher and Itani 2014; Graham-Rowe, Jessop and Sparks 2015; Walton and Jones 2017; Hamerman, Rudell and Martins 2018; Brieger 2019), revealing the commonly held consensus amongst scholars that both personal as well as collective biospheric values exert greater influence on the prediction and manifestation of a wide range pro-environmental behaviours (Triandis 1988; Schultz and Zelezny 1999; de Groot and Steg 2009). However, it is worth noting that environmental

identity, derived from individuals' personal values and intrinsic belief in biosphere encouraging his proclivity to display a pro-environmental behaviour, may progressively develop into a group level in the case of collectivistic cultures where pro-environmental behaviour is mutually harnessed by all members in line with the interests of the group in ensuring a securely sustained environment. A pro-environmental behaviour driven by personal biospheric values guide individual attitudes, behaviour, and thinking which might differ in how people prioritise and endorse each value — "the more someone endorses and prioritises a value, the more decisive this value will be for this person's attitudes, evaluations and behaviour" (Wang et al. 2021: 5). On a group level, its members, jointly and collectively, are guided by the biospheric values that are only deemed appropriate to their mutual goals of presenting themselves as unified group members — determined in their collective ardency to exhibit an environmentally committed behaviour (Feldman 1984; Terry and Hogg 1996; Hornsey 2008).

Within the domain of environmental identity, four distinct sets of personal values have been identified to be linked to pro-environmental behaviour — altruism, egoism, hedonism, and biosphere (de Groot and Steg 2007; Steg et al. 2014). Whilst altruistic and biospheric values respectively signify advocacy for environmental benefits, hedonic and egoistic values, in contrast, suggest personal comfort and self-interest. This suggests that the more people sanction altruistic and biospheric values, the more prone they are to behave and act pro-environmentally. Likewise, the more they are predisposed to the hedonic and egoistic values, the more they are resistant to the environmentally obliging behaviour, presumably due to the excessive resources to be mobilised in maintaining the latter's behaviour in terms of financial cost, effort, and convenience (de Groot and Steg 2009; Steg et al. 2014; Jans, Bouman and Fielding 2018; Bouman and Steg 2019). Due to the impacts of personal biospheric values on the prediction of pro-environmental behaviour, these values are seen as a crucial

barometer by which one's personal environmental self is described (Cook, Kerr and Moore 2002). Personal environmental identity is, in short, definable by the extent to which one sees himself and how he is seen by others as someone who behaves and acts in an environmentally-friendly manner (van der Werff, Steg and Keizer 2013). Collective environmental identity regulated by the common belief held by the group members in predicting pro-environmental behaviour are, by comparison, characterised by what they, as a group, perceive as important and necessary in the protection of the environment, influenced by the concentrated biospheric values peculiar to the group's mutual aspirations as a guiding principle that determines the scale and scope of their appreciation of environmental values. Studies have thus far indicated that group values prove influential in its members' pro-environmental behaviour (Hanel et al. 2018; Sanderson et al. 2019; Bouman, Steg and Zawadski 2020; Fielding et al. 2020), suggesting that, like that of the personal-level pathway in predicting pro-environmental behaviour, environmental identity constructed by a group's biospheric values are, in equal force and vigour, just as significant in the promotion of pro-environmental behaviour amongst its members.

In the circumstances, the psychological conceptualisation of identity at the interface of the environment provides better clarity in understanding the reliability of the natural environment on the inculcation of people's attitudes and behaviour — whether individually or as a collective body of social group. In the particular instance of this study, the understanding, evaluation, and assessment of self have become increasingly relevant in establishing the natural environment's interlinked relatedness to human identity on account of human characters' bond with nature. In the course of this study, it is worth noting that regard is, at all material times, had to the consolidation of the physical aspects of the natural world and its relative effects on human perception, emotion, and cognition in order to better understand the importance of nature in the culmination of personal eco-

identity, stemming essentially not only from the human-nature physical interconnectedness, but also from the intrinsic mutual constitution of their beings and the reciprocity of their roles which essentially contribute to such identity formation.

2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING AND IDENTITY WRITING IN MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

This section reviews the literary works of Malaysian authors in English in relation to the thematic concerns of nature and identity within the Malaysian English literary tradition. This section is organised in the following manner: The explanations in both Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 are built upon the literary works on environmental and identity writing produced by Malaysian authors and/or poets in English respectively.

2.5.1 Environmental Writing in the Malaysian Literary Works in English

The emergence of Malaysian literature in English within the local literary tradition comes in parallel with the birth of Malaysia as a newly emergent nation upon its independence. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003) suggests that Malaysian literature in English has developed flourishingly alongside the nationalistic resilience and racial dynamism of the people since Malaya's liberation from the imperial power, likening the evolution of Malaysian literature in English to those of other postcolonial societies in three prominent stages, beginning from "works produced by 'representatives' of the imperial power", continued by "works produced 'under imperial license' by 'natives' and/or 'outcast'" and further advanced by the "development of independent literatures" or the "emergence of modern post-

colonial literatures" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 148 cited in Quayum 2003: 186). Scholars have begun their exploratory probes into the geographical contours of colonised nations by reassessing the works of erstwhile British colonial officers such as Sir George Maxwell, Sir Hugh Clifford, Sir Frank Swettenham, and Anthony Burgess (Holden 2000; Pakri 2014). This has since led to the discovery of a nascent yet promising tradition of literary activism, although it must be emphasised that "the roots of literature in English by Malaysian can be traced back to the publication of literary magazines in 1940's–1950's" (Nimura 2016: 41). This finding is further confirmed by the marked history of the launching of *The New Cauldron* by the University's Raffles Society in 1949 otherwise known as "the literary coterie at the University of Malaya" (Quayum 2007: 24) composed of its English Department students where literary writing was produced and published in English (de Souza 2001).

The post-independence literary scene has, by the 1950s, risen to prominence following the burgeoning repertoire of publications on nationalistic writings in English. Writers such as Muhammad Haji Salleh, Omar Mohd. Nor, Lloyd Fernando, Ee Tian Hong, Lee Kok Liang, and Wong Phui Nam are hailed as Malaysia's first-generation literary elites for their impactful influence and continuity in the literary tradition of Malaysian literature in English (Vethamani 2003). In the 1970s, most Malaysian novels written in English were set against significant historical events such as World War 2, the Independence of Malaya, and the turbulence of the race riot in 1969. Malaysian English novels then focused on presenting the peculiarity of local sentiments evoked by these events and the regional flavours surrounding native communities by documenting the experience of historically dramatic and traumatic past. Malaysian literature in English bears witness to the birth of its second-generation writers during this period, likewise esteemed in their canonical contribution, with more racially diverse backgrounds such as Lee Kok Liang (b. 1927), Ghulam-Sarwar Yuosof (b.

1939), Cecil Rajendra (b.1941), K.S Maniam (b. 1942), Shirley Geok-lin Lim (b. 1944), and Kee Thuan Chye (b. 1954) (Chin and Quayum 2021).

A careful introspection of the historical origin of Malaysian literature in English and the thriving journey of its literary movement, taking into account Singapore up to 1965 as a collective set of Malayan polities, has prompted Phillip Holden (2009) to posit that Malaysian literature in English is "associated with four different elite communities that have coalesced in opposition to the racialised categories of community incited by governmentality" (Holden 2009: 61). The Chinese Peranakan community is the first community whose concern, according to Holden, is narrowed down, through extensive English publications, to the issues revolving around the status of 'the Straits Born' or the Chinese Peranakan community birthright in the Straits Settlement. The abovementioned 'literary coterie at the University of Malaya' identified as the second literary community is composed of the learned elites in literary scholarship that had lasting impressions on their explosive publications which had diffused outside the university and reached out to a more varied readership. Holden (2009) suggests that the third community consists of the colonial Malayan as well as the post-independent Malaysian writers whose nationalities were secured either by virtue of birth or legal naturalisation. Also, members belonging to this third community are those who have been adversely affected due to their experiential exposure to major traumatic events in the country ranging from institutionalised discrimination, systemic racism, and discriminatory policies such as the preference of the Malay language over any other languages as a formal medium of interaction or educational instruction, following the enactment of the National Language Act 1967. An excessive emphasis on the Malay language leaves them with a deep feeling of otherness, prompting some of these writers to an exilic move as a last resort. Illustrious figures which include Dina Zaman, Huzir Sulaiman, Karim Raslan, and Amir Muhammad are dubbed the writers belonging to the fourth

community whom Holden (2009) notes as a direct progeny of the post-1970s economic policies which had afforded them an elevation of social status equalled to those of the wealthier, more educated, and refined intellectual segment of the Malaysian society.

The colourful ranges of literary productivity amongst Malaysian literature in English writers can be seen as a celebration of their sheer quality, tenacity, and determination in fortifying the future of Malaysian literature in English in spite of the looming threats of censorship, legal constraints, and social marginalisation. However, these qualities and spirit of which Malaysian literature in English writers were in proud possession are the result of the following concern:

> [The] beleaguered state of Malaysian writing in English, particularly given the massive changes in national culture when the English language lost its status with the passing of National Language Act 1967. Then there are references to the even greater marginalising of writing in English following the 1969 racial riots, the subsequent rise of Malay nationalism and specific policies in the name of nation building and the promotion of national culture which denied the 'national literature' status for any writing not in the national language (Merican et al. 2004: 114).

Despite these challenges, Malaysian literature in English writers are increasingly determined in their spirit to edify the social, cultural, and historical fabrics which, despite the historical complexity to form social unity and the racial differences mostly prevalent in the Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities in "the common source of collective imagery, symbol and myths" (Lim 1994: 107),

underpin the identity of Malaysians as one national composite. The impediments to create a racially integrative nationhood have been subdued by Malaysian literature in English as a literature of reinvention and reconciliation. On this note, Maznah Mohammad and Wong Sook Koon (2001) opine the following in their book, *Rising Malaysia: Culture, Politics and Identity*, drawing upon the intersection between history and literature in which Malaysian literature in English can be employed as a literary tool by which to combat further attempts to compromise our national fabrics:

> Historical studies may empirically relate events but perhaps only literature can heighten the representation of a lived experience; it may even be a medium more productive that committee reports for feeding into the reinvention of the future (Mohamad and Wong 2001: 32).

Quests for and challenges against the notion of identity stemming from the malicious generalisation of racial stereotypes have prompted Malaysian literature in English writers into fervent discourses on racial binary between homogeneity and heterogeneity. In effecting so, Malaysian literature in English writers move further afield by venturing beyond national borders to expand their movement outside the country whilst remaining cognisant of the historical interrelationship between the specific locations foregrounding the narratives in their literary texts and the national issues of importance surrounding Malaysia. Malaysian literature in English, through this means, does not only expand its literary milieu to merely encompass geographical variety, but also "becomes part of a process of questioning, of continual negotiation with and redefinition of their social contexts" (Ricard 1987: 286).

Elicitations of sentiments bearing on identity and nationalism by the Malaysian literature in English writers are decidedly evincible in the form of environmental writing. Environmental writing, in this context, refers to the depiction of the natural world in literary works in these writers' attempt at advocating the sense of individuality through human-nature interrelatedness. By way of profound concentration on nature and non-living beings, Malaysian environmental writings in English apply the literary theory of ecocriticism manifesting a different facet of analyses in Malaysian literature in English. The notion of human interdependence with nature is presented in Muhammad Haji Salleh's poems (Ahmed and Hashim 2012). Natural awareness is overt in his expression of concern over the consequent disruption of ecology arising from humanity's intervention that lacks regard for environmental importance in the co-existence between human and non-human. This sentiment reverberates across the tradition of Malaysian literature in English evident in yet another writer's, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, works whose nature-themed poems position nature at the epicentre of discourses on "place, identity, society, and gender" (Yeow 2011: 22) as opposed to projecting environmental images wholly divorced from the human-dominated world. Lim's focus, observes Yeow (2011), on human consciousness of ecology is derived essentially from the involute relationship extant between human and the biotic community underscoring the crisis of identity and place attachment. A similar effect is felt in Ee Tiong Hong's poetry where the roles of nature are portrayed as a social parameter within which individuals' physical reality and emotion are shaped, appreciated, or resented (Yeow 2011). The indispensable link which ties humanity to nature is emphasised with vigour upon the realisation of the non-human world as an extension of a lived, tangible experience of Malaysians, especially those of postcolonial and diasporic Chinese who are constantly faced with the dilemma of identity and belonging (Yeow 2022).

The integration of ecocriticism into the creative productions of MLE is seen in the works of other two Malaysian literary luminaries, A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra. In Muhammad Syaukat Mustafa Kamal's (2013) examination on environmental awareness in the former's works through his seminal book, *The Poetry of A. Samad Said and Cecil Rajendra: A Comparative Study in Ecocriticism*, he finds that the ecosystem is valued with utmost regard in scrutinising the formation of ecological identity and the manner in which such identity is expressed in effecting passion; either through human's elevated spirit or sheer abhorrence at natural degradation within that construct. Through eco-imageries, the Malaysian landscape of Lake Chini, recognised as the second largest natural freshwater lake in peninsular Malaysia (Kahtirithamby-Wells 2005), is interrogated by Zainor Izat Zainal using the "cultural ecological analysis" (Martusewicz, Edmundson and Lupinacci 2015: 30). This is predicated upon the assumption that the crisis of ecology brought out by human acts and their indifference to environmental importance amounts inevitably to a cultural catastrophe. Through the agency of this analysis, it discloses "the poets' persistent sense of loss in their reflections on the degradation of Lake Chini, appearing as a recurring theme in Muhammad Haji Salleh's poems, "slow is beautiful", "if the lake" and "step lightly", Noorhayati Abdullah's *Lake Chini Pantun*, and Zawiah Yahya's *Jungle Trekking at Lake Chini* (Zainal 2021a: 50). Such nostalgic bitterness about environmental loss resounds in the literary echo through the investigation of eco-apocalypse in the poems written by Cecil Rajendra and Muhammad Haji Salleh as these writers investigate the polemics of environmental desolation stemming from ecological maltreatment. Whilst Rajendra holds humanity accountable for the implication of unethical abuse in ecological mismanagement, Salleh rues the human avarice in ecological capitalisation in the name of progress (Yeow 2008). Such clear absence of oneness between humanity and nature marks an individualistic view (Abdul Aziz 2015) and essentially speaks volumes of human awareness of environmental significance and of the sheer heedlessness to the sense of cooperation that human should ethically extend to nature.

Environmental writing in Malaysian literature in English continues to be published in the authors' advocacy to instil natural consciousness in various post-independence creative productions seen in the preponderance of nature writing in novels and poetry. It is observed that the Malaysian natural landscape often serves as spatial settings within which the narratives incorporating natural elements are recounted (Ali Termizi and Mohd Said 2020). Illustrations of complicated and prolonged battles of man against others in power, often ending, as a result, in natural calamities, are presented in the writers' attempt to establish the environmental repercussions of human greed (Hasan 1989). The range of local landscapes identified in K.S. Maniam's novels, for instance, are examined in the spectrums of "physical settings, memory, dream and imagination, mind and personality, margins and shadows, as well as institutions from plantation to coffee shop" (Wicks 2000: 80). Natural emphasis in these writings refine the view on natural implications either in proportionate or greater consequence to human egoism and cupidity in pursuing excessive economic enrichment (Zainal 2014).

The blossoming rise of environmental writing in English by the Malaysian writers translates well to show their cognisance and effectively highlights the widespread of ecological crisis. The combination of environmental writing and the concern with human ethics articulates the need for an honest revisioning of ecological awareness which must, of necessity, centre around the "long-term preservation of opportunity to live well into the future" (Curren and Metzger 2017: xxi). Environmental writing challenges the notion of human centrality and explores the tendency to destructive behaviour in order to appreciate the entrenched interconnectedness between human and non-human. This is to address the pervasive classist binary which perpetuates not only the environment, but extends, to a greater length, to the subordinate human "others" whose right to the enjoyment of life is thwarted severely by dominance and inveterate patriarchy (Sankaran 2018). Zainor Izat Zainal (2021b), firm in the belief that "moralising

about the Anthropocene is inevitable", sees such exercise as extremely crucial, noting that "we have the responsibility to look at inequalities of power and understand how diverse groups of people exert power in different ways with different consequences" (Zainal 2021b: 258). Bearing in mind that "ethics and the Anthropocene need to be actively engaged with each other in order to facilitate our sense of what responsibilities we hold" (Zainal 2017: 350), environmental writing in the Malaysian literature in English creative scene prides itself in the rich and expansive literary tradition which continuously branches out into multiple directions yet tethered to its fundamental focus on the issues and themes of climate change in Malaysia and the narratives of climatological emphasis (Yeow 2022).

2.5.2 Literary Productions on Identity Writing in Malaysian Literature in English

The issue of identity appears to be Malaysia's primal literary currency which continues to permeate across Malaysian local literary production. Significantly foregrounded against the historical backdrop of nation-building and the inter-racially embroiled sentiments during the pre-independence era, the notion of identity is not only discoursed heavily in literary canons, but has, at a considerable length, become a central focus of Malaysia's creative writers. Such focus is essentially imputable to the complex nature of identity that sits at the multidimensional interface of Malaysia's history, races, religions, and cultures that characterise Malaysia as a nation, necessitating constant theorising and reflection by scholars and writers alike. Identity — whether personal, cultural, or national — is influenced pervasively by the "deep psychic" and "primordial attachment" that Malaysians have to their respective race, language, culture, and ethnic origin (Saad 1980: 24 cited in Gill 2013: 62; Verma 2002: 140). Such is evident, for instance, in the presence of a steady religious bond shared by the Malay community who

identify themselves as Muslims, preceding other attendant forms of identification, especially those related to their race (Malay) and nationality (Malaysian) (Martinez 2006 cited in Jerome 2013b). Literary voices on the issues regarding the construction of Malaysian identity and its complexity are amply raised in Malaysian literature in English whilst other tropes are not as present or frequent in Malaysian literary scene in English (Merican et al. 2004; Gaik 2006; Quayum 2007; 2008). It is acknowledged that such imbalance in literary representation on this score within Malaysian literature in English tradition remains unremedied where the dominance of local literary production on identity largely focusing on the Malay community over others is affirmed despite Malaysia's ethnically plural societies. The following excerpt is worthy of reflection:

> The didactic lessons in these stories leave little doubt the authors would like to promote unity, allegiance, and virtue, under Malay leadership. The attempt is unlikely to be successful, however, as long as segments of the population (minorities) are represented as not quite belonging, others (such as women) are misrepresented; whilst still others (lower classes, indigenous and immigrant groups) are left out of the literature altogether. As long as these images persist in the literature, readers will receive a mixed message about who really belongs and who doesn't (Desai 2006: 173).

Despite the pride that Malaysia holds since the time of imperialism until the present day's highly globalised post-independence period as a culturally and ethnically plural nation, the issue of identity dilemma experienced by many Malaysians continues to spark vibrant debates amongst scholars and authors, prompting them, therefore, to closely inspect "the liquidization of contemporary identity processes", affecting "the emergence of a 'new individualism'" as well as

"the arrival of post-traditional process of identity construction" (Elliot 2013: xii). The vibrancy of these debates reflects the urgency to ameliorate these conflicts that influence the process of identity formation. Malaysian writers in English, committed to this concerted effort, too, echo their shared sentiment in the contemporary or "modern Malaysian literature" (Jerome, Hashim and Ting 2016: 24-25), regarding literary agency as "a site for identity creation" (Jerome, Hashim and Ting 2015: 17) and an avenue through which identity-related issues affecting the lives of Malaysians in general are addressed and challenged by way of "creating, among others, diverse identities of their characters and their own identities in the process" (Jerome, Hashim and Ting 2016: 25). Through the examination of how Malaysians, albeit the differences in socio-cultural values and beliefs, confront the quandary of self-identification in Malaysia's pluralistic society, these writers are able to identify the locally constructed identity issues through various social factors (Barlocco 2014; Holst 2012; Milner, Embong and Tham 2014). Driven by the cultural and socio-political conditions affecting the varying process of identity formation, Malaysian authors are deeply preoccupied with the theme of identity and its processual construction, whether in terms of nationality or ethnicity or that which is actuated by the snippets of personal experience amassed in the course of an individual's life. These writers are, in the same vein, creative in their imaginations of diverse identities and often challenge the narratives focusing only on a prevalent, communal identity with total disregard to other existing minority identities:

> Multiple identifications can be problematic to the writer as he attempts to represent them in literature. For instance, when a communal outlook takes precedence over and above a national one, the writer, like the nation, faces a significant test of identity. How does one construct identity in one's narrative? Does one focus on the person, the ethnic community or the nation? Or does one consider

> all three constructs, and if so, what problems might one face in taking up such an endeavour? (Mohd Mydin 2009: 53).

The construction of racial identity in Malaysian literature in English is a "vital preoccupation" (Mohd Mydin 2009: 54) amongst Malaysian writers and has been extensively dealt with in order to address the issue of marginalised identities, often stigmatised as repugnant to cultural and social expectations. This effort is considered an emboldened act of contesting the assumption of presumed superiority of one identity over another. It is contended that the politics of identity representation actively propagated amongst Malaysian writers in the English creative works is speculated to be a manifestation of their conscious effort in contributing to the counter narratives in the existing repertoire of Malay literature that are at odds with the reflection of reality in Malaysia's racial diversity and social conditions. Noritah Omar's (2014) view below is worthy of reflection:

> One of the biggest challenges faced by writers of Modern Malay Literature is to depict multicultural reality of modern Malaysian life. This reality is rarely handled by these writers, with the majority of them choosing only to depict an ethnocentric reality populated with Malay characters, and issues that are seemingly of exclusive concern to the Malay community (Omar 2014: 138).

One major concern amongst early Malaysian writers is the rethinking of national identity "with a uniquely Malayan consciousness, one that would give a 'common identity' to the diverse population of Malaya" (Vengadasamy 2011: 103). The multicultural dimension of identity brings together the desired 'commonness' in the works of Malaysian literature in English where the erasure of separatist

boundaries between races is sought by recognising the multicultural identity that is solidly interwoven in the Malaysian social fabrics. This effort is mobilised so as to 'Malaysianise' all Malaysians into an identity of united nationalistic ideals despite their respective differences in racial, ethnic, or cultural origins. Such endeavour is apparent in the works of Wang Gungwu (known under his nom de plume of Awang) alongside Wong Phui Nam, Ee Tiang Hong, Kassim Ahmad, Lee Kok Liang, Edwin Thamboo, Lloyd Fernando, and K.S. Maniam, amongst others, who employ the theme of national identity in their works as a uniting force to reflect national camaraderie in Malaysia as a culturally diverse yet united society (Vengadasamy 2011). Likewise, stimulating scholarly discussions including those of Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Ganakumaran Subramaniam (2003), Zawiah Yahya (2003), Lloyd Fernando (2001), and Mohammad A. Quayum and Peter Wicks (2001) have contributed in equal fervour to the continuing relevance of Malaysian literature in English in solidifying the sense of nationhood and in building an identity catalysed by the imperatives of national and racial unity. Raihanah Mohd Mydin (2008) observes that the construct of national identity is a result of careful multicultural harmonisation built upon three foundational precepts, to wit, (i) personhood; one which coalesces the corporeal and the spiritual within the self that activates his personal identity, (ii) ethnicity; a social group formed by the shared cultural attributes within a community to which one belongs, and (iii) nationhood; a political culture that contributes to the cognitive interconnectedness between the self, the ethnic community, and the nation.

The works of Lloyd Fernando and K.S. Maniam are vital in exploring the conflict of national identity and the interacting factors that foment the seeds of its impossibility thereby stunting the effort to form a united Malaysian identity due to the exclusivist attitudes of the people who see those of different ethnicity as a foreign entity, unwelcomed into their land which further affirms the idea that "the parameters of Malaysian identity were, and remain communally defined and

exclusionist" (Wicks 2002: 31). In Fernando's historical narrative of *Scorpion Orchid* (1976), the meaning of independence is portrayed as a mere geo-political liberation from the colonial power; desensitised, however, to what it personally and nationally means to belong to an independent and self-determined nation (Hosking, Rutherford and Khoo 2010). Maniam's *The Return* (1981) is a self-appraisal of an individual's identity as the narrator witnesses the changes of life in his homeland and the stark difference in his people's way of thinking compared to those with whom he fraternises during his brief stay in a foreign country. Finding that these two realities are barely compatible, the protagonist begins to compare the comfort of his erstwhile residence to the grim reality of his Indian relatives living in Malaya who are iniquitously subjected to a series of inhumane oppressions under the caste system. Such perspective of 'excluded other' is a significant hallmark of both Fernando and Maniam's works as they provide an inclusive outlook on identity evidenced in "those writings which by emotion, identification, description, social context and involvement relate to Malaysia" (Tham 1981: 180).

Further, the assimilative process of post-migration cultures proves to be one of the main concentrations amongst Malaysian writers in English in accentuating the theme of diasporic identity. The difficulty in harmonising the immigrants' unilateral form of selves is presented in the complexity with which they try, albeit often in vain, to integrate into the local norms due to their foreign identity. In Chin Woon's collection of poetry, *Naturalization of Camellia Song* (1993:5), the writer points out that developing a "hybrid" identity and identifying as a "multi-cultural" individual are what is essential for the diasporic community in order to secure a safe survival in a newly immigrated country. The evolution of identity construction in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's works is observed to take place in three stages: (i) an independent-self from the motherland, (ii) the independent-self in the adopted homeland and, (iii) the contradicting-self between the adopted culture

in the foreign land and the ancestral customs of the original homeland (Sawatsky 2002). Such evolution, speculated to reflect the reality of Lim's own stratified-self — exilic, diasporic, and Asian American — is a depiction of layered and opposing identities. Identity in Lim's narratives, constructible through the imbrication of many social and non-social factors, is problematised due to the multiplicity of its layers, making it seemingly difficult to coalesce into a single identity (Powell 2014). In her novel, *Among the White Moon Faces* (1996) and that of Tash Aw's *Five Star Billionaire* (2013), the process of Malaysian national identity formation is observed with close scrutiny over the Chinese immigrants' diasporic experience "on the sociocultural and political implications of movement of Chinese subjects from the Middle Kingdom" (Lim 2018: 15). Lim focuses on the illustration of the colonial Malaya as a land of promise for a better life, not only in the context of Chinese immigrants in Malaya, but also in the context of immigrants' experience in Southeast Asia as a whole. Aw's display of Malaya as a safe location for cross-border migratory adventure is a contribution to the Chinese diasporic narratives, informing the readers of the process of inter-cultural assimilation processes involved, culminating eventually in the identity of hybridity as a result of the diasporic acclimatisation of the Chinese immigrants' 'alien'-selves into the Malayan local and normative cultures.

Equally marked in the Malaysian literary reserve of creative productions in English is the theme of gender identity which probes into the normative and non-normative values and the appreciation of liberation and sexuality. The exploration of gender identity in Malaysian literature in English appertains the aspect of male-female relationships, women's bodies, and alternative sexuality (Omar and Che Dan 2011). It is shaped by the specific experience of personal struggle and normative expectations from the socially gendered community (Abdul Manaf and Quayum 2001), everyday life, personal circumstances, and exposure to modernity (Hashim et al. 2011). A gendered reading of women liberation in Rani Manicka's

The Rice Mother (2003), notes Manmeet Kaur Senthok Singh (2015), reveals the protagonist's identity formed through her constant oppositions to the patriarchal expectation in her community as she aggressively fights against the cultural taboos surrounding the Malaysian community especially those of bodily emancipation and expression of women's sexuality. The construct of gender identity in *The Rice Mother* is not only viewed from the traditional examination on the oft-analysed notion of misogynistic dominance vis-à-vis women's submission to men, it also centres around the questions of women's strength, resilience, and their relentlessness in combatting inequality and gender injustice. Another salient example is seen in Hilary Tham's works which savour sharply of feministic tones. In her memoir, *Lane with No Name* (1997), a representation of strong gender identity is constructed within the Chinese Malaysian patriarchal family where a Western model of feminism is juxtaposed against the Eastern feminist perspectives in highlighting the issues of subjugation, discrimination, and dominance. It is worth noting that Tham's ardour in heralding loud feministic crescendos in her literary works, set against the Malaysian Chinese cultural backdrop, is inspired by her own personal experience that motivates her ideals of gender equality. The following excerpt encapsulates the account of Tham's real life experience that steers her focused writing on gender identity:

> Reading Tham's *Lane with No Nam*e exposes reasons why Tham is preoccupied with women's issues; her mother's tempestuous relationship with her husband, the unpredictable behaviour of her grandmother, the general condition of Chinese women around her provided one scenario of women. The English nuns, her Eurasian friend Susan, Mrs. L and nana, and the English characters in the fiction she read provided another scenario. Tham's works, both short stories and poetry, and her memoir, show a preoccupation with the

issues of being a woman, especially a Chinese one (Merican et al. 2004: 116).

The truth and reality of human life and experience are likewise intrinsic in the tradition of Malaysian English literature through the representation of sexual identity where writers approach the controversial theme of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) in order to "give context and meaning to their experiences" and to provide the readers an "insight into experiences and cultures they only can barely understand and might not understand at all" (Nelson 2009: 199). Despite the unfavourable treatments of the LGBTQ community laden with negative social stereotypes and legal discriminations (Ng et al. 2015; Luhur, Brown and Goh 2020; Tan, Lee and Cheong 2021), Malaysian writers are, nevertheless, determined to challenge "the convention of uptight Malay fiction" (Hosmillo 2011: 66). Likewise, various literary analyses have directed their focus to the LGBTQ community in Malaysia and the construction of their sexual identity as well as the psycho-social dynamics in the face of patent oppression in Malaysia (Baba 2001; Jerome 2008; Jerome 2013a; Razali, Noor and Talif 2015). Other local writers including Dina Zaman, Rehman Rashid, Karim Raslan, and Amir Muhammad have been relentless in their literary spirit to disrupt the dominant notion of sexuality by incorporating into their works elements of sexuality that are non-normative and bristled with invectives and profanities otherwise deemed culturally inappropriate in the Malaysian society (Tope 2010). The intentional depiction of moral transgressions of these fictional characters is demonstrated with respect to intimacy and sexual relations so as to alter and subvert the conventionally held views about mainstream sexuality using culturally perceived derogatory expressions and elements of erotica (Jerome 2008; Muslim, Hashim and Arbaayah 2010).

Representations of sexual identity are especially manifest in Karim Raslan's *Go East!* (1996a) and *Neighbours* (1996b) where the portrayal of non-normative sexuality is vividly described. *Go East!* presents the protagonist's self-denial of his sexuality as he "is only able to deal with his homosexual tendencies after leaving his hometown in Peninsular Malaysia to work in Lahad Datu, Sabah, where he has a sexual encounter with Anton, a Filipino manservant" (Che Dan 2010: 145). The theme of discreet sexuality continues to ring in Raslan's *Neighbours*, centring his narrative on its principal character, "the nosy Datin Sarina, who sees her new neighbour (a model of male perfection) having sexual intercourse with a pondan (transvestite)" (Che Dan 2010: 146). Amirah Razali, Rohimmi Noor, and Rosli Talif (2015) carefully examine many of the characters in Jerome Kugan and Pang Khee Teik's *Body 2 Body: A Malaysian Queer Anthology* (2009) who are depicted to experience a confusing yet brazen shift of sexuality from heterosexuality to homosexuality, contending that such transition into "gaydom" takes places at several junctures in their lives, dictated by the presence of "Id" (sexual desire for the those of the same sex), "Ego" (consciousness of sexual identity leading to act in the manner so defined by such identity), and "Superego" (the guilt fomented by social disapproval and public opposition) (Razali, Noor and Talif 2015: 49). A similar process of sexual identity construction is expressed in Dina Zaman's work, *Two Men*, published in 1997 (Jerome 2022) which contributes to the wealth of social discourses about the Malay Muslim character's homosexual-self through constant self-negotiation with his own religion, race, and culture that denounce such sexual identity and all acts attendant to it (Jerome 2013a; Jerome 2013b).

In conclusion, environmental and identity creative writings in Malaysia have been equally acknowledged as integral themes dominating the authorial focus amongst many scholars and creative writers within the Malaysian literary tradition. The weight and gravity of both tropes have been carefully considered and appear, in effect, to be of paramount importance as they respectively hinge

critically on the narratives of multidimensional nature where the conception and understanding of self can be better grasped through the narratorial imagination of these authors in their portrayals of human negotiations or interactions with various extraneous factors that eventually shape who they are, either individually or as members of any social groups. It is precisely in this spirit of embeddedness that the examination of self becomes the focal point of attention insofar as the present study is concerned in order to examine the notion of personal eco-identity manifest in the Malaysian literary texts authored in English which looks at the ideas of nature and identity not as disparate units but one of unified and interconnected whole.

2.6 ADDRESSING THE GAP IN RESEARCH

Whilst the theme of identity in Malaysian literature in English has been extensively explored, there remains a significant gap in the examination of how environmental factors influence identity construction. Previous studies have primarily focused on personal, cultural, and national identities as well as the intricate interplay between these identities in a multicultural context (Saad 1980; Verma 2002; Gill 2013). The existing body of work underscores the deep psychological and cultural attachments that Malaysians have to their race, language, and ethnic origins. However, there is a conspicuous absence of discussions that incorporate the role of environmental elements in shaping these identities. Despite the rich portrayal of personal and social identity dilemmas in the works of writers like K.S. Maniam, Lloyd Fernando, and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, amongst others, the dimension of personal eco-identity remains underexplored.

The interplay between environmental factors and identity is crucial in understanding the comprehensive identity formation process. It bears repeating that the current research lacks a thorough investigation into how Malaysian English literature reflects the influence of natural environments on identity construction. It appears that the consideration of ecopsychological insights into the formative steps of characters' identity construction through the deconstruction of human-nature dualism proves starkly insufficient, thereby meriting deeper investigation. This oversight limits the understanding of the full spectrum of identity issues faced by many Malaysians. Ergo, addressing this gap is essential for a holistic appreciation of the narratives within Malaysian literature in English. By integrating literary ecocriticism into identity studies within ecopsychology using the conceptualised Framework of Personal Eco-Identity as expounded in Chapter 3, this present study is well equipped to explore how historical, cultural, and environmental contexts shape the construction of literary characters' personal eco-identities based on the imbricating strength of nature into human behaviours. This approach not only enriches the existing discourse but also introduces a novel perspective in the study of Malaysian literature in English, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted process of identity formation in the ecocritical and ecopsychological frameworks.

As mentioned in the Abstract, whilst much scholarly attention has been given to identity in Malaysian literature in English — particularly around ethnicity, nationhood, gender, and sexuality — less explored is the way identity is co-constructed through ecological awareness or how the natural environment shapes, challenges, or reinforces the inceptions of personal eco-identities in Malaysian literary narratives. Despite the literary richness that attends to identity as a fluid and layered construct shaped by postcolonial legacies, multicultural realities, and diasporic experiences, the roles and effects of place, especially in

respect of natural landscapes, environmental degradation, and ecological belonging, have remained underexamined.

This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by exploring how environmental conditions, metaphors, and motifs serve beyond settings or backdrops, but act as active agents in shaping Malaysian identities. It proposes that not only is the theme of identity in Malaysian literature in English constructed strictly in relation to race, nation, and gender, but also through human's lived experiences with the environment — of land, loss, displacement, and ecological entanglement. Such an approach builds on and, in fact, largely extends existing scholarship by integrating ecocritical theory into postcolonial identity discourse, guided principally by the theoretical underpinnings in identity studies within ecopsychology, offering, ultimately, a more holistic understanding of what it means to be Malaysian in literature — rooted not just in history and culture, but also anchored in nature.

2.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

The reviews in Chapter 2 cover the theoretical aspect of ecocriticism and the interposition of postcolonial studies into the ways in which environmentally concentrated readings appropriately consider the historical underpinnings of ecocritical analyses where imperial dominance and capitalistic drive contribute immensely to the lives of the colonised subjects and the country's ecological harmony. In addition, the psychological aspect of identity is discussed to comprehend the concept of individuals' environmental attachment and to identify the modes of identity construction activated on the strength of human cognitive and physical interconnectedness with the natural environment. In so doing, various studies are reviewed from the ecopsychological perspectives in discerning

the exhibition of individuals' environmentally influenced behaviours, or the lack thereof. In situating the notion of identity within the tradition of Malaysian English literature, a comprehensive survey covering the notion of identity as a thematic emphasis in the analyses by the scholars as well as those cogently articulated in the creative works produced by Malaysian writers are carried out to locate the site on which the examination of identity primarily centres. Whilst the discourses on identity are vibrant especially in the plethora of scholarly analyses and creative works, it is suggested that there appears to be a blatant paucity in the deliberation on identity construction marked by environmental factors. Amongst various local literary works and scholarly studies which have been carefully examined, the dimension of personal eco-identity is decidedly absent in discussion. The combination of literary ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology is therefore suitably applicable to cater to such exigency and indeed relevant as a theoretical framework to render the construct of personal eco-identity materialisable by taking into account the interposing historical and environmental factors which considerably affect the formation of the literary characters' personal eco-identities under present examination and the varying ecopsychological processes involved in its construction.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter centres on the construction of conceptual framework and research methodology for this thesis. The combination of ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology is adopted to establish the conceptual foundation of theoretically informed 'Framework of Personal Eco-Identity' within which the notion of mutual constitution is explored in the selected Malaysian novels written in English using the imbricating concepts in literary ecocriticism and identity studies grounded in ecopsychology. The conceptual framework is underpinned by two interdisciplinary areas, namely, ecocriticism and identity within ecopsychology as illustrated in the diagram below:

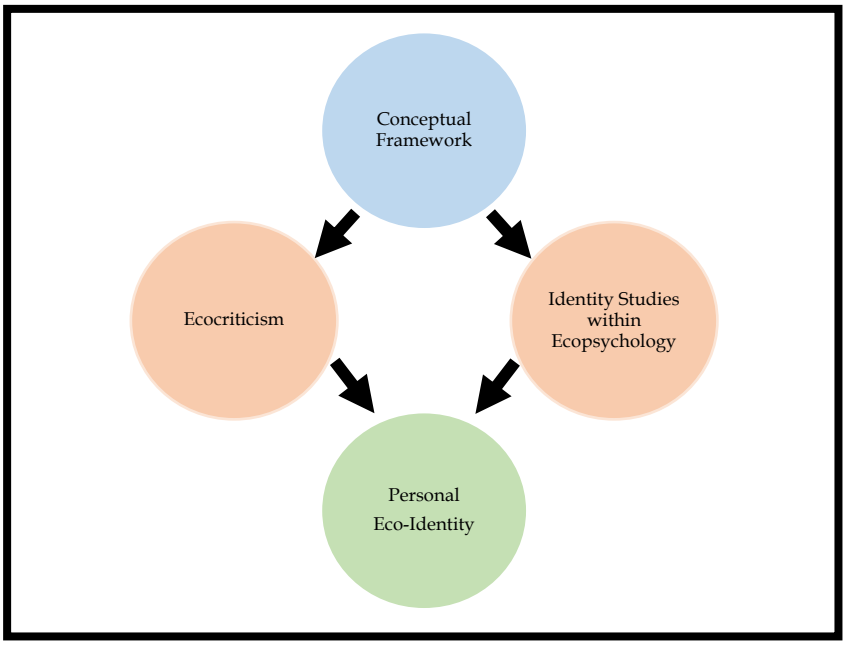


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

The order of this chapter is arranged thus: Section 3.2 offers an insight into the application of literary ecocriticism focusing on the theoretical explanations on biocentrism, anthropocentrism, environmental justice, and interrelationship and co-presence, addressed separately in Sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, and 3.2.4 respectively. Section 3.3 clarifies the concepts germane to identity at the interface of ecopsychology where in Section 3.3.1, a fresh revisioning of identity is demonstrated by challenging the traditional dualistic separation between the mind (human psyche) and the matter (nature) using ecopsychology. Section 3.3.2 expands the notion of identity to include ecological consciousness which significantly concretises the environmental impact on human behaviours and actions. Whilst Sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 cover the motivational aspects of human behavioural tendencies towards nature that influence the formation of their environmental identity by means of pro-environmental behaviour and environmental concern, Section 3.3.5 deals with the conceptual ideas of ecophilia and ecophobia. The proposed conceptual Framework of Personal Eco-Identity is presented in Section 3.4, having integrated the intersecting concepts integral to ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology in the antecedent subsections. This is followed by the research methodology presented in Section 3.5. Finally, the summary of the conceptual framework and research methodology is provided in Section 3.6.

3.2 DISCUSSION ON THE SELECTED CONCEPTS IN ECOCRITICISM

As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, the field of ecocriticism, like many other theoretical disciplines in literature in general, has attracted increasingly greater interdisciplinary preoccupations amongst its scholars whose focus has majorly shifted and diversified from mere discussions on environmental writings within a strict domain of literary ecocriticism to vaster areas of scholarship such

as postcolonial, psychological, and environmental studies. Bavetra Swaminathan (2023) argues that scholarly awareness has been expanding vigorously in recent years whereby scholarly interactions between ecocriticism and environmental studies have attempted to draw the mutual insights on the complementary interrelationship and interconnectedness between human and nature in terms of their correlative values as well as the reciprocal functions in their combination. Such concerted effort between ecocriticism and environmental studies attempts at dispelling the socially-constructed hierarchy which promotes and even venerates the primacy of human over non-human and likewise removes and displaces the environment in the order of equal importance within the said hierarchy. This, as a result, has paved a way for ecocriticism to make inroads into a joint focus with other disciplines on the investigation of both literature and the environment in respect of the multiplicity of ways in which humanity and nature are represented as beings of equal worth and interconnected coexistence as well as residents of the Earth justly deserving of respect.

Indeed, literature and nature share such interdependent dynamic arising from their close relationship and commonalities, chief of which is derived from the perspective of psychological connections to nature and its effects on humanity as represented in the works of literature and other cultural forms. First introduced by William Rueckert (1996), his essay titled *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* posits that literary writing on nature combines romantic imaginations armed with the philosophy of ecological sensibilities otherwise strangely oblivious to humanity so as "to develop ecological visions which can be translated into social, economic, political and individual programs of action" (Rueckert 1996: 107). Nature writing, as it was popularly termed at its inception, has since gained currency with the expansion of ecocriticism as a literary theory that makes its way into the more serious and rigorous explorations of the theme focusing primarily on global crisis. The emergence of literary works infusing the theme of

environment serves as a reminder to the indispensable importance of realising the bane of ecological catastrophes such as global climate change, environmental pollution, and mass extinction of flora and fauna, not to mention the ever-increasing incidences of human fatality caused by human lackadaisy in consequence to human inaction in ensuring environmental preservation and protection.

Ecocritical focus orbits overarchingly around the interrelationship and co-dependence between humanity and the natural world. The study of ecocriticism in literature does not concern itself necessarily with the application of ecological concepts per se. Rather, it actively seeks to advocate for environmental activism using the "Earth-centred approach" (Glotfelty 1996: xviii) to "see literature inside the context of an ecological vision" (Rueckert 1996: 115). Ecocriticism has removed itself from various traditional literary approaches to literature in its commitment to "reinstating the 'real'" (Marland 2013: 858) by employing a myriad of concepts in literary ecocritical theory to depict the world beyond mere aesthetic representations of nature in the texts. Literary texts are utilised as a creative mediating device by which to sound an alarm of concern and to voice out the expression of anxiety which could transmit the best possible environmental message to humanity of the looming repercussions of their indifference to environmental awareness. Yuki Masami (2015) holds the view that ecocriticism opens a pathway along which a critically insightful overview of environmental stances can be made from the perspective of cultural representation using literature as its instructive tool.

Analogous to the theoretical conceptualisation of feminism in literature which explores literary texts from the axis of gender, ecocritical analysis in literature probes into the texts beyond the general physical environment and

focuses on the significant interposition of the natural world into human lives "in the spirit of commitment to environmental praxis" (Buell 2005: 105). Jonathan Bate through his influential works, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000) contends that the interactive elements of nature in eco-poetry allows readers to dive appreciatively into the fragility of the Earth. He furthers that human-nature embeddedness can be truly comprehended and the fission between them may be mitigated by acknowledging the constructive presence of the natural world in literature. Hence, ecocritical analysis in literature launches its exploration of natural integration into human lives to galvanise both political and cultural momentum and to dismantle the ideology of non-human othering flowing dangerously from the binary thinking which perceives human and nature as indispensably disparate and hierarchically unequal.

In the succeeding subsections, several pertinent concepts of ecocriticism which have emerged following the evolution of the ecocritical theory in literature are addressed in detail. The selection of these concepts reflects their currency and propriety in the present study and shall be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the close textual analysis of the selected corpus in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

3.2.1 Biocentrism

Aldo Leopold first articulated biocentric perspectives in the 1940s, paving the way for discussions on environmental ethics in relation to modernisation and consumerism, particularly in challenging the view of nature as a commodity (Arora, Yadav, and Mishra 2020). van de Veer and Pierce define biocentrism as "the claim that all living things are of equal moral worth or equal intrinsic value"

(van de Veer and Pierce 1994: 336). Joseph Desjardins (2013) explains that biocentrism recognises the values, rights, and dignity of all beings, while Timothy Morton (2010) highlights the interconnected and interdependent existence of all beings as a way to address the violence caused by human–non-human dualism.

Biocentrism asserts that all living beings possess equal intrinsic value and that humans are not hierarchically superior to non-human entities. This position is grounded in the "biospheric-centred paradigm" (Marland 2013: 854), which proposes that humans and non-human beings are 'co-owning residents' of the Earth. Biocentrism is closely associated with deep ecology (Marland 2013), which calls for a radical rethinking of human superiority. This perspective is reflected in the idea that "the eminence of nature is equivalent to mother and is untarnishable but we see role reversal when it comes to life where humans tend to see nature as a ploy of their hand" (Mishra and Mishra 2017: 132). It also encourages a re-evaluation of human relationships with nature, urging humans to "de-ground ourselves from the dark of our deepest selves" (Snyder 1999: 113) and rediscover "our profound connection with the 'more-than-human' world" (Abram 2010: 168). As noted in Section 2.2.2 of the Literature Review, deep ecology further emphasises "the intrinsic value of all life forms, promoting ecological balance and integrity" (Md Rafiqul Islam 2024: 113) through a distinctive "language to deepen the meaning of nature's position in our lives" (Alkodimi 2024: 56). However, this approach is not without criticism, as concerns remain that such restructuring may still ultimately serve human interests (Klemmer and McNamara 2019).

Biocentrism functions as a critical lens through which texts are analysed for their representation of ecological interconnectedness. It shifts attention from human-centred interpretations to the role of non-human agencies. This includes the recognition that "any desire, interest, or goal that is pursued must be carefully

and justifiably judged to be highly unlikely to damage our species' guarantee of survival now and in the foreseeable future" (Coren 2015: 53). Literary works depicting ecological symbiosis may therefore affirm biocentric values. In this context, ecocritical texts are seen as "morally committed to transforming the conditions of exploitation and poverty in which large sections of the world's population live out their daily lives" (Young 2003: 6), revealing how characters engage with or fail to recognise their entwinement with the non-human world. While biocentrism decentralises human authority, anthropocentrism, the notion of which is explained below, represents the opposing framework that reinforces human dominance.

3.2.2 Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism refers to a worldview that places human beings at the centre of importance. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy defines it as "any view magnifying the importance of human beings in the cosmos, e.g., by seeing it as created for our benefit" (Blackburn 2016: 23). Ecocritical scholars further conceptualise it as an ideology that upholds "the centrality and priority of human existence through marginalising and subordinating non-human perspectives, interests and beings" (Weitzenfeld and Joy 2014: 4).

Anthropocentrism prioritises human interests and treats the natural world primarily as a resource for human use. This perspective is rooted in human elitism, where non-human value is defined only in relation to human ends (Cadman 2016). As an antithesis to biocentrism, it presupposes that nature exists solely for human advantage. Roderick Nash traces its historical development to colonial encounters with wilderness, where nature was conquered and domesticated alongside

indigenous communities (Nash 1973). Anthropocentrism is also associated with the commodification of nature, driven by economic interests. It aligns with "shallow ecology" which "advocates the systemic usages of natural resources like coal, gas, forests, oil, etc." (Mishra 2016: 169), often under the pretext of sustainability. However, such practices may justify environmental exploitation and deny nature's right to sustainable survival.

In literary studies, anthropocentrism is examined as a dominant trope that reflects human tendencies to dominate and exploit the environment. At the same time, it can be critically engaged to promote alternative perspectives, encouraging readers to "view life, including nature and humans, in a more holistic conception" (Kopnina et al. 2018: 118). In this context, life extends to "metabolisms and ecosystems and natural periods of arising and passing of all that is living" (Waldmüller 2015: 17). Anthropocentric representations also raise ethical concerns about environmental degradation and crisis. While sustainable development is proposed as "the most common measure to tackle environmental crisis" (Frederick 2012: 140), it must be approached with caution, as earlier scholars remind us that resource use should not be inordinately or irresponsibly mobilised (Selvamony, Nirmalnasan and Rayson Alex 2007). If anthropocentrism reveals patterns of human dominance, the succeeding explanation on the notion of environmental justice addresses the unequal consequences of such dominance across different communities.

3.2.3 Environmental Justice

The notion of environmental justice is a reflection of ecocritical approach to literature which represents global anxiety of the poor against the privileged and the powerful in the discourse of nature-culture binary. Environmental justice advocates for the equal treatment and inclusive involvement of all human irrespective of nationality, race, or economic standing in all aspects of safeguards against any manner of environmental threats. It seeks to ensure a maximum enjoyment of life in a healthy and clean environment through the protection accorded to them by way of enforcement, implementation of environmental laws, policies, and regulations.

This notion is conceptualised to reflect on the scholars' dedication to raising consciousness and holding institutional powers accountable for their intentional perpetuation of prolonged ecological crises (Egya 2020). Human irresponsibility in natural preservation has caused global climate change to be "the single greatest threat to human civilisation" (Hartnett 2021: 147) where both people and the non-living beings are displaced, endangered, and killed. Attention to the monstrosity of environmental hazards resulting from the effects of imperialism on climate change, however, appears to be inadequate. Amitav Ghosh (2016: 88) states that "in accounts of the Anthropocene and of the present climate crisis, capitalism is very often the pivot on which the narrative turns". Similarly, Rob Nixon (2011: 185) laments the paucity in discussions amongst scholars so much so that the concern of environmental justice in addressing the crucial "issues of slow violence, the environmentalism of the poor and imperial socioenvironmental degradation" continues to remain marginalised.

The discourse of environmental justice in literature attempts to deconstruct the politics of power relations in the context of environmental practices which de-privilege and displace the poor and the unfortunate. Measuring the natural representation in literary works on the strength of environmental justice may functionally act as an agentic principle in which the aspects of society and culture can be scrutinised to observe "the overlapping territory where social, cultural and environmental challenges must be confronted all at once" (Bergthaller et al. 2014: 271). An ecocritical analysis in literature focusing on the conceptualisation of environmental justice enables locating various environmental devastations actuated by human anthropocentric behaviours which sees the prevalence of capitalism and consumerism, resulting in the dislocation of the underprivileged entities. It is posited that the notion of environmental justice stands as a primary tenet in the development of ecocriticism as a theory, acting pertinently as a literary impetus to "depict the attitudes of these tribes to nature, their way of life, the human-non-human relationship and how socio-political acts of development and rapid urbanisation have affected the environmental landscape" (Mukherjee 2018: 1).

The ecocritical concept of environmental justice in literature reveals human subscription to the elitist mentality by the institutional powers that treat nature and natural lives as 'the other' whose purposes of and directions in their existence are unimportant and indefensible. As a result of this alterity, not only is environmental justice undermined by humanity's tendency to reinforce such disconnect, the underprivileged humans too are no lesser victims to these abuses. Environmental justice may be suitably embedded in literary interpretations in the possibility to "recharge these novels' social energy and to give their narratives the weight of environmental historiography" (Kneitz 2015: 55). The infusion of notional environmental justice in literature may also yield an effective interpretation in that reading eco-texts is not merely a "historical" or "social"

exercise, but importantly an "environmental" one (Mukherjee 2018: 10) Although climate change is a physical fact, literary reading of these texts provides readers with a multiperspectival understanding of human and non-human which will enable a better comprehension of the potent impact of the way climate issues and other various environmental concerns are conceived (Schneider-Mayerson 2019). Through an ecocritical probe into literature in the context of environmental justice, Kate Soper in her book, *What is Nature? (*2000a: 4) recommends a "nature-endorsing" approach to the literary scrutiny of natural representation so as to ensure a fair dispensation of justice, not only to nature but also to other fellow humans who depend on nature for the continuity of their livelihood. Thus, the notion of environmental justice is essential to prevent the nature from "failing to foreground the natural worlds and their role in shaping the thoughts and ways of living, as well as in the preservation and conservation of diverse life-forms" (Egya 2020: 70).

3.2.4 Interrelationship and Co-Presence

This concept of interrelationship and co-presence foregrounds the interconnected and mutually constitutive relationship between humans and the natural world. Here, the human–nature binary is challenged by emphasising interconnectedness. Human and non-human entities are interdependent and co-constitutive, where each shapes and is shaped by the other. The idea of "cross-fertilisation" (Glotfelty 1996: xix) reflects the productive interaction between environmental philosophy and literary imagination.

This perspective also highlights the synchronisation of cultural preservation and natural conservation. Literature plays a central role in

articulating these relationships. The concept of "storied matter" (Opperman 2016: 95) demonstrates how narratives embed relationships between "humans, biota and abiota" (Bennett 2010: 112), emphasising reciprocity, agency, and shared existence. This aligns with the idea that human and natural domains are not strictly separate but exist along a clear, unbreakable continuum. The mutuality of human and nature in the manner in which the former deals with nature without essentially denying the latter's worth is in accord with Immanuel Kant's double-edged conception of nature. Kant, a prominent philosopher, observes that although humans are free from nature, their livelihood is, however, determined by it (Ogar and Bassey 2023). The recognition of such non-exclusivity allows the human–nature relationship to be understood as relational rather than hierarchical.

Ecocriticism negotiates human–non-human differences by emphasising "the symbiotic interconnectedness between humans and the natural world" (Ramzan et al. 2023: 478). It further calls for renewed engagement with the material world, including "renewed critical attention to the physical dynamics of the world in which human beings 'live and have their being'" (Iovino 2023: 30) and "intensive and hybrid cross-fertilisations and generative encounters with non-human others" (Braidotti 2010: 233). In this thesis, these ideas are synthesised through the framework of mutual constitution, where identity is formed through continuous interaction with the ecological world rather than in isolation. Taken together, these concepts form a unified framework for analysing ecological consciousness and identity in literature.

3.2.5 Conclusion of the Selected Concepts in Ecocriticism

The concepts of biocentrism, anthropocentrism, environmental justice, and interrelationship and co-presence collectively form the theoretical framework of this study. These concepts establish that human and non-human life are interconnected and that ecological understanding must move beyond human-centred perspectives. Biocentrism and anthropocentrism provide contrasting lenses for analysing attitudes towards nature. Environmental justice highlights inequality and ecological harm, while interrelationship and co-presence emphasise mutual dependence and shared existence. Together, these concepts provide a coherent framework for examining how literary characters develop or resist ecological awareness. They also support the analysis of how ecological experiences influence the formation or discouragement of personal eco-identity. In Chapters 4 and 5, these concepts are applied to selected Malaysian novels written in English to evaluate the construction of personal eco-identity. This study ultimately argues that such identity is shaped through continuous interaction with the ecological world, where human and non-human relations function as a central, constitutive force. These concepts are contextualised with great rigour as they form the conceptual concerns which this study seeks to uncover in evaluating the construct of personal eco-identity of the literary characters in these texts. Indeed, these concepts are pertinent to their respective contributions to the analyses of personal eco-identities in the selected Malaysian novels written in English in which the ecological traits and concepts, solidified further by the characters' immersive experience with nature, prove to be the governing pillar on which their personal eco-identities are constructed. On this note, the following subsection shall address *ad rem* the selected concepts germane to the formation of identity within ecopsychology.

3.3 DISCUSSION ON THE SELECTED CONCEPTS IN IDENTITY WITHIN ECOPSYCHOLOGY

Escalating environmental concerns and their effects on one's environmental identity have further deepened the entwinement, not only between the theories of literary ecocriticism and identity, but that which extends to ecopsychology, hinging on the appraisal of human behaviour in relation to the influential aspect of nature in moulding environmental identity. As explained in Chapter 1, the extension of analysis on identity to ecopsychology is useful in predicting human behaviour, values as well as attitudes which characterise who we are as individuals whose psychological components — cognitive, affective, and behavioural — are measured by the sense of connectedness to nature. Traditional identity theories such as those of McAdams' Narrative Identity (Ergün 2020) and Erikson's Psychosocial Development and the Societal Identity Theory (Kaiser 2020) assert the influence of personal and social experience in one's self-concept. The inclusion of environmental elements into these frameworks have led to the notion of environmental identity.

In comprehending the formation of self, it is pertinent to base the discourse on the traditional theories of identity. Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory asserts that one's identity is driven by his association with certain social groups (Harwood 2020). The notion is that such association affects one's behaviour, self-esteem as well as social relations. These groups may bond over shared interests, gender, religion, or ethnicity. This theory draws on the impact of social experiences in shaping the dynamic construct of identity, thereby allowing individuals to identify themselves based on their community's standards and values.

The formation of identity, as emphasised by Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, transpires in the various phases of one's life (Orenstein and Lewis 2022), with each phase being marked by a certain conflict which one must overcome to ensure a healthy identity development. One primal example is the adolescent phase's "identity vis-à-vis role confusion" conflict (Orenstein and Lewis 2022: 17). A successful resolution to such issue leads to the development of a cohesive sense of self, thus enabling the person to blend and function well as a member of the society. This theory underscores the significance of external influences including one's family, society, and culture in shaping one's identity at multiple life stages.

Meanwhile, McAdams' Narrative Identity Theory hypothesises that identity development is the result of the internalisation of one's life narrative which gives meaning and coherence to one's life (Ergün 2020). A narrative entails the integration of multiple life events which affect one's sense-of-self via the reflection of personal experiences. The constant reinterpretation of one's history to align it with one's growing sense-of-self underscores the significance of personal narrative in identity creation as asserted by this theory. The functionality of this theory is apt in observing the processual instances of environmental identity development of the literary characters sought to be analysed in this thesis where their involvement with nature and the portrayal of their acts in relation to the environment in the narratives inform the intelligibility of their environmentally-internalised selves.

These traditional identity theories put forth social and psychological factors as the key drivers in identity creation, elucidating people's way of self-identification without any specific emphasis on the environmental dimension. This is where ecopsychology steps in, broadening the existing identity theories

and explicating the concept of self-identification by integrating the human-nature nexus. Ecopsychology asserts that human and the natural world are intimately intertwined (Harrild and Luke 2020) and that the development of ecological consciousness essentially leads to the development of complete selfhood, as opposed to the traditional theories' emphasis on the personal and social dimensions. This is an acknowledgment of the impact of the human-nature nexus on identity formation, along with the impacts of social groups and life stages.

The Social Identity Theory, for instance, could be employed by environmental advocacy groups, membership of which substantially affects an individual's self-concept. The values and standards of these groups shape the individual's environmental identity, thus promoting environmental awareness and its accompanying behaviours. Likewise, McAdams' Narrative Identity Theory asserts the significance of ecological experiences in one's life story. One's experience with conservation efforts or natural disasters may cause a shift in his inner self and his level of environmental consciousness. Ecopsychology is essentially the integration of identity theories and eco-consciousness, underscoring the effect of nature on the behavioural formation of individuals or groups. The application of traditional identity theories to environmental contexts provides a different angle from which to assess the formation of eco-identity. Environmental elements may be incorporated into the theories of Social Identity, Psychosocial Development, and Narrative Identity to improve insights on human's environmental behaviour changes over time.

Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory explicates that one attains a sense of identity from his social affiliations. Hence, people who participate in environmental support groups such as Greenpeace may potentially develop their social identities on top of advocating for environmental matters. As such, their

identity becomes deeply entrenched with the group's principles related to climate change, sustainability, and conservation. They may subsequently be motivated to adopt an eco-friendlier lifestyle. Hence, the Social Identity Theory offers relevant perspectives on how identities and behaviours are shaped by common ecological goals and group dynamics.

Likewise, Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory can be applied to assess people's incorporation of environmental issues experienced at various stages in their life into their identity. A dramatic effect on one's self-concept may ensue as a result of his engagement with environmental initiatives during adolescence, specifically during the "identity vis-à-vis role confusion" phase (Orenstein and Lewis 2022: 17). A teenager could develop a solid environmental identity by participating in school activities related to environmentalism. Such ecological awakening shapes their eco-identity as citizens of the world, thus affecting their future career and lifestyle. Erikson's theory hence enriches our comprehension of how our key life stages are related to our eco-experiences which, in turn, form our eco-identities.

McAdams' Narrative Identity Theory alternatively elucidates how eco-experiences affect one's life narrative. This theory asserts that the internalisation of one's life story is primarily and primordially driven by his eco-experiences. Seeing the destruction of natural habitats, for instance, may motivate an individual to venture into lifelong eco-advocacy. Such eco-experience can substantially transform and reinforce his eco-identity. These ecopsychological theories, in general, underscore the intimate link between one's self-concept and his eco-experience, offering an in-depth knowledge regarding the effect of social and personal dimensions in shaping his eco-behaviour and advocacy by incorporating the environmental dimension into the traditional psychological frameworks.

Another pertinent perspective in assessing one's environmental identity has to do with cultural aspects. Individuals' perceived relationship with nature may be influenced by cultural experiences, which would in turn shape their eco-identities (Chwialkowska, Bhatti and Glowik 2020). Ecological elements are rampant in many cultures as they are incorporated into people's identities in a myriad of ways. This is a critical point from which to evaluate the formation of eco-identities worldwide.

The link between identity and land has been established in indigenous societies. The Maori culture of *whakapapa*, for instance, foregrounds ancestral links as well as components of nature including rivers, forests, and mountains (Lorenzo 2017: 18). Likewise, in Malaysia, like those tribal communities all over the world, the indigenous communities have a close bond with nature. Such intimacy is further bolstered through many cultural and religious practices that involve natural elements such as exorcism, shamanism, and peace-offering (Lorenzo 2017). In their eyes, nature is a pivotal mechanism to inculcate social interactions and it is through such relationship with nature that the sense of amiable community takes place. Flora and fauna are quintessentially tethered to their innermost conviction and identity, "which can be represented symbolically by the expression 'it is from the land that we come, and it is to the land that we shall eventually go'" (Mat Dong, Midmore and Plotnikova 2022: 1231).

In these holistic worldviews, there appears to be a blurred line, however, between nature and culture whereby one's identity is formed through the constructive influences from the natural world. Environmental preservation is a key aspect of spirituality and cultural identity beyond the lines of their responsibility. Such deeply profound bond with nature illustrates the entwinement between culture and eco-identity. This philosophical view is also

similarly evident in the Native American traditions, underscoring the pertinence of living in harmony with nature. In these cultural frameworks, emphasis is placed upon environmental conservation and sustainability, underlined by how ecological concerns are being addressed. Unfortunately, the dualistic perspective pitting humanity against nature has resulted in a separation between the two, especially from the Western lens. The widespread cultural perception that ecological issues have nothing to do with the formation of self-concept limits the incorporation of eco-identity. Examining eco-identity through a cross-cultural lens enriches our understanding of how ecological interactions are influenced by cultural values, customs, and worldviews. The eco-identity body of knowledge expands with the inclusion of numerous cultural viewpoints into ecopsychology, accentuating, therefore, the need for inclusive strategies as a solution to environmental concerns.

Contemporary research on eco-identity and ecopsychology highlights the growing significance of ecological consciousness in shaping individual and group behaviour and self-concept, particularly in responding to the international concerns of climate change and biodiversity loss (Pong and Tam 2023). A solid eco-identity brings about numerous psychological benefits including increased well-being, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose (Netuveli and Watts 2020). Individuals who identify themselves as environmentalists have a higher likelihood of taking actual environmental protection measures (Irawan, Elian and Benius 2022). Meanwhile, eco-experiences such as being in close proximity with nature or participating in environmental initiatives have been shown to be instrumental in the gradual formation of one's eco-identity (Molinario et al. 2020), thereby lending support to the notion of eco-identity's dynamism due to continuous contact with ecological elements.

Even so, eco-identity theories and ecopsychology are not spared from reproaches. Their detractors have highlighted the limitation of conventional identity theories in navigating the intricacies of eco-identity, particularly in the presence of ecological elements. To illustrate this point, eco-identity is insufficient for explaining the political and socio-economic challenges that prevent people from advocating for the environment, even amongst those with solid ecological self-concept (Karimi and Mohammadimehr 2022). Some academics have even questioned the capacity of eco-identity in ensuring the continuity of environmental deeds (Barth et al. 2021). It appears that external variables such as regulatory frameworks, community support, and financial incentives affect behaviour significantly, notwithstanding the effect of a strong eco-identity (Ling and Xu 2021). Whilst acknowledging insightful views on eco-identity, these criticisms also urge the necessity for more multidisciplinary studies and for integrating ecopsychology with socio-political elements.

In sum, ecopsychology boosts one's psychological well-being apart from motivating environmental protection both at the personal and community levels. It is a robust framework for promoting sustainable behaviours towards environmental preservation via serious integration of identity and eco-awareness. Existing knowledge on how the environmental dimension shapes individual and group identities is enriched with the extension of traditional identity theories to include ecopsychology which accentuates the entwinement between self-concept and environmental behaviour. Specifically, eco-awareness is integrated into the Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, Erikson's Psychosocial Development, and McAdams' Narrative Identity frameworks, as explained earlier. With contemporary research highlighting the psychological and behavioural advantages of eco-identity formation, the cross-cultural lens further enriches this body of knowledge. Ultimately, ecopsychology provides a crucial platform on

which contemporary environmental issues can be addressed, thereby addressing how identity promotes sustainable behaviour and ecological accountability.

3.3.1 Ecopsychology and Dualism

Ecopsychology challenges Western dualism between the mind (psyche) and nature (matter) by treating human and environmental health as fundamentally intertwined through the examination of the ways in which ecopsychology destabilises the unbending division between human psychology and nature (Cox 2021). Ecopsychology's aim is to dismantle the conception that the mind is independent of nature, asserting that mental health and environmental health are fundamentally intertwined (Thoma, Rohleder and Rohnes 2021). The Cartesian concept of dualism maintains the inflexible distinction between the material and the psychological, rendering the alienation of human from nature. The proponents of ecopsychology, Fisher and Roszak, assert that individual and collective healing necessitates comprehension of the complex nexus between human consciousness and nature. Such understanding is crucial in the advocacy for integrated strategies towards remedying mental health and environmental crises (Fisher 2013; Roszak 1995). This study, therefore, purports to unravel the ways in which ecopsychology reveals the complex human-nature relationship, thereby deconstructing dualism and providing a novel lens through the construct of personal eco-identity in the literary characters.

The Cartesian dualism, particularly, holds sway in the conventional dualistic separation between the mind and nature (Dika 2020). With nature perceived as external to the human experience, the human-nature divide exacerbates. Ecopsychology counters this notion by asserting that human and

nature are fundamentally intertwined. Ecopsychology fundamentally raises cognisance of the delicate link between environmental health and human mental health. Fisher (2013) challenges the logic behind the distinction between mind and matter, underlining its damaging effect on well-being, both ecologically and psychologically. He demonstrates that the human-nature separation contributes to today's prevailing ecological disasters and that addressing it is crucial in rehabilitating the human psychology and the environment (Maitra 2021). A "radical ecology of mind", he views, is required in understanding the mental state of human based on individual interaction with the environment, perceived as the key ecological components (Maitra 2021: 41).

The notion of dualism is contended further by Roszak (1995) who asserts the significance of nature in shaping human psychology. He has coined the phrase "the voice of the Earth", also his book's namesake, proposing that human constantly interacts with nature and that without such interaction, human psychology would suffer (Durvenic, Marjanik and Pieniazek-Markovic 2022: 20). The human-nature relationship can be revitalised by treating nature as a key component of human identity and well-being instead of viewing it as a peripheral or extraneous element altogether. The restoration of this relationship is achievable via approaches such as eco-therapy (Baudon and Jachens 2021), whereby nature serves as a therapeutic tool for human based on the mind and the strength of environmental relatedness. Ecopsychology proves useful in challenging the mind-matter dichotomy, accentuating the centrality of environmental elements in unveiling human psychology.

In literary analysis, ecopsychology offers a unique perspective in the exploration of the human-nature nexus. It enables readers to dissect the intricate link between the characters' mental state and their environment by disassembling

the notion of dualism (Ruckert, Casson and Kuh 2021). Such approach enriches understanding of how nature shapes the characters' identity, behaviour, and psychology particularly when assessing nature-oriented works. The integration of ecopsychology into literary analysis enables an examination of the characters' relationship with nature to reveal the varying themes of connectivity, healing, and alienation. In Malaysian literature in English, the depiction of nature often facilitates a clearer spectacle of cultural identity, stressing people's psychological and spiritual link to the natural world (Zainal 2019). An ecopsychological framework elucidates how the breakdown of this link can result in personal and social problems that are often triggered by modernisation or environmental ruin. It is observed in K.S. Maniam's works, for instance, where characters are portrayed as struggling with their identity in a constantly shifting surrounding, whereby disengagement with nature denotes psychological issues.

Ecopsychology may facilitate the unravelling of nature's symbolism and personification in literary works. Narratives which portray a living creature in the setting are often a reflection of the characters' emotional and psychological conditions. Hence, nature depicted in these literary works is not merely a setting. Nature is the central force driving all characters and storyline development. Ecopsychology explicates this as the dismantling of the mind-matter dualism and a demonstration of the significance of nature in affecting human emotion and psychology. The ecopsychological lens allows readers to comprehend the ways in which environmental degradation, such as deforestation and climate change as depicted in the narrative, affects the characters' psychology and exemplifies their psychological state of depression, anxiety, or grief. The incorporation of ecopsychology further enables critics to understand how the characters confront ecological loss and how this situation echoes wider eco-cultural views.

Overall, ecopsychology allows for novel insights into literary analysis, particularly regarding the human-nature relationship and how it leads to the formation of identity, emotion, and behaviour, thus proving the non-dichotomy between mind and matter. Such denunciation of dualism eases the way to understanding the cultural and ecopsychological mechanisms of societal norms represented in literary works. As opposed to the Western propagation of human-nature and mind-matter dualism, ecopsychology puts forth a more holistic perspective regarding the intricate link between human psychology and the natural world (Zainal 2021b). This shift in worldview, notably in relation to Malaysian English literature, widens the insight into the relationship aside from transforming cultural narratives and impacting societal structures.

In summary, a solid understanding of eco-based characters and narratives is enhanced via the lens of ecopsychology. Alienation from nature may expose a wide variety of psychological issues in the characters. By using the framework of ecopsychology, one can understand the benefit of restoring the human-nature relationship in remedying the effect of dualism on the cultural and psychological dimensions. Essentially, ecopsychology goes against the notion of dualism, asserting its damaging consequences on both mental and environmental health as expounded by its proponents, Fisher and Roszak, on top of driving a comprehensive strategy that acknowledges the mutuality between human psychology and the natural world. Additionally, an awareness of such bond shifts our literary approach in unravelling how characters in nature-based narratives interact with their environment. A long-standing Western epistemic tendency suggesting nature as absolutely detached from human identity formation and psychological state is challenged by ecopsychology via literary analysis, deepening our understanding, therefore, of the contrary, implication of which goes beyond the literary realm insofar as it informs ethical imagination, readerly affect, and cultural understandings of human-environment relations. This

framework also offers an all-encompassing comprehension in cultural and psychological analyses, notably in the context of people who have an inherent bond with nature such as those in Malaysia. Overall, ecopsychology is a robust framework from which to reconsider the human-nature bond towards developing more holistic and sustainable outlooks.

3.3.2 Ecological Consciousness

Ecological consciousness refers to environmental knowledge, understanding, and behavioural attitude of the community (Miroshkin et al. 2019), constituting the centrality to the advocacy of sustainable activities amid escalating environmental woes including pollution, climate change, and the destruction of habitats. Ecological consciousness may develop at the individual or group level (Bulueva, Israilova and Magomedova 2023). Separately, each level significantly affects people's eco-behaviours, but collectively, they affect a considerable and actual environmental change.

Individual experiences, attitudes, and education (Salazar et al. 2022) are the foundation of personal ecological consciousness. It reflects individuals' view of their relationship with nature, their emotional attachment to the environment, and the decisions they make in reaction to ecological issues. Individual awareness drives actions that can help to lessen environmental impact, such as recycling and energy conservation. Nevertheless, addressing significant environmental challenges requires more than individual efforts. Communal ecological consciousness entails a community's general beliefs and behaviours, driven by their customs, norms, and shared cultural behaviours which typically motivate environmental protection. Clean-up campaigns, environmental legislation,

advocacy, and educational initiatives are some examples of eco-related community activities. Such eco-awareness may trigger positive behavioural shifts and establish an eco-friendly atmosphere within the community.

A close examination on both individual and collective ecological consciousness reveals their intricate intertwinement. There is a crucial need to understand this relationship considering the significance of individual attitudes and social behaviours in driving ecological sustainability. Personal ecological consciousness refers to an individual's environmental awareness, attitudes, and behaviours, as affected by numerous elements including social upbringing, education, and core beliefs. Insights into personal ecological consciousness are pertinent when one decides to commit to environmental causes. This level of ecological consciousness is composed of several components, most notable of which are knowledge and awareness, behavioural practices, emotional ties to the environment, and value-based decisions. The knowledge and awareness component refers to the individual's understanding of his environment and how the ecosystem is affected by human activities. People's environmental knowledge is typically gained from reading, formal schooling, or personal experiences with nature. Learning about pollution, climate change, and deforestation may trigger the adoption of eco-friendly behaviours. Lived nature experiences are when individuals witness biodiversity first-hand and develop a sense of environmental responsibility therefrom, thus heightening their awareness. This is crucial in the advocacy for sustainable living.

Communal ecological consciousness refers to the community's general understanding of, attitudes towards, and behaviour in relation to the environment. As the term suggests, communal ecological consciousness entails shared behaviours, customs, and cultural norms which form the community's

standpoint with respect to environmental matters (Shteynberg et al. 2020). Communities significantly stimulate the sense of shared ecological responsibility towards achieving sustainability. This level of consciousness is fostered by several elements, specifically traditions and cultural practices, collective action, shared norms and values, education and social learning, and interaction with the individual ecological consciousness. Many communities hold traditional customs and cultural practices that are strongly linked to the environment, encouraging a balanced way of living with nature. Certain indigenous societies, for instance, practice centuries-worth of sustainable land management practices entailing forest protection and rotational cropping. Such cultural customs are highly significant for maintaining ecological balance (Constant and Taylor 2020). Hence, there is a crucial need to preserve these customs to ensure lasting resilience and collective identity as well as environmental protection.

Through collective action and coordinated measures, communities can fortify their environmental conservation efforts, notwithstanding the contributions of individuals. Such collective efforts may entail tree planting, neighborhood clean-ups, or renewable energy advocacy. These initiatives would bring the community members closer, thus developing a sense of purpose and solidarity. Indeed, communities are typically instrumental in demanding for environmental legislation, cooperating with local governments, and driving broader societal transformations. Communities' ecological consciousness is fundamentally impelled by the ability to bring people and resources together to achieve a joint environmental mission (Ardoin, Bowers and Wheaton 2023).

Shared norms and values, indicating the normalisation of acts of environmental stewardship such as recycling, composting, and conserving water — all performed collectively. In some cultures, the communal acts of reducing

waste or protecting regional ecosystems are considered as obligations to both the society and the environment. Eco-friendly behaviours become second nature in communities with deeply rooted belief in environmental sustainability. This leads to the creation of a supportive environment that validates sustainable initiatives. Education and social learning as part of the shared environmental norms and values within a community highlights the community's role as the disseminator of environmental knowledge whether via seminars, social gatherings, or public awareness activities (Tam et al. 2021). Informal education such as knowledge passed down from elders or shared by peers greatly facilitates eco-knowledge propagation and the formation of sustainable behaviours. Social learning ensures the embeddedness of ecological awareness within the community's identity and that it is inherited to the next generations. Beyond local settings, collective ecological awareness can aid in the advocacy for environmental policies and mobilise progressive environmental actions.

In conclusion, both individual and collective ecological consciousness substantially affect the creation of sustainable environmental behaviours. Whilst individual environmental interactions are compelled by personal ecological consciousness — developed by way of personal knowledge, beliefs, emotional ties, and daily behaviours — collective ecological consciousness is rooted in shared customs, group behaviours, and cultural norms, impacting and refining individual knowledge. New ideas presented by individuals initiate collective change, whilst communities provide a supportive environment that facilitate the adoption and retention of eco-friendly behaviours. Individual and community ecological consciousness have a dynamic relationship, leading to the creation of a mutual interaction which bolsters ecological consciousness and action, thus substantially increasing the possibility of momentous environmental reform. Both facilitate the advancement of a highly ecologically conscious and sustainable society by way of reinforcement, communal education, and transformation.

Ultimately, the individual and collective efforts may potentially reach a balanced awareness towards addressing contemporary environmental woes and dilemmas.

3.3.3 Pro-Environmental Behaviour

One significant area of environmental psychology is identity and the formation of pro-environmental behaviour which synthesises the relationships between identity formation and the inclination towards an environmentally-oriented behaviour. It also outlines how personal and social identities can influence people's behaviour towards the environment. Pro-environmental conducts and environmental identity are linked in the manner in which human are more inclined to behave in ways that preserve the environment when they consider themselves a part of it. Behaving in a way that promotes environmental sustainability and preservation includes any acts that support these goals. Since identity affects people's attitudes, beliefs, and intentions, it plays a significant role in determining human conduct. By ensuring that human values are consonant with ecological objectives, a strong environmental identity promotes a pro-environmental behaviour. An increased likelihood of recycling, energy conservation, and support for environmental groups is seen in those who have strong environmental identities. Their dedication to preserving the environment and sense of duty motivate their efforts.

The increasing severity of climate change, resource depletion, and other ecological issues of today have given rise to the necessity, and indeed, the importance of comprehending positive environmental behaviours. Such behaviours are typically a result of one's environmentally morphed sense-of-self (Legere and Kang 2020). Personal identity, referring to one's personal perception

of his environmental obligations, and social identity, relating to the one's self-concept derived from his group norms, are pertinent in driving environmental action. People with high environmental awareness or those hailing from a closely knit environmental-conscious community would be predisposed to display these values in their actions (Sherif 2022). The notion of pro-environmental behaviour presents the psychological factors influencing environmental behaviour, thereby highlighting the role of identity in altering one's sense of environmental responsibility and motivating the corresponding action. In other words, the concept of pro-environmental behaviour aims to elucidate the psychological elements that affect environmental actions, emphasising the significance of identity in transforming one's perception of environmental responsibility. More specifically, it focuses on the role of individual and group identities in spurring meaningful environmental efforts (Wang et al. 2021) and motivating widespread behavioural reforms (Wan and Deng 2022) demonstrable in the real-world cases. The aim is to explicate how identity-based approaches can facilitate sustainability efforts via actual evidence.

The psychological mechanisms shaping people's perception of their environmental obligations and consequently, the construction of their personal and social identities are derived from a deep-rooted commitment to the environment which indispensably leads to the development of an environmental self-identity. With such solid environmental consciousness, one would tend to adopt sustainable behaviours such as recycling, conserving energy, and opting for eco-friendly products (Silvi and Padilla 2021). Personal identity, navigated by one's fundamental eco-principles, inspires him to routinely act in environmentally sustainable ways such as opting for non-plastic usage. Meanwhile, social identity is shaped by a sense of belonging to a certain community pertinent to nature which endorses certain environmental beliefs and standards. Communities that uphold environmental care as their core value tend to have members who display positive

eco-behaviours demonstrable in neighborhood-based initiatives such as urban gardening, recycling programs, and renewable energy projects (Jones et al. 2021). In Malaysia, certain indigenous communities that are culturally linked to nature often rally together for river and forest conservation efforts due to their shared social identity (Abas, Azmi and Awang 2022).

Both social and personal identities facilitate the translation of environmental standards into applied behaviours via solid psychological processes as these identities crucially promote the widespread of pro-ecological behaviours as they steer both individual and group efforts. Amongst the most prominent environmental initiatives driven by personal identity is the zero-waste movement (Akmal Mustafa, Muhammad Arif and Abu Bakar 2023). On this score, an eco-conscious person tends to adopt a zero-waste lifestyle by opting for non-single-use plastics or reusing items. Apart from reducing waste, such lifestyle reflects behavioural modifications towards the formation of a sustainable identity. To illustrate, Malaysia's prominent environmental activist, Melissa Tan, is observed to lead a sustainable lifestyle and inspires others to practice the same via workshops and social media campaigns — indeed a real-life proof that personal identity can affect environmental decisions (Salvador 2023). Likewise, social identity has also contributed significantly to successful environmental initiatives. The indigenous Dusun and Murut tribes in Sabah, Malaysia, are culturally linked to nature where forest conservation is intrinsic to their sense of community (Salvador 2023). Although unwholly reflective of Malaysia's practice of pro-environmental behaviour, these communities practice sustainable agricultural methods, protect their forests, and preserve the habitats of endangered species — all achieved successfully via group efforts and the strong desire to safeguard their natural heritage. These instances demonstrate the power of identity in driving significant environmental actions. Whether they are materialised by dint of

individual behaviour or larger community-led efforts, their endeavours are united in the common goal of positive and desirable ecological outcomes.

Identity and environmental behaviour are indeed closely linked based on the manners in which individuals and organisations recognise their environmental obligations and behave accordingly. As personal identity or self-concept is driven by one's experiences, values, and beliefs, a person in possession of these traits would demonstrate deliberate actions that are congruent with such awareness such as conserving energy and reducing carbon footprint. Taking personal environmental responsibility and making decisions based on these values, therefore, point to a strong link between self-identity and behaviour (Balundė and Perlaviciute 2023). Meanwhile, social identity, defined by a sense of belonging to a group with common beliefs and standards, significantly affects individual behaviour, resulting in likeminded actions. The social identity theory asserts such notion in that the adherence to collective norms by the group members reinforces the collective behaviour.

In examining the links between environmental attitude and conduct attributable to stewardship, Robert Gifford and Reuven Sussman (2012) observe that environmental attitudes demonstrate concern and care for the environment. They classify pro-environmental behaviours as the "behaviour undertaken to preserve or improve environmental quality" (Gifford and Sussman 2012: 73) which takes more than just an intimation of information to inspire individuals to adopt pro-environmental actions. Formal education may not be as crucial to environmental commitment as outdoor experiences and involvement in environmental groups. Long-term stewardship activities may cause one to become personally interested in restoration. Regular volunteers' social contacts may have an impact on their attitudes and actions. Pro-environmental behaviours are

predicted when an individual believes that he can dispense the proper environmental conduct, when societal norms are seen to support the activity, and when one's attitudes and behaviours are similar in terms of specificity (Dresner et al. 2014). By understanding how identity affects behaviour, we are able to recognise the significance of these psychological mechanisms in upholding environmental obligations. Further examination may reveal other key implications of identity in supporting sustainable behaviours. Ultimately, solid personal and group environmental identities significantly promote pro-environmental behaviours which may help address global ecological woes.

Applying this concept to the present study, the relevance of pro-environmental behaviour to literary analysis lies in how characters' environmental consciousness and actions reflect the psychological, cultural, and social formation of identity. In Malaysian English literature especially, works foregrounding the characters' lives embedded in local ecologies are often portrayed in these characters' demonstration of a reciprocal relationship with their environment, whether through resistance to ecological destruction, memory-laden landscapes, or spiritual affinity with nature. These narratives do not merely illustrate sustainability but dramatise the co-evolution of self and setting. Pro-environmental behaviours in fiction signal how identity and environment are mutually constitutive, in that characters come to know who they are through their relationship with place, and their ecological attachments shape ethical agency. This reinforces the thesis's broader argument that literary demonstrations of eco-consciousness are not at all peripheral to identity formation, but central to it, revealing that sustainable behaviours, whether individual or collective, are rooted in deep-seated ecological belonging and emotional investment. As such, the study of pro-environmental behaviour enriches the literary analysis by providing a psychological and cultural framework through which the enactment of personal eco-identity in fiction may be best understood and appreciated.

3.3.4 Environmental Concern

Our fears and concerns about the condition of the environment may have its roots in our sense of place. One's environmental concern can be a powerful motivator towards addressing environmental issues. In order to discover individuals' aspirations to protect the environment, the need to care for environmental action are of utmost importance whereby a delicate equilibrium between positive and negative emotions regarding the environment must be properly managed so as to avoid misjudgement and, *ipso facto*, environmental misconduct (Simons 2021). Identity shapes people's perceptions of and reactions to ecological concerns, which, in turn, determines the degree of environmental care. People who identify strongly with the environment tend to care more about environmental concerns. Their relationship with nature sensitises them to the threat of environmental damage and subsequently inspires them to act. Their political views, lobbying activities, and lifestyle decisions typically represent this concern. Environmental concern is also shaped by cultural identity. Members of societies with deeply ingrained ecological values are known to exhibit greater degrees of environmental concern. Cultural narratives stressing the value of harmonious living with the natural world can foster environmental stewardship and a feeling of duty.

Environmental concern is deeply influenced by culture as well. Human perceptions about nature and the environment are influenced by distinct cultural attitudes which differ due to the peculiarities of each and every cultural tradition, practices, or beliefs. The higher the level of environmental concern in a society, the greater the prominence of a cultural orientation towards environmental attitudes (Tam and Milfont 2020). These cultural values can be perpetuated through social norms, traditions, and group behaviours that contribute to environmental stewardship and sustainability. Individual experiences with nature can have a

strong influence on their concern for the environment. Immersive physical experience with the environment through activities such as hiking, gardening, or wildlife observation can lead to a better understanding of natural complexity and provides a greater impetus to protect it rather than by simply observing the environment. Domalewska (2021) argues that this can potentially develop one's environmental identity and, as a result, heighten his environmental concern. Person-place bonding increases environmentally-positive behaviours by individually cultivating a sense of concern and care about nature.

There is an increasing global awareness regarding today's environmental woes such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation due to the devastating impact they have on the natural ecosystem and the significant ways in which such awareness has shifted the society's perspectives on and behaviours towards ecological preservation. Protection and preservation efforts are primarily driven by the concept of environmental concern (Hateftabar and Hall 2023), namely, the knowledge and the instinctive unease about the worrying state of ecology. Concern and behaviour are evidently linked, from individual efforts to mass participation in major advocacy initiatives. However, the extent of such concern and the subsequent behavioural acts spurred by it are very much dependent on individual experiences, emotional reactions, and cultural backgrounds.

The discourse now turns on the major role of cultural background in influencing how environmental challenges are perceived, thus affecting the attitudes and behaviours of people in advocating for environmental protection. Each culture has its own distinctive worldview, beliefs, and traditions; all of which determine how it perceives nature and, in turn, how it responds to ecological issues (Yue et al. 2020). Cultural narratives can either increase ecological consciousness or impede mitigation efforts. Indigenous cultures are observed to

be strong in their spirit of co-dependence with nature, with conservation as the recurring theme in describing this relationship. Environmental protection is ingrained in traditional customs, rendering it as a way of life rather than a mere concern (Hatala et al. 2020). These communities manage their farms, hunt, and gather resources in a sustainable manner to ensure that ecological balance is preserved, evidencing their profound respect for nature. Their cultural values endorse ecologically responsible behaviours and ensuring care for the planet. In contrast, industrialised communities see nature as a source for survival, exploiting it for economic and technical growth and dismissing ecological sustainability. Their sense of environmental concern may only be activated if the threat of ecological harm has direct consequences on their economy or health.

In the Malaysian culture, environmental concern results from the interaction between traditional values and modernisation. The country's cultural diversity — made up mainly of the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and the aborigines — makes for diverse perspectives on environmental conservation (Karpudewan 2021). The Malay culture traditionally emphasises on a harmonious co-existence with nature, reflected in its religious teachings, folklore, and proverbs. Such cultural standpoint promotes a healthy bond with the natural realm, with the latter perceived as a sacred ground worthy of protection and attentive care. Environmental concern is also reflected in the numerous works within Malaysian English literary tradition, addressing ecological woes such as deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity via the ecocritical lens. These narratives highlight the prevailing conflicts between nature-oriented traditional lifestyles and the contemporary demands for industrialisation and modernisation (Quayum 2003). With the incorporation of local histories, landscapes, and cultural values, these narratives facilitate the propagation of ecological knowledge and insight into the accompanying environmental challenges.

Hence, environmental concern can be fostered by strong cultural dimension. The development of environmental attitudes and how they potentially translate into ecological actions can be understood through cultural narratives, either by those advocating for nature or those favoring modernisation. The significance of environmental concern in mobilising individual and group initiatives in tackling today's pressing ecological problems cannot be undermined. Such concern and its direct effect on human behaviour are demonstrated by empowering advocacy movements and shifts towards sustainability, with the facilitation of the cultural dimension. The cultural narratives in Malaysian English literature, whether contemporary or traditional, accentuate the significance of environmental protection on top of delineating the mass reaction to ecological issues. Broader behavioural change remains limited due to economic restrictions, dearth of information, and differing cultural views, even with the increased levels of the characters' ecological awareness. Indeed, this underscores the intricate link between human existence and nature, unravelling a clearer perspective towards environmental issues canvassed in Malaysian English literature. Cultural-based perception and mitigation of environmental woes are primarily stimulated by cultural narratives, with some highlighting the need to live in balance with nature and others underlining economic or industrial motivations (Abdul Manaf and Quayum 2001).

In this regard, the literary dimension of environmental concern in Malaysian literature in English provides a seedbed for exploring how cultural narratives and character experiences shape ecological consciousness. Environmental concern is often expressed through nostalgic personal and culturally situated encounters with ecological loss, degradation, or resilience. Characters who experience anxiety, grief, or anger in response to environmental damage frequently channel these emotions into forms of resistance, memory, or healing — revealing that environmental concern is not simply psychological but

narratively constructed and socially embedded. These fictional portrayals reflect how emotions catalyse action and how identity, shaped by cultural and ecological contexts, becomes a site for negotiating environmental ethics. Ultimately, by illustrating how environmental concern arises from place-based attachments and is channelled through cultural expression, literature foregrounds the principle of mutual constitution — that self and environment are co-constitutive and that meaningful ecological engagement emerges from this relational entanglement.

3.3.5 Ecophilia and Ecophobia

Scholarly discourses on environmental awareness and behaviour are seen to be increasing in the notional emphasis of ecophilia and ecophobia within ecopsychology. Ecophobia refers to the fear or aversion to nature, leading to a sense of indifference and detachment (Vitaliivna, Mykolaiovych and Ivanovych 2021), whilst ecophilia denotes its exact opposite, namely, the love and affinity for the natural world, resulting in individuals' solid bond with it (Klochko et al. 2022). Both pose an effect on one's ecological consciousness, either swaying one's perception favourably towards the environment or discouraging his interaction with it. In the state of the world today — mired in ecological devastations — there is a need to explore how these affective elements influence behaviours related to environmental protection and resource manipulation. Both are significantly influenced by the prevailing environmental policies, cultural narratives, and education, leading to either love for or fear of nature.

The discourse on the ecophilia-ecophobia dyad begins with the unravelling of theoretical underpinnings of both concepts. Essentially, ecophilia and ecophobia are contrasting emotional states which determine one's manner of

interaction with nature. Ecophilia is a derivation of the term 'biophilia', referring to the inherent love for and bond with nature. Ecophilia is described as an inborn human characteristic stemming from our instinctive desire to bond with the natural environment (Goloshubin and Pavlova 2022). An intrinsic bond with nature comes with a sense of responsibility and belonging to it, inspiring one to protect the natural world and to live in harmony with it.

In contrast, ecophobia does not only connote environmental indifference but reflects the feeling of animosity towards nature, resulting from the subconscious belief that nature is erratic and destructive or from a sense of vulnerability amid environmental decay. This emotional state not only causes one to be estranged from nature, but also to prioritise human over the environment. This idea includes a variety of negative emotions towards nature in general such as hate, disgust, or apathy. Causes of ecophobia may include traumatic experiences in nature, lack of exposure to nature, or exposure to the cultural narratives, casting nature as malevolent or threatening. The notion of ecophobia was introduced by David Sobel in 1996 to articulate how our fearful, paranoid, and negative thoughts about the planet can negatively influence our practices in environmental education and stewardship (Murphy 2023). A balance between ecophiliac and ecophobic attitudes can have large effects on the general societal attitudes surrounding environmental headlines.

By affecting either a sense of love or hate for the environment, ecophilia and ecophobia are pertinent to the development of ecological consciousness. Distinguishing these two may encourage deepened comprehension of how sentimental attachments to nature can influence people's attitudes and actions towards environmental care. Ecological consciousness as a result of human interdependence with nature is conceptually related to the notions of ecophilia

and ecophobia as they bear crucially on human decision in the protection and preservation of natural ecosystem. Ecophilia raises ecological consciousness by driving a sense of empathy and environmental stewardship in one's acknowledgment of the value of nature and the moral obligation to protect it. Meanwhile, ecophobia decreases human ecological consciousness by instilling a sense animosity against the environment. People with ecophobia are indifferent to environmental protection as they see neither weight nor value to such initiative. This emotional disengagement often results in apathy and the manipulation of natural resources.

Indeed, it is crucial that understanding these two affective states and how they influence ecological consciousness may expose why environmental conservation efforts are advocated by some people or cultures but rejected by others. From the behavioural standpoint, ecophilia and ecophobia significantly affect and directly manifest people's ecological consciousness. Ecophilia commonly results in positive environmental actions. People with a strong bond with nature tend to partake in pro-environment initiatives, engage in conservation, promote sustainable farming, lessen personal wastes, and opt for energy-efficient practices, amongst others (Göbel 2022). An exophilic individual appears active in environmental advocacy and in pressuring governments to enact environmental protection laws whilst a person with ecophobic tendencies manifest deep hostility towards nature. An ecophobic individual perceives nature as a resource to be exploited for personal benefit. Such perception may result in harmful actions towards the environment including overconsumption, resource exhaustion, pollution, and destruction of natural habitats (Gaard 2020).

The behavioural impact of these affective states may encompass individuals and society at large. Exophilic cultures and societies commonly support

conservationist efforts, sustainable growth, and green movements. Ecophobic cultures, on the other hand, prioritise economic and industrial progress over ecological well-being. Clearly, these emotions crucially drive differing environmental behaviours, either bolstering or impeding ecological efforts (Zelenski and Desrochers 2021). Education and culture may also foster the development of ecophilia and ecophobia. Within the educational realm, classrooms incorporating discussions on nature may raise environmental consciousness, thus nurturing ecophilia. It is observed that environmental education programs on sustainable practices and outdoor learning, for instance, may drive students' personal bond with nature. Initiatives such as Malaysia's Eco-Schools Programs endorsed by WWF Malaysia motivate the adoption of sustainable habits amongst students such as reducing wastes, conserving energy, and protecting biodiversity (Suleiman Mohamoud, Maon and Kassim 2020). Meanwhile, non-exposure to outdoor activities or environmental education may heighten one's sense of ecophobia. Ecophobia-predisposed communities often lack green connection, thereby aggravating their alienation from nature and subsequently, further reinforcing their indifference to ecological issues. This highlights the significance of integrating environmental education into national curriculum to prevent ecophobia and promote ecological awareness.

The affective states of ecophilia and ecophobia may sway people's ecological consciousness and relationship with nature. Whilst ecophobia affects emotional detachment and the manipulation of nature, ecophilia fosters ecological bond and motivates positive eco-behaviours. Educational programs and cultural narratives influence the development of both emotive states, with policies serving as the key catalysts in driving positive eco-behaviours and mitigating all those to the contrary. Ecophilia-promoting initiatives include Malaysia's policies on biodiversity protection and its Eco-Schools Program. Ultimately, the development of a robust commitment to environmental sustainability necessitates the execution

of a wide-ranging strategy integrating education, cultural values, and facilitative policies. By doing so, individuals and societies would take accountability in protecting and preserving nature for the generations of tomorrow.

In literary texts, the emotional spectrum of ecophilia and ecophobia offers a compelling framework for understanding how characters' identities are shaped through their affective relationships with the environment. Malaysian literature in English often stages these emotional dynamics within narratives that portray characters negotiating ecological loss, cultural memory, and environmental belonging. Characters who embody ecophilia not only demonstrate care for nature but also articulate a deeper sense of self forged through the intimate and affective ties with the land, rivers, or forests. In contrast, ecophobic responses signal a rupture, where fear, alienation, or exploitation disrupt the ethical bond between self and environment. Through these representations, literature becomes a powerful space to examine the mutual constitution of identity and ecology, illustrating how emotional orientations towards nature influence both inner transformation and broader ecological engagement. Ultimately, ecophilia and ecophobia, as literary affective modes, deepen our understanding of how environmental subjectivity is formed and mobilised, reaffirming the thesis's proposed ideological lodestone that the self is always ecologically embedded and narratively constituted.

3.3.6 Conclusion of the Selected Concepts in Identity and Ecopsychology

Principally, an environmental identity inheres in a bi-dimensional domain — individual and social — which, in a similar vein, takes into account the cultural aspect of human experiences. The construction of environmental identity is

formed through the comprehension of human experiential, immersive, or cultural exposure to the natural world. Environmental identity is the result of the interacting consilience between the self and the environment within which human integration into the natural world propels a strong sense of ecological responsibility, and indeed, encourages pro-environmental conducts, driven mindfully by the strength of their appreciation of the complexity of identity and how it closely relates to the environment. Through these consolidative elements of human innate cognition and experiences with nature, this relational bond of interconnectedness and interdependence can evolve into a conscious sense of personal eco-identity, subsequently enabling human self-images distinguished by the ecological traits that solidify individuals' environmentally-encouraged sense of selves.

3.4 THE NOTION OF MUTUAL CONSTITUTION

In addressing the relational dynamics between human and nature in Malaysian literature in English, this section seeks to challenge the binary thinking where it posits the two as ontologically distinct. It adopts the notion of mutual constitution as its guiding principle, arguing that the representation of nature both in literary narratives and human lived experience produces, in effect, the idea that human and the natural world co-create one another by virtue of their interconnectedness. Mutual constitution implies a reciprocity between these entities in terms of interdependence in which the constitution of human self is continuously shaped through environmental immersion. This notion dismantles the human construct of hierarchical superiority that regards nature as an inert matter and human as autonomous agents.

As Barad (2011: 129) reminds us, the mutually constitutive oneness of human and nature as "entangled agencies" is not reducible to isolated components; it emerges through intra-action. In this sense, human identity — especially within colonially inflected and ecologically sensitive contexts like pre-independence Malaya — must be understood as evolving in tandem with and through environmental conditions. Literature, by lending its narrative form to these entanglements, becomes an ethical and imaginative space where the mutual constitution of identity and ecology is made visible.

This approach is necessary in light of the legacy of colonial exploitation which has severed many indigenous and local communities from traditional environmental relationships, thus dislocating identity from place. The works examined in this chapter represent literary characters whose subjectivities emerge from their entanglements with forest, soil, water, and animal life. These are not passive surroundings but active forces in the making of self. Ecocritics further deepen this claim by showing how systems of domination — whether over humans of lesser power or nature — rely on the same epistemic violence that denies co-agency and co-evolution. In acknowledging the mutual constitution of human and non-human worlds, this chapter offers not simply a critique of dualism but a reorientation towards embeddedness, entanglement, and ontological co-becoming. Malaysian literature in English thus becomes a site on which the fiction of separateness is deconstructed and where new models of subjectivity — ingrained in ecopsychological attunement and environmental co-agency — can take root.

The human-nature distinction has been the long-standing axiom of Western thought, innate in the historical Western philosophy in respect of environmental imagination which often emphasises a rigid divide between humanity and nature.

As Huggan and Tiffin (2015) argue, nature has been reduced merely to an aesthetic or peripheral self-standing agent, providing only support structures for human needs or actions. Here, nature is regarded simply as a being of inanimate creation, viewed only in its physicalistic terms and materialistic values. Deborah Brown (2007), in rejecting the view of nature as an inert object, argues against any manner of attempt to deny the feasibility of human-nature co-existence, aligning herself with that of René Descartes, a French philosopher, whose influence remains sturdy on contemporary thought, that human inclination to remove nature from the discursive dialectics of co-existence only attracts a litany of further connivances by humans to justify environmental exploitations on the strength of such assumed taxonomy. The objectification of nature has been widely critiqued for limiting the relativity of ecology to human lives. It bears noting that the object-subject conception of nature-human relations is indeed anthropocentric and that it only serves to reinforce the reductionist view of nature as subservient to human and that it renders the non-human inhabitants of the Earth merely "inorganic, fundamentally mathematical and hence objectively quantifiable" (Soper 2000b: 128).

Gaard (2012), observation of whom is analysed in depth in the antecedent chapter, makes a pertinent observation on the separatist mentality consuming human in their superiority over nature, as that of men over women, who are always assumed to be of lesser worth and power, in the equation of gender, both in terms of power, influence, and dominance. Just as it is ubiquitous in the man-women dynamics, such prevalence can be equally seen in the inferiority of nature to human. Here, human are quick to assume hierarchical importance over nature in that such entitlement is derived from the idea that the latter's function is merely for the former's best interests. Viewed from this spectacle, nature, like women, appears, in human eyes, to be of lesser worth and is deemed subservient to them. Such discriminatory view towards nature only affirms Gaard's (2012) conviction

of the perpetuation of "gendered dualism" where polarisation and declassification of nature as "animalised" women and "feminised" animals are dangerous and demand urgent revisioning (Gaard 2012: 17).

The parallels between human dominion over nature and men's patriarchal control over women with pronounced limitations and restrictions are drawn upon, amongst others, to suggest that both are underpinned by a misguided sense of entitlement and domination. These analogies expose how deep-seated biases against nature and women are intertwined and perpetuated culturally. By according due recognition to these appallingly flawed perceptions and by acknowledging their connections rightfully, a more equitable and sustainable interconnectedness between human and nature by virtue of their mutual constitution can be better understood. This analogy, however, is employed only illustratively rather than as an ecofeminist intervention remaining subordinate to this chapter's personal eco-identity focus.

Ultimately, this chapter proposes a re-evaluation of the traditional human-oriented approaches to nature and seeks to advocate for a refined view that recognises the interdependence of all living beings in the environment, both human and nature alike. Indeed, literature plays a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive and respectful interaction with the natural world. Environmental literary writings serve as a transformative tool in this re-evaluation as they essentially challenge the anthropocentric narratives and promote a deeper ecological awareness. The integrative approach as suggested by Braidotti (2010) and Serenella Iovino (2023) reveals the potentials found in literature to bridge the obvious gap between human and non-human realms which may potentially encourage mutual respect and enrich the understanding of their shared values. This may also deconstruct the belief which transposes nature to the external realm,

thereby disassembling the position of human as superior inhabitants to other non-human.

The issue of natural relatedness to and interdependence with humanity has been canvassed with great rigour in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively anent identity construction where a synthesised connection between nature and human behaviour provides a legitimate lens through which ecopsychological underpinnings prove useful in understanding the formation of self. The formation of self and, by extension, identity is mediated through the interfolding bond discriminable in the commingled dynamics between human and other-than-human selves — a distinct notion of 'intra-action' in marked contrast to 'interaction' — emphasising that entities emerge through relationships rather than pre-existing independently. Human cognition is formed not solely by virtue of physical or emotional exposures to interpersonal interactions, but also to an expansive extent, through a combination of human multi-sensory and experiential immersion in nature (Garbarini and Adenzato 2004; Gallagher 2005; Slingerland 2008). The sense of belonging as a result of human immersive experience in nature implies the physical affinity from which human develop as well as the emotional values by which they live, transcending all aspects of physicality which gradually transform "important phenomenological experiences in one's environment into one's sense of self" (Baxter and Pelletier 2019: 28).

In exploring the human-nature complementarity in the construction of personal eco-identity in this chapter, it is vital to consider the historical spectrum against which the literary works of Malaysian literature in English are set — that of colonial Malaya — in order to discern with precision, the roles of nature which was historically subjected to the British colonial administrative rules that had altered the economic course of the colonised society. It is recorded that British

colonial rule, in its frenzy to profit immensely from forestation because of its active "land speculation, trading profits and tax collecting" (Baker 1999: 211), had opened its door to immigrants largely from India and China, and further encouraged them, through a divide-and-rule policy, to work as labours for the Malays on the latter's tapioca, sugar, pepper, and gambier plantations first (Begbie 1967) and later, to venture in tin-mining (Hirschman 1986) and rubber plantations (Bhat, Narayan and Sahoo 2008), respectively. The native Malays, on the other hand, traditionally worked as rice planters, fishermen, and forest produce gatherers, sometimes with the cooperative aid of the aborigines in the peninsular. The Malays, feeling increasingly defeated in the competitive dynamics by the newcomers then "retreated further into the more remote part of Malaya to escape the competition" (Wan Yahya, Zainal and Abd Rahim 2009: 235). In this light, the following observation is instructive:

> Progress was denied to them and that professional qualification would never compensate for their skin was not white. Inevitably many were disappointed and resentful at the dichotomy between the belief in equality acquired through western education and the reality of inequality as practised in colonial society (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 228).

Due to the pervasive inequality and demographic segregation as a result of British imperialism, the people in the colonial Malaya, both locals and immigrants, were taxonomised into their respective race-based economies which were largely agrarian. The resulting effects of British colonialism on the social and economic livelihood of the colonised subjects in Malaya have seen the corrosive influence of colonial powers on the people in the form of dominion, control, oppression, and disempowerment. These unequal power relations between the coloniser and the

colonised is especially pronounced in the British paternalistic attitude towards its subjects, grounded firmly in the imperially paternalistic belief "that the management of the country or of individuals should be done in a manner of a father dealing with his children" (Hirschman 1986: 346). This approach however only conduced to generational poverty and had sadly driven the people away to the life of quiet retreat as "they themselves only wish to be left alone and to be allowed to develop in their traditional way of life with minimum outside interference" (Harper 1997: 8). Ultimately, such 'traditional way of life' stimulates a strong sense of relatedness to nature as a result of their excessive dependence on nature. This, in subsequence, only further amplifies the claim of this thesis that the consilience flowing from the human-non-human dynamics made manifest on the strength of their mutually constitutive and comingling entanglements contributes, in effect, to the construct of their personal eco-identities.

It is in the virtue of nature's interpolation into human lives that this chapter shall, in considerable detail, investigate by way of close textual analysis in *No Harvest but a Thorn*, *Jungle of Hope*, *Between Lives*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, *Days of Change*, and *Yalpanam* these associative relations between human and nature and how they influence the processual steps to the characters' construction of their respective personal eco-identities. The textual analysis provided in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively compares and contrasts the novels with the notion of mutual constitution which inheres and indeed, fortifies human attitudinal inclination and psychological behaviours orbiting around the environmental sphere which influence and ultimately, shape personal eco-identities. The construct of personal eco-identity seeks to dismantle the erstwhile deterministic assumption about nature and human as two separate entities and to bring about a unified view of their interdependence. The harmonisation between nature and humanity strives to convey that human culture is not foreign to but rather interdependent with other natural and ecological beings. Human psychology pertinent to the

construction of personal eco-identity bears closely on the relative connection to nature around which human feel, perceive, internalise, and externalise their sense of selves and through which self-reflexive, interactional, and communicative dynamics arising from the social and natural processes can effectively and productively coalesce the otherwise unbridgeable gap between the mental and the natural.

3.5 THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK OF PERSONAL ECO-IDENTITY IN THE STUDY

This section presents the proposed framework within which the construct of personal eco-identity is examined by means of observing the manifestation of actions, behaviours, and attitudes of the literary characters in the selected Malaysian novels written in English, the narratives of which are captured in the pre-independence settings. This framework is built upon the conceptual conflux stemming from the selected concepts grounded in ecocriticism and identity study within ecopsychology, therefore termed as 'The Framework of Personal Eco-Identity'. This study applies the embedding theories ranging from ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology as the conceptual framework to demonstrate the manifestations and representations of personal eco-identity in the literary characters in the selected Malaysian novels written in English of the pre-independence era by way of close textual analysis. The "environmental referentiality", as Buell aptly puts it (Buell 1995: 296), forms the cornerstone of environmental identities activated by natural imperatives — that all pertinent concepts in ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology ultimately seek to highlight the dyads of human mind and ecology in terms of their mutual functions in and contributions to the construction of personal eco-identity

entrenched in the literary characters of the selected Malaysian novels written in English.

The expansion and indeed, the interpolation of identity studies within ecopsychology into literary ecocriticism highlight these respective fields' relevance for interpreting environmental consciousness and psychological development within fiction. The selected Malaysian English novels echo many of the ecopsychological themes outlined by Roszak, Glendinning, Buzzell, and others — the alienation caused by industrial modernity, the restorative potential of nature, and the trauma of ecological disconnection. Through detailed characterisations and symbolic landscapes, these texts explore the effects of detachment from the natural world and the possibility of renewal through ecological re-immersion. Whether characters experience moments of transcendence, healing, or identity reconstruction, literature becomes a vital medium through which ecopsychological insights are not only reflected but narratively realised. This study thus participates in the broader project of ecopsychology and identity by imagining, interrogating, and modelling pathways back to ecological belonging.

This study using the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity is an exercise of ecocriticism undertaken together with the overlapping realms of identity studies within ecopsychology where, using the methodology of close textual analysis, the ecopsychological ideas of environmental identities are drawn upon to investigate the nexus between the roles and influences of nature as well as the construct of personal eco-identity based on the panoply of insights derived from the theories grounded in ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology. The behavioural proclivities of individuals accentuating the notion of personal eco-identity on the strength of the dynamics of their interactions, perceptions, and

relationships with nature are analysed in this study and informed by historical, cultural, and social signals appropriate to the Malaysian environmental context that has taken place in Malaysia — historically, culturally, and socially.

3.5.1 The Functionality of the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity

In observing the literary characters' personal eco-identities, the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity, in essence, seeks to examine the characters' formation of personal eco-identity in which its construction is arguably formed through the inevitable interrelation of humanity to the environment, acting importantly as an agentic force that impacts heavily on human's internalised psyche and externalised disposition in their ecologically-influenced selves. In analysing how these behavioural and attitudinal manifestations are reflected in the works of literature, the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity offers a meaningful way to explore how deeply our identities are intertwined with the ecological state of the Earth and how these connections influence individual lives. An analytical attempt is made, to this end, by way of close textual analysis at establishing a coherent connection between human mind and nature by focusing on the literary characters' interactive bond and involvement with nature so as to reflect the construction of their environmentally inspired identities locatable in a distinct historical setting namely the pre-independence period. This framework is a conceptual composite derived from both identity studies flowing from the lens of identity within ecopsychology and literary ecocriticism where, together, they are mobilised hand in hand to probe into the fictional characters' construct of personal eco-identity. The Framework of Personal Eco-Identity is therefore a blending tool by which to undertake the 'green reading' of these selected Malaysian novels written in English. In short, this study presents a reflection on the assimilative bond between the cognitive individual selves and the natural environment around

which the fictional characters' environmental attitudes and behaviours are identified.

The **Framework of Personal Eco-Identity** is formulated in the following manners:

i. The concepts of **biocentrism** and **interrelationship and co-presence** from the literary ecocriticism are linked with those of **environmental concern** and the demystified idea of **dualism** in ecopsychology to develop **the notion of mutual constitution**, from which the sense of intertwined interrelationship is drawn between the individualistic self and the environment where **personal eco-identity** is subsequently constructed. The notion of mutual constitution implies that identity and environment are co-emergent and inseparable, rather than merely interconnected. The narratives explored in this thesis — rich with ecological, socio-political, and cultural tensions — illuminate this co-constitutive relationship and reinforce how Malaysian literature in English interrogates and reimagines human-nature relation through the prism of colonised human life and the resultant personal eco-identities formed thereby. This notion reflects the idea that human and nature are co-constitutive, shaping, and defining one another through "entangled agencies" (Barad 2011: 130). It signals a break from hierarchical dualism and emphasises on reciprocal shaping, which is core to the concept of mutual constitution and the inseparability of human and non-human realms in the ecocritical and ecopsychological framework adopted.

The biocentric view turning on the dismantlement of human-nature binary places an emphasis on both human and nature as equally important beings whose respective existences are neither inferior nor superior to one another but one of complementarity between each other. The recognition of their mutual roles towards one another by dint of biocentric views provides the foremost idea of reciprocal roles embodied by human and nature as co-owners of the Earth where the exchange and discharge of these symbiotic roles create a multifaceted ideology in identity construction. The enmeshed ways in which human and nature function in terms of the roles, influences, and significance form the bedrock of the human-nature interrelationship, hence the indispensable mutual constitution arising from such confluence. The intersection between human mind and the natural environment on the strength of their ethical "'culture of co-presence' into which traditional humanism ought to evolve" (Iovino 2023: 43) sheds luminous light on the invaluable participatory, integrative, and non-dualistic aspects of human cognition and nature, manifesting, therefore, the traits of personal eco-identity in the literary characters of the selected Malaysian English novels backgrounded in the pre-independence narratives.

ii. Natural influence in human behaviour appears markedly significant in the construction of human identity on the basis of human dependence on nature for **survival and sustenance**, underscored by the resourcefulness of nature for human economic sustainability. Human dependence on nature solidifies this relationship for material survival through natural encouragement which ultimately shapes individuals' sustainable behaviours and personal resilience in the face of challenges (Samus et al. 2022).

iii. By grounding the concept of human-nature mutual constitution, human consciousness is morphed through the agency of nature. It consequently encourages the construction of personal eco-identity on the strength of its influence in and sway over human behaviour in terms of human drive for **dominance and materialistic quest**. The inclusion of nature in the constitution of human identity based on this consideration is crucial in that human behaviours can be assessed through human care in the treatment of nature (Koller 2021) and the level of safeguard observed in ensuring safe climate goals as well as in securing a sustainable resource management (Lebdioui 2021).

iv. The mutual constitution between nature and human from the lenses of identity and ecopsychology is especially glaring in terms of the management of **human emotion and affect**. Here, both environmental sustainability and human emotional health appear interlinked, resulting in natural connectivity and strong eco-sentiments. This suggests that such connectivity is essentially driven by emotional processes such as wonder, gratitude, or love sensations (Petersen, Fiske and Schubert 2019). Via a joint exploration into the human-nature interrelationship, mutual constitution offers an in-depth perspective as it highlights the benefits of natural settings in cultivating mental health and psychological well-being (Hao et al. 2024).

v. From the standpoint of identity and ecopsychology, a profound link between nature and human in the enhancement of **spirituality and ritualistic beliefs** is delineated through human belief system. Nature as the embodiment of human spirit is capable of fostering human identity and well-being (Fisher 2013). Fisher (2013) views that engaging with nature enriches our introspection and spiritual rejuvenation, through ritualistic practices, thus enriching one's sense of universal belonging. Indigenous

worldviews underscore the sacredness of nature and the significance of respecting it on account of spiritual attachment to nature. Such holistic viewpoint nurtures a sense of obligation towards the Earth, emphasising how human well-being relies largely on living in harmony with nature. Identification, ecopsychology, and spirituality engage in a complex interplay, highlighting the role of nature in uplifting human spirits, enhancing personal health, and solidifying a shared identity out of respect for nature (Ryff 2021).

vi. On the strand of mutual constitution, it is argued that not only is the natural world treated as significantly equal to human in terms of values and importance as co-occupants of the Earth, the intricate relationship between human and the nature is capable of providing an effective catalyst in the improvement of **inter-human relationships**. Through the manifestation of the naturally oriented behaviours by way of environmental education, for instance, an adoption of pro-environmental stance highlights the emotional engagement between individuals, extending beyond mere factual knowledge about the environment, thus fostering an ecological connection and advancing ecological understanding and attitudes which, ultimately, alter human behaviours (Baxter and Pelletier 2019). It is worth noting that human engagement in nature-oriented activities can improve well-being via the promotion of pro-social behaviours, empathy, life satisfaction, and recovery from stress (Pirchio et al. 2021). On the strength of such mutual constitution, continuous environmental exposure and learning boost the moral, emotional, and cognitive development of individuals, in terms of the relationship, not only with nature but with other fellow humans too. This greatly benefits their self-esteem, tolerance towards stress, and ability to focus on the ways their relationships are managed, improved or enriched.

Succinctly put, the coalescence of these two theories, *scilicet*, ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology, produces the outcome of an overarching concept, namely, **the notion of mutual constitution** inherent in the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity, which is employed in the close textual analysis of the selected Malaysian novels written in English foregrounded in the pre-independence period. Tethered to the ideas of coloniality and indigeneity, this study, therefore, explores the notion of mutual constitution within this framework as a conceptual offshoot stemming, in essence, from the combination of the interdisciplinary studies of ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology. It serves principally as a guiding mechanism by which to analyse the construct of the literary characters' personal eco-identities backgrounded in the ecologically colonialised locale. For any avoidance of doubt, the structure of the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity is summarised in the following illustration:

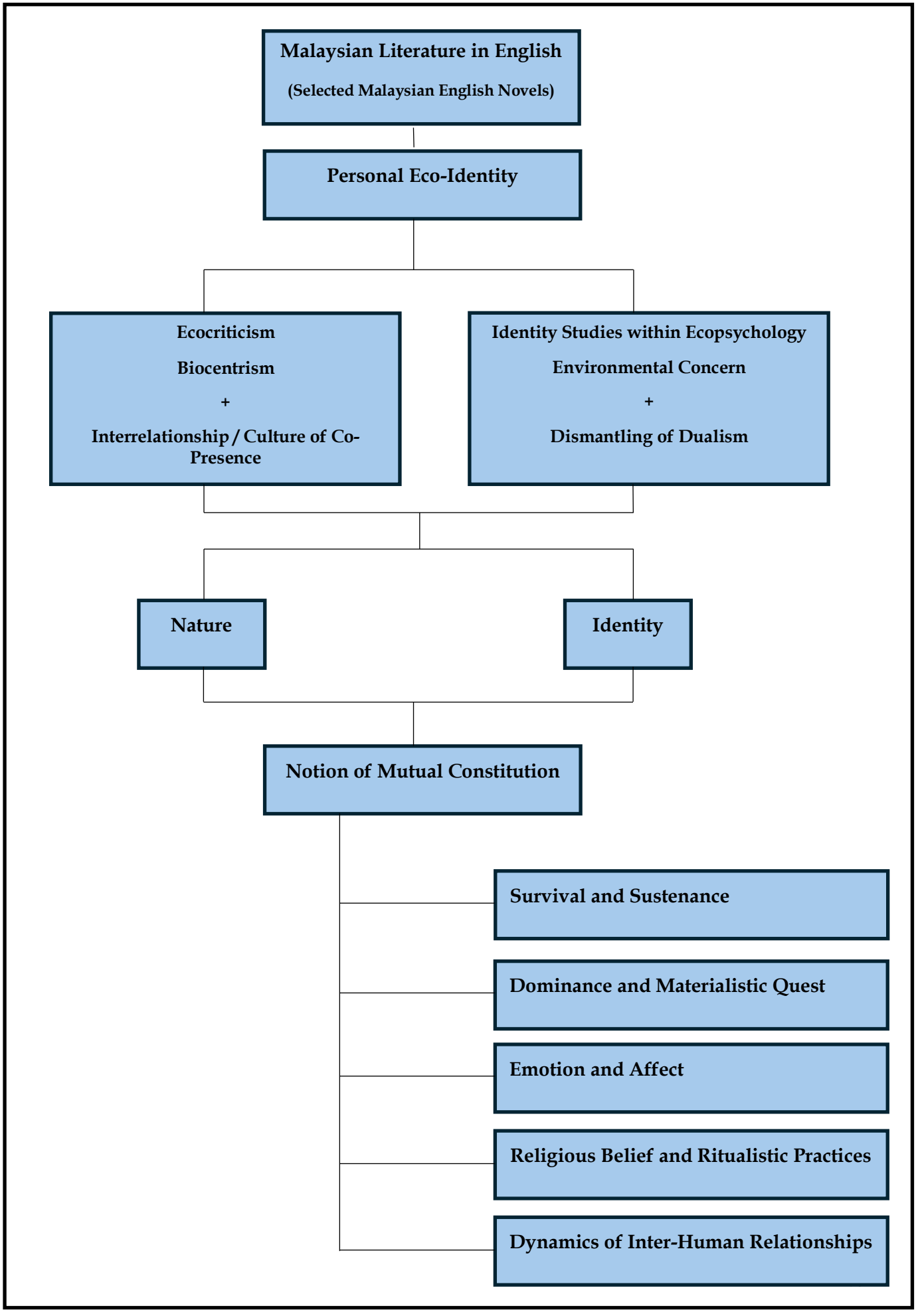

Malaysian Literature in English
(Selected Malaysian English Novels)
Personal Eco-Identity
Ecocriticism
Biocentrism
+
Interrelationship / Culture of Co-Presence
Identity Studies within Ecopsychology
Environmental Concern
+
Dismantling of Dualism
Nature
Identity
Notion of Mutual Constitution
Survival and Sustenance
Dominance and Materialistic Quest
Emotion and Affect
Religious Belief and Ritualistic Practices
Dynamics of Inter-Human Relationships

Figure 3.2 The Framework of Personal Eco-Identity

3.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The works of Malaysian novels written in English in relation to the relationship between human and nature are carefully selected in order to identify the pertinent tropes with respect to the literary characters' construction as well as maintenance of identities that are strongly influenced by environmental factors. In all these selected literary texts — Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* (1972), Mas' *Jungle of Hope* (1986), Maniam's *Between Lives* (2003), Ariff's *Long Road to Merdeka* (2006), and Sivagurunathan's *Yalpanam* (2021) — the portrayal of these characters' behaviours and attitudes are observed to have been shaped by various nature-related considerations. It is especially intriguing that these characters' sense of personhood is morphed through their embodied entanglements with nature. It is mostly palpable that the inclusion of nature in the consideration of their formation and, subsequently, maintenance of personal eco-identity proves significantly instructive to discern the specific archetypes representing the means by which their identities are influenced.

This study, in essence, focuses on the environmental elements in demonstrating the shared affinity between human and non- human which shapes the literary characters' personal eco-identity. To this end, nature is hypothesised to be an impactful catalyst in the former's process of identity construction based on their lived ecological experiences during the historical period of imperialism. The present study attempts at corroborating this hypothesis — that the natural environment is an influencing factor in the formation of individuals' personal eco-identity — using the integrative concepts in literary ecocriticism and identity

studies within ecopsychology which underpin the theorised notion of mutual constitution. The methodology of the analysis operates in the manner in which the analysis purports to present the emergent thematic tropes foregrounding the construction of personal eco-identity of the literary characters in these selected novels. Therefore, the methodology of analysis focuses on how these characters' personal eco-identities are constructed based on the narratorial representations of nature and their experiences with and responses to the natural imperatives set against the pre-independence period of Malaya, physically and emotionally. This exercise reflects, in effect, the representation-internalisation-enactment model of analysis.

In addressing the research questions, the research design employed in the study is close textual analysis. A close textual reading of these selected texts on these fictional characters and settings as well as their relationships with nature are examined in order to evaluate the panoply of ecopsychological reflections of their behaviours, affects, and cognitive awareness that are objectively grounded in natural elements. As an interdisciplinary, the concepts in the literary ecocriticism and identity within ecopsychology are contemporaneously applied to demonstrate the roles of nature in shaping the environmentally influenced identities of these characters by showcasing the multperspectival instances where human and nature in the pre-independence period unite and cannot be forced asunder, rendering them indispensably 'parasitic', yet 'symbiotic' of each other.

The selected concepts in identity and ecopsychology elucidate the multifaceted ways in which human-environment relationships shape and reflect the construction of selfhood. The integration of theories of place attachment, trauma recovery, pro-environmental behaviour, emotional ecology, and affective responses such as ecophilia and ecophobia provides a comprehensive

ecopsychological lens through which to view the formation of personal eco-identity. These concepts contribute constructively to this study by foregrounding the internal and external processes through which characters respond to ecological crises, negotiate their environmental values, and articulate their sense of belonging in natural or disrupted landscapes. By examining the ecopsychological mechanisms that underlie the characters' respective personal eco-identities, this section builds a critical foundation for understanding how literary characters in Malaysian fiction embody, resist, or reimagine their ecological selves. These insights affirm the thesis's central premise of mutual constitution — that identity is both shaped by and shaping the environment — thus enabling a more nuanced literary analysis of personal eco-identity in the selected narratives that follow.

A close textual analysis of personal eco-identity during the pre-independence period is presented in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. In so doing, the construction of personal eco-identity is analysed based on the relationship of the literary characters with the natural world in the pre-independence era where the dualistic existence of each is demystified and the idea of human-nature interdependence is reinforced. The human-non-human dyad, in this context, is thus seen as mutually and equally in need of each other, and not to be viewed from a binary lens. Through the analysis, the manifestations culminating in the construction of these characters' personal eco-identity are identified in these strands: **(i)** survival and sustenance, **(ii)** dominance and materialistic quest, **(iii)** emotion and affect, **(iv)** spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices, and **(v)** dynamics of inter-human relationships.

For ease of reference, the analysis of these manifestations is subsumed into 2 distinct classes: Chapter 4 explores the embodied struggles and material entanglements in personal eco-identity by traversing though the construct of the

character's personal eco-identities formed through physical, emotional, and socio-economic survival and by asking how human negotiate personal eco-identity through struggle, sustenance, dominance, and affect. Chapter 5 expands into relational and spiritual ecologies by observing spiritual landscapes and relational ecologies in personal eco-identity by perfecting the personal eco-identity arc through the characters' community ties, belief systems, and self-other-nature connections. It is worth noting that the division of personal eco-identity analysis into two separate chapters, namely Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, is purely one of structural organisation and by no means suggestive of a phasal development of the latter following the former. The analysis in these chapters is organised into five interconnected analytical threads to represent the complexities of environmental participation in the selected novels. However, as the close readings continues, it becomes clear that these strands do not work separately. Instead, they overlap and co-create each other within the stories, demonstrating the dynamic and interconnected nature of personal eco-identity creation. To synthesise these findings without fragmenting the investigation, the five strands are analytically classified into three major groups. Each category shows a dominating strategy for constructing eco-identity while keeping the internal diversity of the original strands. This process of synthesis allows for a more complete examination of how ecological experience, emotional response, and lived practice interact to shape personal eco-identities. Table 6.1 in Chapter 6 summarises this synthesis and shows how the five strands are conceptually integrated into the three broad categories.

The entire methodology of close textual analysis in respect of Chapters 4 and 5 is summarised in the illustration below:

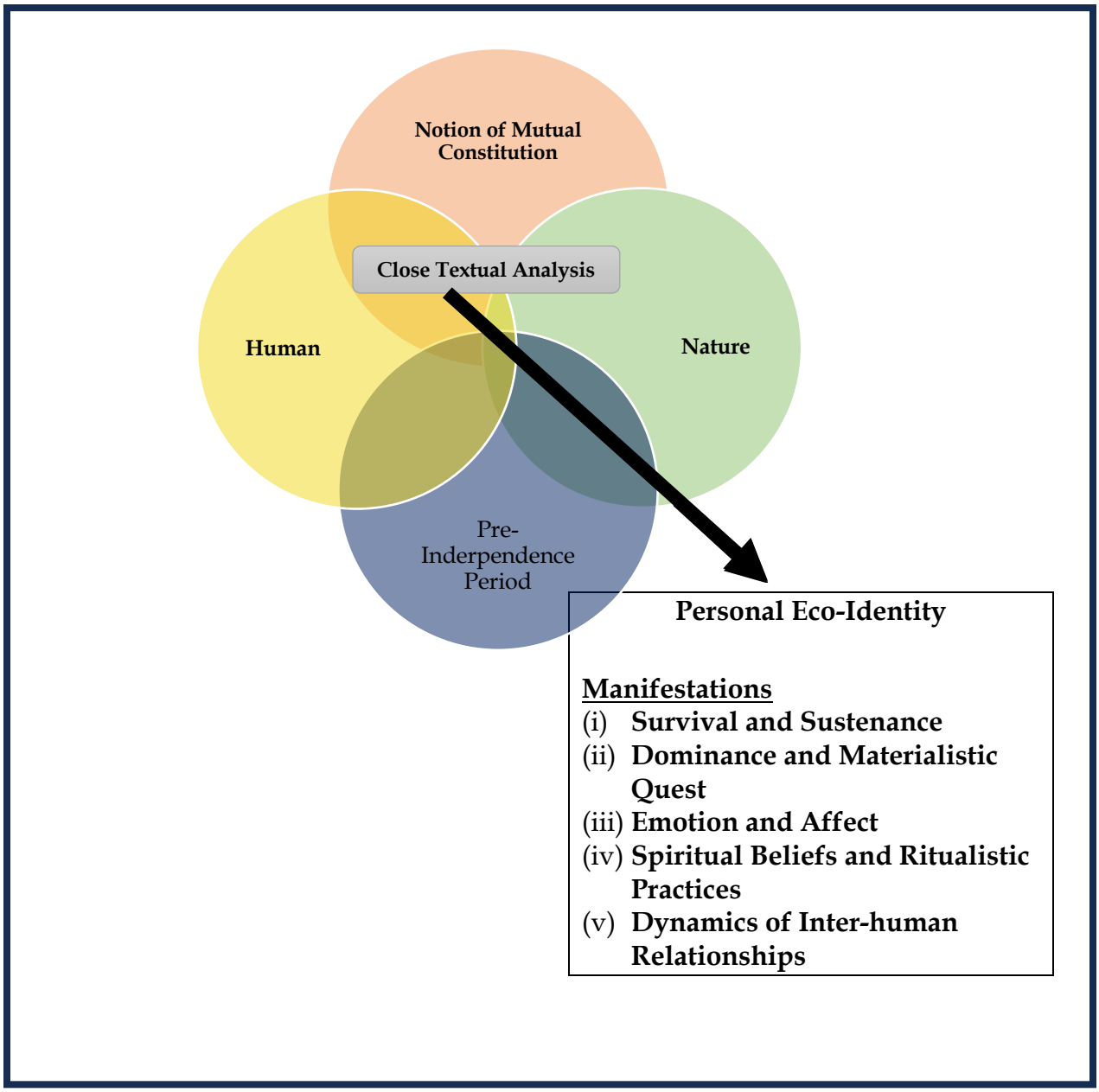


Figure 3.3 The Methodology of Analysis of Personal Eco-Identity

3.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

In conclusion, the discussion of the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity in this chapter shows that such framework is applicable as a novel dimension through the combined analyses of literary ecocriticism and identity studies grounded in ecopsychology, termed therefore as 'personal eco-identity'. The concept of personal eco-identity in facilitating the study of environmentally influenced identities in the selected Malaysian novels written in English is applied as an analytical tool by which to explore how natural elements are employed by the Malaysian writers as a form of identity construction in their respective literary works. The methodology of analysis is carried out by distinctly expounding these environmentally constructed identities at a personal level. Its analysis is executed under the rubric of the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity which consists of the historical contextualisation pertinent to the pre-independence period of Malaya in order delineate the ecopsychological denominators identifiable in the Malaysian English literary context which are pertinent to the conception of personal eco-identity. In examining the characters' personal eco-identity in the selected corpus, different markers of eco-identities are aided by eco-images, individual and social values, and human lived experiences. The close textual analysis of the characters' personal eco-identity, presented in the succeeding two chapters, is tested against the hypothesis postulated in the hitherto conceptualised notion of mutual constitution within the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity.

CHAPTER 4

EMBODIED STRUGGLES AND MATERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS IN PERSONAL ECO-IDENTITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the construction of personal eco-identity in the selected Malaysian novels in English, grounded in the overarching principle of mutual constitution. It argues that identity and environment do not simply interact but are inextricably entwined, shaping and re-shaping each other through embodied experience, narrative representation, and affective alignment. The analysis in this chapter is scaffolded on three primary interrelated thematic nodes, *scilicet*, **(i)** survival and sustenance, **(ii)** dominance and materialistic quest, and **(iii)** emotion and affect, which later unfolds into five manifestations as the remainder of personal eco-identity strands, namely **(iv)** spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices and **(v)** dynamics of inter-human relationships, is discussed in Chapter 5. These themes emerge from the notion of mutual constitution in the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity articulated in Chapter 3. Under the combined epistemologies of ecocriticism and identity studies within ecopsychology, the chapter builds upon the conceptual shift from static identity models to more fluid, co-produced configurations of selfhood and ecology. Here, nature is not merely a backdrop to human action, but a co-actor in the ongoing formation of identity. The literary works under analysis function as generative spaces in which human-nature entanglements are narrated, contested, and ultimately re-imagined as mutually constitutive. In the analysis, the natural world becomes a mediating presence through which the human characters within colonial settings come to

know themselves and are simultaneously known by the environments in which they inhabit.

4.2 HUMAN AND NATURE IN THE NOVELS: PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

4.2.1 *No Harvest but a Thorn*

Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* is a story which renders visible human struggle and earnest determination to overcome economic hardships and familial conflicts in the face of natural challenges. Set against the backdrop of a deeply agrarian world, the novel is aptly viewed as a "complex struggle of man against calamities of nature that lay beyond the control of man" (Hasan 1989: 152). It offers a view of nature as "a beneficent force" (Ali Termizi and Mohd Said 2020: 35) where human submission to nature offers a nuanced enfolding of Malay environmental consciousness. Nature, in the circumstances, is culturally deemed to hold sway over human fate. Lahuma's sole dependence on the paddy field is apparent through the display of Lahuma's family members' collective fight against the force of nature. Ahmad's use of the fictional place of Banggul Derdap employed as a setting in the novel enables an expedition into an imaginary rustic land, functioning chiefly as a kernel of reflections on the behavioural tendencies of agrarian folks in their quest to conserve the intactness of land and to secure their economic income amid calamitous challenges for the sake of continued livelihood through a panoply of means from which it forms part of their defining existence. The environmental setting in which the plot in the novel is foregrounded attracts a crucial observation on the characters' behaviours and mentality during the colonial period in a manner that is closely linked to the values and appreciation of

nature which influence their sense of selves and the recognition of the fact that nature stands as the epicentre of human decision-making process.

4.2.2 *Jungle of Hope*

Keris Mas' *Jungle of Hope* articulates the struggle of a maltreated farmer against colonial capitalistic design through a forced land acquisition order enacted by the British government in colonial Malaya circa 1920s–1930s. This gravely affects the beneficial interests of the people, including Pak Kia, the protagonist, who is forced to surrender his ancestral land and begin their life anew in another place. Despite a litany of physical and emotional difficulties as a result of their forced relocation, Pak Kia remains resolute in continuing the tradition of ancestral farming which he inherits from his father and those antecedent to the latter. Pak Kia's unfazed resistance is rooted in his loyalty to and belief in rural survival, which is a classic representation of Malay environmentalism during colonial times (Zainal 2019). His initial rebellion and later, grudging acquiescence to the order to surrender his land, alongside other concomitant family issues especially that which relates to his brother, Zaidi, who is adamant about moving away from their traditional life as farmers as well as the tribulations of natural disasters, have exposed the challenging realities of agriculturally oriented Malay rural society who are forced to succumb to the imperial dictate which, in consequence, further reinforces their true personal eco-identities.

4.2.3 *Between Lives*

Maniam's *Between Lives* integrates multigenerational colonial Malayan and post-independence Malaysian Indians from varied social landscapes and backgrounds. Diasporic integration into the Malaysian social fabric is arguably the most notable characteristic in which the sense of belonging and identity in Malaysia are constantly negotiated in the novel. It is especially lucid in Maniam's novel with the portrayal of resistance to environmental changes which problematises the conflict of racial invisibility and the construction of national and ethnic identities from the diasporic lens (Gabriel 2005: 241). The sheer manifestation of the financial as well as social plights from the marginalised group of diasporic Indians seen in Maniam's narrative shows a deep-seated association with "alienation, displacement, anomie, anxiety, and detachment" (Talib 1999: 48). The dynamism intrinsic in the relation between Malaysian Indians through the agency of environmental discourse in the construction of identity is further complicated by the human dualistic perspectives on nature especially those embraced by Sumitra, a modern woman of impressive educational height, on the one hand, and a traditionally-grounded elderly woman, Sellamma, on the other. Both differ in their perception of life, generally, and of nature, specifically. Whilst Sumitra is uncompromising in her attempt to ensure Sellamma's relocation to a welfare house, the latter, equally unswerving in vigour, refuses to oblige. It is by means of such difference that Maniam captures the development of and renegotiation with identity, prompting a sojourn to self-discovery through a series of introspective reflections.

4.2.4 *Long Road to Merdeka*

Ariff's *Long Road to Merdeka* exemplifies the soul-fulfilling and life-enriching relationship between human as a result of their harmonious interrelationship with the environment. The sense of personal eco-identity is rich in Ariff's illustration of congenial communion with nature through the act of peaceful human-non-human co-existence shown by the villagers of Sungai Serai. Nature, apart from its function as a fount of human continued subsistence, lends its inherently qualitative credence as a source of both physiological and spiritual remedy where Ariff's cardinal character, Omar, recuperates from his illness through natural aid when a shaman has recourse to the forest in finding a cure best suited to his recovery. The characters' profound attachment to nature is painted with decided vibrancy by Ariff so as to evoke an engaging spectacle of collaborative spirits embodied by the Malays in the teeth of paucity in modern technology. Juxtaposed with the ideals of modernity typical of urban life, the novel stresses the importance of environmental appreciation through the protection and preservation of nature by drawing on the fair equilibrium between human and the natural environment in the former's quotidian social transactions. Indeed, the characters in this novel are portrayed not as masters towards whom obligation is performed in their sole interest. Rather, Ariff craftily weaves in his story the element of environmental concern by picturing his characters as a naturally mindful posse of "the custodian of the environment, working with and respecting it" (George 2010: 37).

4.2.5 *Yalpanam*

Sivagurunathan's *Yalpanam* weaves together various themes of exile, peregrination, trauma, inter-ethnic camaraderie, and memories into her Malaysian narrative. The collective and interwoven dynamism of the aforementioned themes in Sivagurunathan's novel has its genesis in the Malayan imperial politics and the attendant social ramifications impacting greatly on the "Malaysian communal consciousness" (Pillai, Amarasekara and Wong 2023: 264). References to other major historical events are worthy of attention in Sivagurunathan's novel, primary of which are the British and Japanese occupations. The interrogation into the historical nuances from the postcolonial dimension unmasks various anthropogenic activities actuated by material yearnings of the British on Coal Island which subsequently portend environmental doom. This observation further exposes the unpalatable truth of ecological carnage "from the metropolitan or peripheral perspective" (Stockwell 1993: 77). A sense of solidarity is especially entrenched in the social fabric of the characters, evident in the strong attachment between the main characters, Pushpanayagi and Maxim, following their growing familiarity with each other. Such bond extends to their mutual understanding of nature and its impacts on their lives, individually and jointly. Sivagurunathan's fictional 'worlding' of *Yalpanam* is a multiperspectival venture into the constitution of individuals' personal eco-identities which engenders complex yet arresting examination of the human-non-human relations; one which does not purport to offer a binary deliberation as an outcome, but unmistakeably acknowledges the interconnectedness between the roles of nature in the characters' processual steps as well as in the projection of their environmentally influenced identities proper.

4.3 SIGNPOST

It might not perhaps be inapposite at this stage to observe that, in the close textual analysis that follows, all notable strands or manifestations of personal eco-identity as propounded conceptually in the preceding chapter are not demonstrable *in toto* in each of the selected corpus. Such appears to be the case as it transpires that some strands or manifestations of personal eco-identity emerge saliently in one novel whilst some prove apparently distinct only in another. This apparent variability is by no means an indication which may imminently vitiate the nub of the research around which this thesis revolves — that these selected novels *ex necessitate rei* unfold five thematic strands of personal eco-identity manifested in their literary characters. In addition, the seeming lack of fixed patterns evincible in all the novels point indispensably to one overarching nature of the tradition of Malaysian literature in English — that Malaysian English writers whose novels are analysed in this thesis are varied in the narratorial contours of their authorship and produce neither cliché works nor repetitive ideas. In other words, the literary works of Malaysian authors in English do not exhibit, in a unanimous manner, the varying representations of nature and its diverse influencing roles in the construction of self.

It bears reminder that this investigation does not aim to 'prove', per se, the notion of personal eco-identity in the literary characters in all the selected corpus. It examines, instead, how their sense of selves is represented based on the experiential aspect of these characters' respective natural environments. The discussion which relates to the unfolding themes in this respect, strictly within the remit of the selected corpus, demonstrates that whilst some depictions of nature and its relation to human identity are discernible in one work, such portrayal is entirely non-existent in others. Whereas some authors, for instance, instantiate a

deep relation between a character's identity and his desire for improved livelihood, other authors demonstrate such relation by virtue of nature's commodifying value which intensifies a character's pursuit of his material goals.

It is trite that in literary studies, an endeavour to probe into the interface between nature, society, and culture is not sought by means of strict proof or rigid corroboration in a pool of existing corpus. The current investigation is launched, instead, by way of exploration into a multiplicity of potential interpretations offered in the authors' works for such purposes. Similarly, this research is not intended as an exercise of verifying the legitimacy of the personal eco-identity framework, incontestably sought to be proven beyond a shadow of doubt. Contrarily, it aims to explore one of the myriads of possible interpretative readings in which human identity is constructed on the strength of fertile intersectionality between man and nature, where its formation is depicted by the authors using their respective visions, peculiarly and idiosyncratically, with each appearing different to another. Hence, such uniqueness and indeed, its diversity ought to be appreciated as a point of strength in the Malaysian English literary tradition and not at all to be condemned as a weakness on account of these differences.

4.4 SURVIVAL AND SUSTENANCE AS ECOLOGICAL AGENCY

This section examines the theme of survival and sustenance in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *No Harvest but a Thorn*, showcasing how the characters' means of living is deeply intertwined with their environments amid illimitable challenges posed by colonial influences and natural calamities, thereby influencing their personal eco-identities. In the construction of such identity, it is demonstrated that the notion of mutual constitution is pronouncedly manifest in the way the characters' struggles for survival are projected onto their unique environmental behaviours which influence the formation of their personal eco-identity in these novels. Each narrative presents a vivid portrayal of how the characters navigate their relationships with the environment amidst socio-economic and colonial challenges from which they are able to "de-ground" themselves from their solitary human-selves (Snyder 1999: 114) in an attempt to rediscover the "profound connection with 'more-than-human' world" (Abram 2010: 169).

4.4.1 *Jungle of Hope*

In *Jungle of Hope*, the protagonist Pak Kia faces the dualism of tradition versus modern economic pressures. His personal eco-identity is rooted in ancestral farming practices that have long served as his family's primary means of survival and sustenance, yet these are increasingly threatened by the allure of rubber planting introduced through colonially capitalistic policies. This sets up a critical conflict between maintaining ecological harmony and succumbing to material gain. The theme of sustenance is intricately woven into the narrative through the depiction of Pak Kia's attachment to traditional wet rice cultivation — a practice that ties not just to his livelihood, but to his identity and dignity. The notional inscription of mutual constitution into the novel is made visible through his emotional and economic dependence on land and nature, which becomes severely destabilised by colonial administrative decisions that transform arable land into tin-mining zones and rubber estates. These externally imposed changes create a rupture in traditional subsistence practices, forcing villagers to consider abandoning rice cultivation — once a cornerstone of survival — for cash crops that serve colonial interests.

Constructed in narrative of individualised experience in the person of Pak Kia, Keris Mas highlights the significant alienation of the society's economic activities largely revolving around the practice of varying rural pursuits, mainly those of traditional agriculture at the fringe or in the interior of the forest such as rice cultivation and jungle produce and how the granting of permit to the British-approved corporations to convert the otherwise cultivated land, including that of Pak Kia's, into an active tin-mining enterprise has aggravated the extremity of economic conditions for the peasant community whose lands are exploited for the advantage of foreign commodity. Pak Kia's anxiety is especially felt when

reflecting on the other villagers' growing submission to the temptation of profitable rubber-tapping noting that "the other who had stayed behind with Pak Kia on their little orchards amidst the rice-fields felt they had missed something good. A few villagers whose land was near the town began to sell their little orchards and rice-fields, and to open up new settlements and grow rubber" (JOH, p.8). This is further compounded by the present hardship befalling his family due to the heavy and continuous rain since "there was a lot of grain in the rice store, but since it could not be sunned, it could not be pounded and made ready for cooking", causing him to be disheartened hence by the gloom of impending paucity as he laments, "How were they to get some rice to cook for the next meal?" (JOH, p.6).

Pak Kia's deep connection to his land at Ketari Village is persistently tested by both ecological and economic uncertainties. Zaidi, his brother, urges him to embrace change, emphasising the promise of economic relief through rubber planting: "it's true that if you work hard, the rice and the fruits from the ancestral land are enough for you to live on; but for the future, why not start a rubber plantation?" (*JOH*, p.8). In this quote, the juxtaposition of "enough to live on" with "for the future" signals a pivotal tension between subsistence and speculative growth. Keris Mas powerfully illustrates this tension as Pak Kia is caught between the sustaining rhythms of traditional farming and the potentially more lucrative — but environmentally alienating — prospects of rubber tapping. Pak Kia's resistance reflects a deeper anxiety not merely about economic insufficiency, but about the erosion of a way of life sustained for generations. This anxiety is heightened when prolonged rains destroy his crops: "for days there had been rain and cloudy skies" (*JOH*, p.3), a condition that leaves him helpless — he "could only sigh and fret," having "tried to find new ways of battling the elements, but in vain" (*JOH*, p.3), in order to retrieve howsoever minimally salvageable his flooded crops especially rice which has always been "*Pak Kia's lifelong problem*" (JOH, p.5).

These lines reflect the fragility of sustenance in the face of climate volatility, making clear that survival is never assured, even in a life bound to the land.

Indeed, the instability of the natural environment in the Ketari Village heralds a consistent chorus of pronounced desperation in Pak Kia's restless frustration over the impossibility of securing sure sustenance for his family. Fazed by the fear that it has been "the ninth morning in a row that the sun had not appeared" where "such a stretch of rainy days was rare" (JOH, p.3), Pak Kia is constantly threatened into a multitude of plaintive images in the face of disrupted routine in his works. Helplessly, he can only grieve over the abrupt inactivity in his village caused by "the showers" that "did not let up even at night" (JOH, p.3), which lays out a troubling spectacle of the "houses and windows shut, like those amidst the rice-fields. Not one window was opened. The difference was that the houses amidst rice-fields were on lone little islands on an expanse of water" (JOH, p.6). The following reproduced except is mostly instructive:

> Now he was gripped with anxiety. There was plenty of grain, but they could not prepare it for cooking till the rain stopped. He would have to turn to Zaidi for help, as he had done at the start of the dry season. Zaidi would certainly help out, but for how long? How long could Pak Kia bear to live on charity? Three days before, the water had reached the steps of the house on his little plot of land. When the water subsided, it was sure to leave a thick layer of silt over the land and the rice-fields. He could see it all over his little acre. The rice-fields was still under water, but he knew silt was there too. Could the rice-field ever be cleared of all that silt? (JOH, p.9).

Pak Kia's reminiscence of the erstwhile long spell of draught where "the rice-fields grew parched and cracked" and "the rivers, Bentong and Benus, went dry" (JOH, p.8) makes it all the more strenuous for him to work in the rice fields. It only intensifies his disquieted-self as his means to survival is heavily prejudiced by the "deeper parts of the rivers [which] were now shallow enough for buffaloes to wallow it" (JOH, p.8). Pak Kia's reluctance to be heedful of Zaidi's advice to shift to rubber plantation is traceable in the dominant practice of rice cultivation in the 1860s (Zainal 2014) where due to the ecological suitability of the Malayan environmental climate at the time, his insistence is deemed appropriate for the Malay agricultural activities whose proceeds are gleaned at a subsistence level. Such perception is however contradictory to the colonial aspiration in promoting an intense optimisation of commodity for colonial self-enrichment. Pak Kia's persistence against Zaidi's reminder that "what will become of you? Your little orchards and rice-fields are gone" when "boars will trample your hill padi and plants" (JOH, p.14) is writ large upon his determination to defend his means of living, declaring assuredly, "I certainly won't sell our little plot and rice-fields. Whatever will happen, let it happen" (JOH, p.33).

Keris Mas' narrative, drawing from the personal memories of his own youth in Pahang (Banks 2009), is an ingenious indictment of how colonial capitalism transforms subsistence agriculture into a fragile, marginalised pursuit. The story illustrates how colonial economic models actively displace traditional livelihoods. For Pak Kia, the rice field is not only a site of labour, but also of generational memory and identity. The grant of permits to British-endorsed corporations to convert cultivated land into tin mines does not merely represent land loss — it signifies a loss of sustenance, both materially and psychologically. His continued struggle for food security amid natural disasters highlights the delicate balance between environment and survival. In a particularly poignant scene, the heavy rains make even stored grain unusable: "there was a lot of grain

in the rice store, but since it could not be sunned, it could not be pounded and made ready for cooking" (*JOH*, p.6). Here, Keris Mas urges the reader to confront the immediacy of food insecurity, situating it not as an abstraction, but as a palpable, daily crisis that defines Pak Kia's very existence.

As environmental challenges intensify — "the ninth morning in a row that the sun had not appeared" (*JOH*, p.3) — Pak Kia becomes increasingly aware of his vulnerability. The continuous rain turns the village into an image of isolation: "houses and windows shut…the houses amidst rice-fields were on lone little islands on an expanse of water" (*JOH*, p.6). This visual metaphor magnifies the sense of entrapment and detachment, portraying how the environment can both provide and withhold life. Survival becomes a game of endurance — one that Pak Kia can no longer play alone, as he considers seeking help from Zaidi, albeit reluctantly: "He would have to turn to Zaidi for help…but for how long? How long could Pak Kia bear to live on charity?" (*JOH*, p.9). His desperation is heightened by the fear of ecological aftermath: "a thick layer of silt over the land and the rice-fields that may never be cleared" (*JOH*, p.9). These fears point to an emerging personal eco-identity formed in the crucible of disaster — one that is painfully aware of how dependent life is on the shifting moods of the land.

Pak Kia's memory of previous droughts — "the rivers, Bentong and Benus, went dry" (*JOH*, p.8) — only sharpens his despair. His rice fields "grew parched and cracked"; a visual testimony to the impossibility of consistent survival under erratic environmental conditions. Yet, Pak Kia refuses to relinquish his land, insisting to Zaidi, "I certainly won't sell our little plot and rice-fields. Whatever will happen, let it happen" (*JOH*, p.33). His refusal is more than just stubbornness; it is an assertion of autonomy, a claim to a life sustained by ancestral rhythm rather than colonial profit. In this, Pak Kia's personal eco-identity embodies both

resistance and resilience. He understands the risks — of boars trampling his padi, of soil degradation, and of recurring floods — but chooses to bear them rather than become complicit in the erasure of his community's agrarian ethics. Zaidi's consistent warning — "Your little orchards and rice-fields are gone" (*JOH*, p.14) — is less a prophecy than a push to forget and disassociate survival from history. Be it as that may, Pak Kia's quiet defiance affirms that true sustenance lies not just in food or income, but in continuity, rootedness, and dignity.

His determination becomes emblematic of a broader ecological critique. In a postcolonial setting where economic transformation is synonymous with exploitation, Pak Kia's choice is a reclamation of agency. His resistance calls attention to what Adam Weitzenfeld and Melanie Joy (2014) identify as the marginalisation of alternative perspectives, lives, and livelihoods in the shadow of colonial and capitalist systems. Whilst rubber may promise short-term gain, it threatens long-term dislocation — not only of land but of identity. As such, *Jungle of Hope* presents survival not as a passive endurance of hardship, but as a conscious act of sustenance — of choosing to live in accordance with one's values, even against the odds. It is in Pak Kia's struggle that the novel reveals a profound eco-critical message — that sustaining oneself is inseparable from sustaining one's land and any disruption to that balance imperils both the body and the self.

4.4.2 *Long Road to Merdeka*

The natural environment in *Long Road to Merdeka* is not merely a passive backdrop but a deeply affective and functional space through which individual characters shape their survival strategies and affirm their personal identities. Ariff foregrounds nature as an essential terrain of struggle for individual sustenance in the face of colonial encroachment, economic hardship, and cultural disruption. The village of Kampung Serai, "where Omar and Ananti were born and grew up" (*LRTM*, p.29), becomes a symbolic locus where identity is constantly negotiated through human's constant immediacy of material needs. Unlike other narratives that privilege communal harmony or collective resistance, Arif offers an intimate portrayal of how personal attachments to land, food, and tradition define the characters' personal eco-identities, shaped not only by the natural resources around them but by their personal resilience and private sense of continuity.

The natural environment in the novel continues to prove pivotal as the most effective medium through which the characters' personal eco-identities are constructed by sheer virtue of the colonial society's struggle for survival through their traditional lifestyle. The significance of nature in the text, exemplified cogently in the natural interposition into every aspect of the characters' actions to secure safe and adequate sustenance in spite of the aggressive capitalistic growth envisioned by the colonisers is articulated through the author's description of the its rural location in Kampung Serai: "a small village where Omar and Ananti were born and grew up" (LRTM, p.29). It is employed as a central setting that navigates the natural direction of his narrative, revealing the expanse of which the village covers, stretching "an area of a little more than 609 hectares, the village at the time of this story had a population of nearly two hundred families" (LRTM, p.29). The village is painted with a vivid image of immediate proximity to natural resources

which are readily available to the villagers. This is especially so in Ismail's reflection on his brief walk "through the durian and mangosteen orchard that separated Saunah's house from his" (LRTM, p.20) during which he cogitates with elation over the convenience of food available at his disposal due to the strategic location of richly burgeoning natural resources where he "could eat anything. Yes anything!" (LRTM, p.20). The following excerpt is worthy of observation:

> Not everyone in Sungai Serai village was involved in rice cultivation. A few women grew sweet potatoes, pucuk manis, ulam raja, turmeric, lemon grass, long beans, chilli, angled gourd and tapioca, in cultivated plots selling them in Pekan Langat and Batu Sembilan. In the vacant corners of their compounds they planted papaya and sugar cane. To supplement their vegetable produce they picked bunga kantan and fern sprouts by the river bank and near the Indah inland (LRTM, p.76).

Characters like Ismail provide telling glimpses into the way nature serves individual needs and desires. His reflection as he walks "through the durian and mangosteen orchard" (*LRTM*, p.20) is tinged with quiet satisfaction: "he could eat anything. Yes, anything!" (*LRTM*, p.20). The moment is less about abundance and more about assurance — a personal, almost spiritual, confirmation of his assured survival amid a life of uncertainty. Cultivated nature here is internalised as a dependable companion, enabling Ismail's calm defiance of external forces. This aligns with the broader spectrum of environmental philosophy that survival is deeply personal — a lived negotiation between the self and the land. His ability to find comfort and sustenance in his surroundings marks a subtle resistance to the alienating impulses of colonial capitalism, which seek to commodify such connections.

Ananti, too, exemplifies the individualisation of environmental experience through her daily interactions with the land. Whilst the narrative acknowledges the collective rhythm of agricultural life, it is her personal diligence and embodied knowledge that stand out. Her participation in harvesting and pounding rice — although traditionally shared tasks — is narrated with an intimacy that underscores her inner strength and pride. The scene in which she joins in pounding the brown paddy "using long wooden pestles" (*LRTM*, p.74) becomes a moment of self-formation. The physicality of the act and the coordination required depict Ananti as someone whose identity and endurance are deeply built sturdily upon these bodily routines. When she and Omar struggle, it is Grandma who reminds them to "complete their work once it was started" (*LRTM*, p.75) — a moral lesson internalised by Ananti as a formative experience, reinforcing the link between personal discipline, ecological labour, and survival.

Even characters such as Saunah reflect a private environmental ethics shaped by necessity. Her methodical storing of catfish in "big earthenware jars" (*LRTM*, p.71) is not merely a functional choice but a reflection of her anticipatory wisdom. In a world of uncertain harvests and unpredictable weather, Saunah's act of food preservation signals a personal strategy to stabilise sustenance in a time of flux. Her foresight reveals an emotional and practical relationship with nature that is attentive, patient, and deeply self-reliant. These individual interactions with the environment reveal that sustenance is not only a communal priority — it is a matter of private responsibility, improvisation, and long-term thinking.

The intricacies of agricultural routines — the building of dikes, the use of hoes, the working of soggy fields — are described with such detail that they echo the mental landscapes of individual characters who internalise these tasks as acts of survival and self-definition. The narrative describes: "The rice fields would once

again be divided into manageable plots by dikes of mud and earth to hold the flooded water in place" (*LRTM*, p.68). These characters, in engaging with these rhythms, absorb the landscape into their consciousness. Their methods are not mechanical but intuitive, borne from familiarity and dependence. These are individuals who have learned to read the signs of weather, soil, and season, using this knowledge to navigate the precarities of colonial and environmental change.

Moreover, Omar's own development is intricately tied to his evolving relationship with nature. His engagement in pounding paddy, helping with the harvest, and learning from older women like Halimah and Haniza speaks volumes about personal evolution grounded in environmental awareness. The scene where he struggles with the *lesung lengan* (traditional pestle and mortar) yet chooses not to abandon the task under Grandma's watch (*LRTM*, p.75) becomes a defining moment in his maturation. The effort is symbolic of a broader life lesson, that survival requires perseverance and sustenance is never passive — it demands active, mindful engagement. Through these small acts, Omar's personal eco-identity forms not in heroic defiance, but in a quiet willingness to learn, adapt, and honour the inherited knowledge embedded in the land.

In the face of circumstantial misery due to colonial dominance, the villagers of Kampung Serai make good with howsoever constrained their means of survival would sufficiently allow, including their desperate resignation to having recourse to tapioca that "despite its poor nutritional value, it made good alternative to rice for an afternoon meal" (LRTM, p.55). Unswerving in spirit to take on the challenges of providence, they persist with ardour and in solidarity in confronting survival setbacks through the demonstration of great industry in defying economic paucity and financial dearth. Evidence of assiduity is identifiable in the collaborative effort shown by the villagers "to convert the sleepy brook once again

into an irrigation system leading the water into the paddy field. In the next two weeks they would plough the rice fields that had been left unattended after the last harvest six months before" (LRTM, p.63). Fellow villagers, following the harvesting season, "began dismantling the four dams" (LRTM, p.70) together with "the women folk in Puteh brook netting catfish with handy tangguk. Their catch was quite extraordinary and Saunah stored the fish alive in big earthenware jars. She would fry them a few at a time as and when required" (LRTM, p.71). Economic needs for the villagers' survival are indispensably satisfied only with the resourceful aid of nature which is optimised fully not with an avaricious intent to glean materialistic wealth, but merely as a primary measure to ensure an ample sustenance and orderly well-being of its people. The following excerpt accentuates the interfacing attribute between the natural environment and the non-human creatures by which the problem of scarcity is ingenuously negotiated:

> It would take two days before all the rice fields were flooded to an appropriate level, after which the water flow would be curtailed. The fields would be left unattended for a few days allowing the ground to turn soggy. And then the village folk would plough the soggy fields using their traditional hoes, assisted by two willing buffaloes – with ropes looped through their noses. The rice fields would once again be divided into manageable plots by dikes of mud and earth to hold the flooded water in place (LRTM, p.68).

Adumbrating the above, it is clear that Ariff's prose carefully avoids romanticising rural hardship. Instead, it renders individual endurance in sharp relief. The characters are not untouched by colonial hardship; they are shaped by it and their survival is a measure of their tenacity. The decision to rely on tapioca when rice is scarce — "despite its poor nutritional value" (*LRTM*, p.55) — is a

conscious and strategic move made by individuals who must weigh nutritional sacrifice against bodily survival. These choices, although seemingly small, reveal the moral weight and ecological intelligence embedded in daily sustenance. They remind the reader that survival is a deeply personal art — one that balances necessity, memory, and foresight.

In resisting the commodification of their relationship with the environment, these characters construct their personal eco-identities grounded in self-sufficiency and personal stewardship. Instead of succumbing to the alienating structures of colonial agricultural reform, they assert a mode of survival that is attuned to the rhythms of the land and governed by personal integrity. These portrayals echo the notion of environmental cognition (Thoma, Rohleder and Rohnes 2021) as a key factor in the formation of personal eco-identity, wherein individuals internalise environmental challenges as part of their personal histories. Here, nature does not simply offer life — it demands presence, care, and humility. The characters' survival is not only secured through nature, but also in their individualised practices of attentiveness to its offerings and limitations. In this way, *Long Road to Merdeka* becomes not just a chronicle of village life under colonial rule, but a profound exploration of how individuals, through their private negotiations with the land, carve out identities both impervious to external pressures and rooted in the quiet dignity of survival.

4.4.3 *No Harvest but a Thorn*

In *No Harvest but a Thorn*, Ahmad delivers a visceral portrayal of individual survival in a landscape both as vital and volatile, as Lahuma and his family endure the punishing demands of subsistence farming. Lahuma's relationship with the land is deeply personal. It defines his personal eco-identity, sustains his household, and tests his limits. This identity is shaped not through abstract connections to nature but through the daily, bodily grind of sustaining life amid relentless natural challenges. The novel opens with the stark realisation that survival is dependent on forces — both human and the divine: "life and death, dearth and plenty, are in the hands of God" (*NHBAT*, p.1). Yet, Lahuma and Jeha do not surrender passively to fate. Their belief in divine providence coexists with a profound work ethic and a tenacious commitment to self-reliance. In this way, survival and sustenance become not just biological needs but deeply moral and existential undertakings.

The characters' reliance on the natural environment as a mode of survival and sustenance is further complicated by way of the paradoxical intermingling of submission on one hand and an uninhibited resilience on the other. The construction of these characters' personal eco-identities is undergirded by their undeterred spirit in the fight against natural foes that stand in the way of their farming enterprise while accepting in full and unmitigated acquiescence to what providence has reserved for them. Ahmad, in unfolding the story with a prefatory reminder that "life and death, dearth and plenty, are in the hands of God", that is, "in the hands of Allah the almighty" (NHBAT, p.1), sets the narrative in motion by painting on the social canvass the imperative familial values shared between Lahuma's family members, including his wife, Jeha, who "too held this belief…down to every single hair of her body" (NHBAT, p.1), serving

fundamentally as a kernel of their staunch belief in the prescribed destiny as Muslims and a bastion against the contradictions otherwise proscribed by religion. Central to their belief is that "rice is God's gift" (NHBAT, p.3) which both Lahuma and Jeha "received in utter thankfulness", "with a thousand Alhamdulillah – Praise be to Allah", and "when suffering and calamity befell them, these are also received in thankfulness", "also with a thousand of Alhamdulillah" (NHBAT, p.1). Such accession to the dictate of providence notwithstanding, both Lahuma and Jeha hold a firm belief that in securing God's continued blessing of *rezeki* (sustenance) "one needed faith in hard work as a way of life. One must extend one's land" (NHBAT, p.5). Likewise, they fully and faithfully recognise that:

> if one led a beggar's life, it was still rezeki. If one had to eat carcases floating down the river, it was still rezeki. Even if one had to go naked night and day, still one lived and breathed. For Lahuma, the question of eating carcasses and going naked was entirely up to God. Up to Allah the Almighty. What could he do if Allah wanted him to eat carcasses? What could he say if God wanted his descendants to go naked? (NHBAT, p.5).

Lahuma's personal eco-identity is constructed in the everyday acts of resilience that bind him to the land. His labour is ceaseless and intimate, undertaken not in search of wealth, but to ensure continuity. When he enters the rice fields, the text states plainly: "Lahuma and his family's life would be in the rice-field" (*NHBAT*, p.7). The simplicity of the line belies the complexity of his relationship with the land — a space that feeds, injures, and humbles. Lahuma's tools, his *tajak* and *parang*, are extensions of his body, mediating between his will and nature's wildness. The text details his "battle with leeches, weeds, and white crabs — thousands of them — who gnaw at the rice stems" (*NHBAT*, p.7). Each

challenge, from pest to storm, reminds Lahuma that the land gives only what one is willing to wrestle from it. This constant negotiation with the unpredictable makes his commitment all the more remarkable — he chooses to persist, because to him, to yield is to vanish.

This personal endurance is cemented by spiritual conviction, but it is not devoid of fear, frustration, or doubt. Lahuma accepts calamity as *rezeki* — provision from God — but never shirks the duty to act. He and Jeha offer "a thousand Alhamdulillah" (*NHBAT*, p.1) whether blessed or bereft, yet they believe "for good and plentiful rezeki, one needed faith in hard work as a way of life" (*NHBAT*, p.5). It is this belief that drives Lahuma to expand his fields, to fight the elements, and to risk his body daily. His unwavering drive is not driven by idealism but necessity. Even when imagining eating carcasses or going naked, Lahuma accepts that survival (*NHBAT*, p.5) — however bleak — is still a life worth preserving. This tension between divine submission and human determination captures the novel's core message, that sustenance is sacred because it is earned.

Equally noteworthy in both Lahuma and Jeha's resolve in defending the survival of their family's livelihood is their absolute tenacity and pugnacious earnestness to take any challenges in stride in spite of the adversity in their circumstances. When Lahuma "caught sight of a black cobra a depa away from his wife, its head reared knee-high" (NHBAT, p.21), he immediately "hurled himself like a wild wind at the swaying snake" and "caught hold of its throat and squeezed with all his might. The rest of the snake's body coiled round his hand. With his left hand he drew his parang and slashed the cobra to pieces. He pressed its head to the ground and pounded at it with his right fist till it was crushed into the earth" (NHBAT, p.22). In the throes of such hullaballoo, Lahuma is prompted

immediately by the sudden alertness to the impeding hurdles looming macabrely in the circumstances. Lahuma cannot but air his dreads:

> What if the cobra's poison entered his wife's heart? What of the rice still unsown; the children at home; the work of planting, of picking up the crabs, of chasing away the tiaks when they came? What of all these? Lahuma's spirits began to fail him. If that accursed snake poured its poison into his wife's body, he would lose her, he would lose his right hand (NHBAT, p.20).

Here, Lahuma's sense of personal responsibility deepens in moments of danger. His instinctive reaction to protect Jeha from a cobra is not only an act of love but also a defence of their shared life's work. When he sees the snake, "he hurled himself like a wild wind… caught hold of its throat…slashed the cobra to pieces" (*NHBAT*, p.22). His ferocity in "attacking" nature stems not just from fear but from what is at stake: "the rice still unsown; the children at home; the work of planting…What of all these?" (*NHBAT*, p.20). His fears coalesce into a single anxiety — that the fragile line of survival they have walked together might snap. This moment renders Lahuma not as a passive recipient of fate, but as an agent of survival, fiercely committed to protecting the labour and love that not only ensure his survival but also define his existence.

Likewise, Jeha, in the wake of Lahuma's injury due to the thorny palm stem "about a depa (fathom) long" and "covered with hard, knobbly, mud-steeped thorns" that has, by accident, thrust into "the sole of his right foot" (NHBAT, p.50) whilst "swinging the tajak" (NHBAT, p.48), an agricultural tool for weeding undergrowth in the rice field, is filled with extreme fear that "Lahuma would not

be going down to the rice-field. The day after and the day after that, and perhaps for ever and ever" (NHBAT, p.51). As she frets that "without Lahuma, there would be no rice for the children" and that "all those seedlings in the belukar would grow old and worthless" (NHBAT, p.52), Jeha "felt it would have been far better if the nibong thorn had pierced her foot instead of his" (NHBAT, p.54). She maintains her unswerving dedication to counteract the bruising inflicted by tough natural misfortune to work on the rice field in Lahuma's stead, determined that "it had become a duty for her" (NHBAT, p.54), having been part of Lahuma's "very being" (NHBAT, p.30) all these years together, cultivating their land for the better sustenance and ensured survival of their household.

In reference to the above, it appears that Jeha, too, emerges not as a background figure, but as an equally formidable force in the family's survival. Her identity is forged through hardship and her emotional depth is evident when Lahuma is injured. When a *nibong* thorn pierces his foot (*NHBAT*, p.50), she fears, "without Lahuma, there would be no rice for the children" (*NHBAT*, p.52). The dread is immediate and physical. She even wishes the injury had befallen her instead, recognising how vital Lahuma is to their daily sustenance (*NHBAT*, p.54). Yet, she does not yield to despair. With resolve, she decides that it is now her duty to work the fields: "it had become a duty for her" (*NHBAT*, p.54). This gradation, by the change of inevitable circumstances, from a partner to a provider speaks of the elasticity of her personal eco-identity. Jeha's strength is not merely supportive — it is adaptive, carved from the soil she is determined to keep turning, for the sake of her children and her bond with Lahuma.

Ahmad neither romanticises nor sentimentalises rural poverty; he renders it raw, repetitive, and unforgiving. Yet within this bleakness, he reveals the spiritual and emotional depths that drive people like Lahuma and Jeha to endure.

Their lives unfold at the mercy of nature, but they are not passive. The rice field is where their bodies break and heal and where their faith is tested and affirmed. The soil beneath their feet is more than land — it is a moral space in which their dignity, perseverance, and identity take shape. Lahuma's personal eco-identity is not abstract — it is carved with each weed he uproots, each crab he crushes, and each storm he weathers. His survival is not a collective resistance, but a deeply individual act of will.

In a world where nature is as likely to destroy as it is to provide, *No Harvest but a Thorn* reclaims the narrative of subsistence not as tragedy, but as testament. It affirms that survival, though often invisible in grand historical accounts, is a deeply meaningful narrative of its own. Both Lahuma and Jeha remind us that the smallest acts of endurance — planting, protecting, pounding, and healing — are profound expressions of human tenacity. In their unwavering commitment to the land and each other, they become enduring figures of eco-resilience, embodying the inextricable link between identity and sustenance.

4.4.4 Section Review

Across *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *No Harvest but a Thorn*, what emerges with striking clarity is the weight of individual effort in the pursuit of survival and sustenance within colonial and rural Malayan landscapes. These texts do not merely portray nature as backdrop, but as a living force — capricious, generous, and intimately woven into the characters' personal eco-identities. Pak Kia's quiet defiance against colonial capitalism in *Jungle of Hope* is articulated through his persistent commitment to ancestral rice farming despite economic and environmental hardship, revealing a personal eco-identity forged in loyalty to land over profit. In *Long Road to Merdeka*, survival is made tangible through the small but meaningful acts of individuals like Ismail, Ananti, and Saunah, whose personal resourcefulness and adaptive instincts anchor their relationship to the land amid broader systemic pressures. Meanwhile, Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* presents, perhaps, the most visceral account of survival, as Lahuma and Jeha embody a raw, bodily relationship with the soil; a space where faith, pain, and resilience converge in their daily fight for sustenance. Across these narratives, survival is not romanticised. It is shown as laborious, uncertain, and deeply human. Yet it is precisely through these series of ongoing labours — the grudging reluctance to surrender and perish and the stubborn will to live and provide — that the characters shape their personal eco-identities. Their stories remind us that in the face of environmental fragility and social inequality, it is often individual acts of endurance and care that keep the rhythms of life going. In these novels, survival is not just an act of staying alive. Instead, it is a conscious, embodied engagement with land, tradition, and self.

These narratives, though rooted in specific historical and geographic contexts, speak to a broader current within Malaysian eco-literary discourse — one that privileges lived experience, emotional attachment, and ethical relationship with land over abstract environmentalism or technocratic solutions. In a literary tradition often overshadowed by nationalist and communal themes, the foregrounding of individual survival and environmental entanglement offers a quieter but no less powerful intervention. These characters do not resist colonial empire through grand rebellion but through insistence — on planting, on staying, on not selling the land, and on getting back up. Their choices suggest that personal eco-identity in Malaysian English literature is not only formed in relation to ecological loss or degradation but is also maintained through intimacy, memory, and sustained acts of care. The land is not just where identity is rooted; it is where it is constantly negotiated. By giving narrative space to figures like Pak Kia, Ananti, Lahuma, and Jeha, these works challenge dominant discourses of development, offering instead an ethic of endurance and interdependence. In doing so, they expand the scope of Malaysian literature in English read through an ecological lens to include not only environmental justice and sustainability but also the moral imagination of survival — how the vulnerable persist, how the marginalised remember, and how the land continues to shape the self, one harvest at a time.

4.5 DOMINANCE AND MATERIALISTIC QUEST

This section explores how the themes of dominance and materialistic quest in *Jungle of Hope*, *Yalpanam* and *Between Lives* reveal the mutually constitutive relationship between human ambition and its dire effects on the natural environment when such relationship is compromised. Within the colonial context of these narratives, the pursuit of material gain — whether through land accumulation, social recognition, or personal power — is inseparable from the treatment of nature as both an instrument and a witness. This aspect of human quests is central to understanding the sphere of human behaviours and their psychological tendencies which view natural environment as a mere commodity to utilise rather than an invaluable ecological asset to preserve, fashioning after the imperial capitalistic inclination that equates materialism to empowerment and dishonouring "responsibility to protect and honor biodiversity, promoting the dignity and well-being of all living beings" (Ramzan et al. 2023: 477). Each character's personal eco-identity emerges not in isolation from their environment, but through a dynamic interplay in which personal agency, cultural pressure, and environmental conditions co-produce the self. The environment, in these texts, is not simply a backdrop for human striving; it is a shaping force that both enables and limits the characters' efforts at self-making. This relational entanglement challenges the view of nature as passive or exploitable and instead, positions it as an active participant in identity construction. Across the selected novels, characters negotiate power, survival, and belonging through their interactions with the land — sometimes in alignment with it, often in opposition to it — revealing how personal eco-identities are formed within, and not apart from, historical forces of dispossession, hierarchy, and resistance.

4.5.1 *Jungle of Hope*

In *Jungle of Hope*, Keris Mas offers a stark portrayal of the human-nature relationship, especially as it becomes entangled in the competing pulls of personal ambition and material gain. Set during the height of British colonialism, the novel reveals how nature, unfortunately, becomes a collateral in the individual pursuit of dominance and wealth. This narrative dynamic centres around the psychological makeup of its characters like Pendekar Atan, whose personal eco-identity is disfigured by the seduction of capital, and Pak Kia, whose resolve to uphold traditional farming presents a counterpoint to that greed. Through these individuals, Keris Mas interrogates the cost of material ambition — not only to the land, but to the moral compass of the self.

The intricate relationship between nature and human pursuit of dominance as well as materialistic motivation in the novel mirrors a compelling image by which human conditions are assessed in order to examine the impacts on the environment. Narrated against the environmental backdrop of heavily exploited nature in times of colonialism, *Jungle of Hope* unfolds an interweaving narrative of human ambition and greed sought to be attained in the name of insatiable drive for personal wealth. The antagonist, Pendekar Atan, represents a figure thirsting over power, dominance, and materialistic gain, whose exhibition of anthropocentric and manifestly ecophobic behaviours in pursuit of his goals typifies the denial of nature's right in the equation of justice worthy of recognition by both human and nature. Having worked for Towkey Chan for eleven years, Pendekar Atan has since become convinced that "riches are the top priority in life. A man cannot fulfil his wishes. Riches mean money. A man with a lot of money is a rich man. Without money, a man is poor" (JOH, p.149), refusing adamantly the traditional ideology that "the only safe livelihood was rice planting", and that,

"padi berbudi, getah melatah, (the price of rice is steady, but that of rubber fluctuates)" (JOH, p.41). Pendekar Atan is constantly reminded thus:

> To get a lot of money you must have ong, luck, said Towkay Chan, and you must have a lot of tricks up your sleeve. You must be smart. Hard working. Full of tricks. Smart. Pendekar Atan felt he had begun to put all this into practice. His diligence, trickery and smartness had given him food, shelter and clothing; but he was not yet rich. He did not have ong yet. He had been able to lease a piece of land and build his house on it through the hard work, trickery and smartness he had put into arranging the sale of the Ketari and Benus people's land to Tuan Pekok (JOH, p.150).

Exposed by way of juxtaposition between the bountiful ethereality of the natural environment and human ill-intentions, the characters in the novel such as Pendekar Atan, Tutung, and Tapa are a ringing endorsement of human greed leading to the ceaseless pursuit of dominance over the land due to its natural richness that solely steers the [im]moral compass of individuals' capitalistic desires. Pendekar Atan, who is constantly orchestrating devious contrivances in order to convince the farmers in the Ketari Village to sell their lands to Tuan Pekok who wants "everyone out, and the whole stretch of land made vacant" (JOH, p.37) realises that farmers like Pak Kia and Pak Abu who are simple villagers whose livelihood is heavily dependent on the rice field works would not be easily prevailed upon to the allure of money in exchange for their personal eco-identities:

> He knew that Pak Abu was not smart, he was no fool either. He would not fall easily for sweet words or money. Sometimes it was hard to persuade the simple folks. Pak Abu was a plain and simple man. But if Pak Kia could be persuaded, it would be possible to influence simple old Pak Abu. Scores of men had been persuaded. All were convinced now that their rice-fields were damaged beyond hope. All felt their palms itching to hold the large amount of money offered to them. Only Pak Kia held out. Pak Kia was still unconvinced. Pak Kia was still bent on reviving his rice-field. Pak Abu and two others, both simpletons, were inspired by Pak Kia's resolve. Not that Pak Kia was too shred either, but he was steadfast, patient and hardy as a merbau tree in the jungle (JOH, p.36).

Pendekar Atan personifies the internalisation of colonial capitalist ideals, where wealth becomes synonymous with worth. Having served Towkay Chan for over a decade, he now firmly believes that "riches are the top priority in life…a man with a lot of money is a rich man. Without money, a man is poor" (*JOH*, p.149). His pursuit of wealth is not communal; it is deeply personal, motivated by a desire to rise above others, to control land and to gain legitimacy within the socio-political hierarchy of the village. The natural environment, to him, is neither sacred nor symbiotic — it is merely an opportunity, a stepping-stone. This view is further legitimised by his belief in the capitalist credo passed down from Towkay Chan, that success lies in being "smart…full of tricks…hardworking" (*JOH*, p.150). Pendekar Atan's strategy to attain wealth through land manipulation reveals how ecological exploitation is not merely structural but also intensely individualised, motivated by one's fear of failure and hunger for personal elevation.

This ambition manifests in his relentless schemes to dispossess simple villagers of their ancestral land, presenting rubber planting as a lucrative alternative to traditional rice farming. When the community is reeling from environmental setbacks, Pendekar Atan capitalises on people's despair, convincing many that "their rice-fields were damaged beyond hope" (*JOH*, p.36). Yet, the true moral fulcrum of the novel lies in Pak Kia's refusal to submit. His resistance is quiet, unwavering, and deeply rooted in an ethical relationship with the land. He stands firm not because he is ignorant, but because he recognises that land is more than a transaction — it is sustenance, memory, and identity. "Pak Kia was still unconvinced. Pak Kia was still bent on reviving his rice-field…patient and hardy as a merbau tree in the jungle" (*JOH*, p.36). His personal eco-identity is shaped, therefore, not by gain, but by grounded perseverance, offering a moral contrast to Pendekar Atan's mere transactional worldview.

In furtherance of his intention as a middleman who arranges "the sale of Malay land to Chinese towkays, or getting permanent grants for Chinese vegetable farmers who occupied licensed land" (JOH,p.41), having promised the latter "to get all the people in the riverine area to sell their land" (JOH, p.37), Pendekar Atan attempts at garnering support from the village head, the Penghulu, in the hope that he would "try to play rough" (JOH, p.38) on the people of the Ketari Village in order to subdue them into submission, especially Zaidi to whom Tutung and Tapa's land now belongs and is determined that "they could stay on those pieces of land and work the rice-fields for as long as they wished, as if they were theirs" (JOH, p.40). Realising that he "could not guess the Penghulu's feelings on the matter" (JOH, p.38), Pendekar Atan understands that he must harvest "closer ties with the Malays in Bentong" for "he knew that if he went on staying in Towkay Chan's shophouse, the Malays would continue to regard him as an outsider. They would remain suspicious of him" (JOH, p.151).

Unsatisfied with only "earning enough to live on", Pendekar Atan "wanted to make as much money as possible. He wanted to be rich" (JOH, p.151). To this end, he schemes his deceitful stratagem by enacting pretentious camaraderie with the villagers, reflecting cautiously that "if he could be close to Zaidi, he would be liked by the rural folk and the Malays of Bentong, including those who had moved to Lebu, Asap or Janda Baik" (JOH, pp. 151-152). Pendekar Atan's execution of these machinations take form in the disingenuous manner of projecting onto the villagers a "changed behaviour. He no longer strutted around like before. He often went to the mosque, especially on Fridays. He had bought land in Asap. In fact, he sometimes joined the Kaum Muda religious classes" (JOH, p.156). Tutung and Tapa, "left without guidance" (JOH, p.42) due to being uneducated and who "belong to the group of Ketari men who spent most of their time playing cards and hanging around the coffee shop" (JOH, pp.42-43), are entrapped into Pendekar Atan's design by incurring an enormous amount of debts in gambling, forcing them as a result to "sell their lands to the Pendekar and he would pay them the price minus their debts" (JOH, p.263).

In the instances adumbrated above, Pendekar Atan appears to be ever calculating and seeks to embed himself within the social and religious fabric of the village to conceal his ambitions. He begins frequenting the mosque, attending Kaum Muda religious classes and purchasing land in Asap (*JOH*, p.156). This performative piety is not a penitential return to values but a tactical move — a manipulation of appearances to legitimise his actions. His self-awareness is acute: "If he could be close to Zaidi, he would be liked by the rural folk and the Malays of Bentong" (*JOH*, pp.151–152). His personal eco-identity is thus one of sheer theatricality, not anchored in stewardship but in image management, a façade to mask the deeper erosion of ethical responsibility.

The personal dimensions of greed are most starkly illustrated in his dealings with Tutung and Tapa — the uneducated men lured into debt through gambling. Pendekar Atan buys their land, subtracting their losses as payment, thus profiting from their desperation (*JOH*, p.263). This is not simply a story of structural injustice; it is about how one man chooses to see others as expendable in his quest for wealth. Even when manipulating the sale of Ketari land to Tuan Pekok, who wants the entire village cleared, Pendekar Atan acts as a willing agent of displacement (*JOH*, p.37). He does not merely serve capital; he adopts its logic as personal doctrine instead, reducing land, people, and even his own identity to instruments of acquisition.

Meanwhile, Pak Kia's refusal to abandon rice farming, despite ecological uncertainty and peer pressure, signals not stubbornness but a different measure of success. Whilst others itch "to hold the large amount of money offered to them" (*JOH*, p.36), he sees value not in liquidation, but in cultivation. His actions reveal a personal eco-ethic that prizes stability, humility, and care. By holding on to the rice field, Pak Kia affirms that identity cannot be severed from land without consequence. The destruction of the natural world through tin-mining and other colonial designs of environmental destructions in *Jungle of Hope* is, therefore, not merely environmental — it is existential, corroding the internal integrity of characters who choose profit over principle. In this light, the novel does not simply critique colonialism or capitalism per se; it offers a granular study of personal complicity and resistance. Pendekar Atan is not evil by nature — he is ordinary and it is precisely such ordinariness that makes his moral decline all the more chilling. He does what many do, in that he rationalises harm for survival, masks self-interest with social duty, and justifies exploitation as opportunity. In contrast, Pak Kia's strength lies not in heroism but in refusing to compromise, even as storms threaten his harvest and neighbours abandon the fields.

Ultimately, *Jungle of Hope* positions personal eco-identity as something crafted in the tension between temptation and loyalty — between the material magnetism of progress and the quiet dignity of persistence. It is through these individual choices, rather than grand collective movements, that Keris Mas locates the true stakes of environmental stewardship. The novel compels us to ask not just how systems exploit the land, but how individuals enable, resist, or reimagine their place within those systems. In this sense, *Jungle of Hope* is not just a tale of rural change but a moral reckoning with the cost of ambition.

4.5.2 *Yalpanam*

Nature appears all the more conspicuous in its mutual constitution which lies at the interface of colonialism in Sivagurunathan's *Yalpanam* through the various ways that the colonised subjects as well as their natural landscape are described in the language and sentiments of eco-injustice. In *Yalpanam*, the colonial backdrop serves as a stark canvas illustrating the extraction and exploitation of the natural environment alongside the subjugation of local populace. The narrative juxtaposes the colonisers' materialistic endeavours against the deep-seated connection that the local characters like its principal character, Pushpanayagi, have to their land. This contrast serves to illustrate the destructive impact of colonial dominance on both human personal eco-identities and, by extension, the natural environment itself. The concatenation of events in the novel attracts a heavy discourse of human othering as a result of colonial dominance by the British especially in the case of Pushpanayagi. To this end, Sivagurunathan unmasks a litany of social imbalances described in the depiction of colonial attitudes towards nature.

In *Yalpanam*, Sivagurunathan crafts a layered eco-gothic narrative in which the natural world becomes both witness and battleground to colonial excesses and personal reclamation. Whilst the novel exposes the systemic exploitation of land and people, it is through individual experience and personal memory — particularly that of Pushpanayagi and Abu — that the entanglement between ecological subjugation and human agency comes to life. Both characters endure the aftershocks of colonialism not as passive victims, but as people negotiating fractured identities whilst still attempting to retain dignity, autonomy, and a relationship with the land. Their personal eco-identities emerge not from the triumph over colonial system, but from their refusal to be fully consumed by it.

The salience of colonial bias is striking in the description of *Yalpanam*, itself a name of Pushpanayagi's house on Coal Island, from which she seeks shelter and protection since her arrival in Malaya from Sri Lanka, as "another establishment created by a British planter among other establishments erected by British men who sought some semblance of home" (*Yalpanam*, p.2). The description of the Yalpanam house is suggestive, on balance, of territorial superiority that the foreign force attempts to hold sway over the island's residents, including her. Pushpanayagi's interactions with her environment, amidst colonial pressures, reflect a struggle to maintain her sense of self tied deeply to her surroundings. Her personal eco-identity is challenged but ultimately remains unshaken, representing a form of resistance against the commodification of her natural and cultural landscapes. Pushpanayagi's home, attempted to be immortalised by its erstwhile British owner in the celestial appellation of "Eden's Eden" (*Yalpanam*, p.4), is, however, viewed antagonistically as a "den" (*Yalpanam*, p.91) with as much resentment as disgust by the former's local employee, Abu. The excerpt hereinbelow reproduced is instructive:

> The man who built this house, under the circumstances in which the British found themselves, understandably longed for the dark silence of cathedrals, found also in his parish church back home. Divine darkness, so deeply quiet at dawn that the quiet turned into sound, 'divine darkness, he used to say, 'spiced with the fragrance of wax and flame'. He yearned for stained glass window that, as a boy, had enthralled him with their sweeps of colour and pictures of saints and angels and Jesus glowing against the dull winter light. Later, when talking to his lover about churches and windows, he explained, 'It is like being inside the soft glow of coloured light and knowing that the light has come from your own heart. That, my dear, is what love is. At its root, that is love (*Yalpanam*, p.3).

The house — portrayed as a site harbouring "a cornucopia of promiscuity" (*Yalpanam*, p.3) discovered by a British man as a result of his "jungle-clearing expedition" (*Yalpanam*, p.3) and as a locus on which trees and animals resided — was erected to fit the "semblance of home" (*Yalpanam*, p.3) like that of the colonisers' home country through the toil of forced labour by the "Indian coolies" (*Yalpanam*, p.3). It bears testament to the colonial exploitation of nature that is furthered only to concretise the dehumanising inferiority of the colonised society, regarded only as an "ugly machine culture" (Meyer 2001: 112). Through such blatant abuse of nature at its expense and that of the local community, the latter are left crippled and wholly disabled, and to a greater extent, flailing on the brink of submission, amid their battle against the dominant force of colonialism where material and psychological indigence prevails as a sure result thereof.

Abu's exasperation, uncontained in his sheer desperation, over the oppression subjected cruelly to his fellow native Malayans, leads him to an outburst of emotion directed to Pushpanayagi, "Take, take, take. And I left with nothing. My body inside black. This house black" (*Yalpanam*, p.90), accepting in helpless acquiescence that "everything going like dirt in the drain" (*Yalpanam*, p.91). Indeed, discontent is latent in Abu's objection to Charles' pronounced arrogance in having "built this land" (*Yalpanam*, p.75), as the Abu proudly claims that "my ancestors were already living in houses here. They had religion, families, songs, stories, life, Tuan, they had a life before it was taken from them" (*Yalpanam*, p.75). In *Yalpanam*, the house thus stands as a potent emblem and incontrovertible evidence of colonial plunder, where natural violation and the subjugation of people are inextricably bound, leaving enduring scars on both the landscape and the community.

It can be said that Pushpanayagi's personal eco-identity of resistance is constructed by and indeed, tethered to the house in which she inhabits. Although the British builder names it "Eden's Eden" (*Yalpanam*, p.4), Pushpanayagi is acutely aware, however, that the house stands savagely as a vicious result of exploitation: a den built on the backs of "Indian coolies" (*Yalpanam*, p.3) rendered almost spectral in the architecture of colonial nostalgia. Whilst the structure itself is material proof of imperial dominance, Pushpanayagi's occupation of it is an act of quiet re-possession. She inherits the house neither through wealth nor conquest but lives in its shadow, repurposing the space that was never meant to be hers to begin with. Her continued presence within its crumbling walls becomes an embodied resistance, asserting a connection to place even as its history seeks to deny her belonging.

In contrast, Abu's personal eco-identity is visceral, fragmented, and poetic — expressed through scattered speech, metaphor, and deep longing. Abu sees his own suffering reflected in the natural world. His oft-reiterated references to butterflies, particularly those "pressed into books" (*Yalpanam*, p.106), symbolise the loss of freedom and the entrapment of beauty — a metaphor that mirrors his own disempowerment under colonial rule. In one of the novel's most poignant exchanges, he accuses the colonisers of reducing everything sacred into spectacle: "Tuan, he is talking with big-big men in the office…Always he is catching butterfly, putting them inside the book. And I? I go up, go down, up, down, up, down, for who?" (*Yalpanam*, pp. 88–89). This is not merely a lament for hard labour but a philosophical protest against the violent silencing of life, both natural and human.

Abu's memories and his emotive metaphors — likening clouds of opium smoke to maternal embrace, the house to darkness — reveal an individual's attempt to articulate trauma within the limited vocabulary which the colonial structures have left him (*Yalpanam*, p.202). His personal eco-identity is shaped through the collision of his body with the natural and built world: the "my body black inside" and the "house black" (*Yalpanam*, p.90) as well as the butterflies' entombed images (*Yalpanam*, p. 88) that blur the lines between ecological and psychological decay. These are not just aesthetics; they are emblems of survival from someone who, despite being marginalised, continues to make meaning from what remains.

Indeed, colonial projection of its primacy onto the colonised natives is solidly delineated by various references to tones and shades of superiority and condescension in the novel's attempt at crystallising the motive of oppression over the natives. Befitting Johannes Waldemer's (2003: 1) conception of "the conquistador's mentality", such is ever so evident is Charles' indifference to the reality of local inhabitants, exuded predominantly in his patronising attitude and self-importance when anxiously questioning, "Who would see to them? There were plantations to oversee, land to be dug, trees to transplant, tea-parties to be had, wildlife to capture, offices to run, coal to be shipped" (*Yalpanam*, p.177). In his supercilious assumption of the impossibility of development on Coal Island without British direct involvement and swift actions, Charles is consumed with his 'saviour' attitude and self-conceit. He, teeming with vanity, calls out the "men at the coffee plantations pigs, idiots, fools" and "the native imbeciles who need to learn the ways of sophistication" (*Yalpanam*, p.164). Likewise, he, drunk in authoritarian pride, metaphorically likens human to animals caged for self-serving motives, regarding them as those who "should be treated accordingly" (*Yalpanam*, p.96), and overwhelmed with neither reserve nor compunction, "laughs joyously,

the way people do when agreed with" (*Yalpanam*, p.96) whilst chastising Abu, his servant, whose presence he dismisses as that of a "buffoon" (*Yalpanam*, p.96):

> I suppose I have to expect this sort of thing from a boy raised in an illiterate village. But, really, Deborah… He rips off his spectacles and presses them against his chest. Is it hard to follow simple instructions? Perhaps he doesn't understand the gravity of the situation (*Yalpanam*, p.97).

Charles, the British colonial figure, represents the complete inversion of personal eco-identity; one who reduces nature to catalogue, control, and conquest. His treatment of butterflies — killed and pinned as trophies — is a grisly metaphor for how colonisers interact with the land and people. His view that the natives are "imbeciles" and "buffoons" who must be "treated accordingly" (*Yalpanam*, pp. 96–97) illustrates not only colonial arrogance but also the violent separation which he enforces between himself and the natural world. For Charles, the land is a stage for control whilst for Pushpanayagi and Abu, it is a terrain of survival and memory.

It is, however, heartening to observe that the fear instilled in *Yalpanam*'s colonised characters has not, by any measure of illusion, reduced its characters to ready submission. Contrarily in fact, Sivagurunathan confronts the human unethical privileging, tethered unduly to "the relatively homogenous colonial enclave" (Murphy 2023), through an act of resistance shown by these "othered" characters. It is most discernible in Abu and Pushpanayagi's intense exchange in the cellar concerning the former's much-craved thirst for freedom. Abu expresses his hopeful vision of freedom, likening it to a cloud of opium smoke by iterating

in his hallucinatory tone that "in the cloud, nobody can touch Abu. Inside is safe. Like Mummy and baby. Cloud is Mummy. Abu is baby" (*Yalpanam*, p.202). On a separate occasion, Abu, expresses his accusatory reflection on Charles; insistent on the latter's patent collusion in the impossibility of his emancipation from the colonial claws and in the prolonged hardship to which they have been subjected, with specific reference to the butterflies, described in the following manner:

> Not black thoughts sister. We talking about freedom. Every day I am working. You think who I am working for? Not Tuan. Tuan, he is talking with big-big men in the office. At home, he pushing out butterfly, putting them inside big-big book. Always he is catching butterfly, putting them inside the book. And I? I go up, go down, up, down, up, down, for who? Mem Mary, she suffer, Pushpa. Poor Mem is suffer here (*Yalpanam*, pp. 88-89).

The mention of butterflies, referring to it as a lepidopteran simulacrum of denied freedom by Charles as they are "pressed into books, their ghosts trapped in the astral sphere with no salvation for their life" (*Yalpanam*, p.106), is remarked by Abu as a covert expression of his personal eco-identity against the colonial injustices perpetuated against his native land. Understood in its metaphorical sense, the subjugation of freedom is sold short by Charles who sees the deprivation of their freedom as "beauties" (*Yalpanam*, p.98) as he devours the spectacle of these butterflies — caged and immured indefinitely in the bottles. However, Abu equates the grim description of the murdered butterflies to the murder of freedom of Coal Island's local inhabitants perpetuated by the imperial British. The winged creature is deprived of its liberty by the superior hands that control its movement securely for the latter's private collection. John Berger (1980: 56), in examining animals as a social component in literature, contends that "what we know about

them is an index of our power, thus an index of what separates us from them". Charles' mistreatment of the butterflies demonstrates not only indicate human proclivity to deprive others of freedom, but also that which serves as a ringing affirmation of colonial pride that extends its iniquity to other human beings who are described by Charles as the "rows of little cocoons behind a glass cage on the floor" (*Yalpanam*, p.95) — worthless, helpless, vulnerable, and indeed incapacitated by the savagery of imperial subjugation to stand as equals.

Ultimately, whilst *Yalpanam* does not offer redemption in a conventional sense, it locates resistance in memory, speech, and symbolic acts, forming what an ecocritical scholar, Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen terms as "eco-resistance" where colonial implication resulting in one's sense of exile only intensifies the "feelings against being away from his homeland" (Ahmed 2024: 256), and demonstrates his unyielding desire for constant opposition to injustice. Pushpanayagi and Abu's personal eco-identities are forged not by their romanticised connection to nature but by a firm refusal to be fully erased from it. Their personal eco-resilience — evident in Abu's poetic grief and Pushpanayagi's enduring occupation of the house — illustrates that personal eco-identity, even when fractured, can still be rooted in place, in protest, and in presence.

On reflection, Colonial dominance continues to reverberate across the colonial circumstances surrounding Coal Island, foregrounding the sordid reality of its local inhabitants treated as inferior pariahs in the equation of human dignity by the British. Nature is creatively employed by Sivagurunathan to reground the otherwise tainted civility of human culture that is constantly eroded by the arrogance of British superiority in order to further the imperial agenda for the unfair advantage of colonial empowerment. Indeed, the ecocritical prism in *Yalpanam* not only refracts its light of damaging reflection, but also sends forth the

most plaintive hues of human sufferings from which Sivagurunathan attempts to recover and strives to retrieve human consciousness from environmental injustice in the face of its looming perpetuity. Although Love (1996) does not discuss *Yalpanam*, his assertion that ecocritical perspectives should "redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world" (Love 1996: 233) finds a striking parallel in Sivagurunathan's narrative, where nature is mobilised to reclaim dignity and resist the degradations of colonial dominance on Coal Island.

4.5.3 *Between Lives*

A patent distinction is worthy of recognition in Maniam's *Between Lives* wherein the notion of dominance and human thirst for material wealth takes a slightly different turn than those analysed in *Jungle of Hope* and *Yalpanam* respectively. In *Between Lives*, the ecocritical discourse pertinent to the involvement of nature in the aspect of human drive for material accumulation is not pursued merely in order to portray human motivation for personal enrichment, but also to dispel social displacement and to gain social recognition within the social hierarchy during the British colonial era in Malaya. The narrative explores how the protagonists use their relationship with the land to overcome social alienation and to gain material as well as social prominence. Land is not just a source of sustenance but also a battleground for establishing a new identity on a foreign soil marked by colonial hierarchies.

Narrated in the temporally asynchronous periods and settings — past and present — *Between Lives* revolves centrally around the life of an old woman, Sellamma, who lives in her own world due to memory loss. Her memory is consumed chiefly with the events of the past especially those revolving around her deceased family and her ancestral land, revealing scores of social challenges and material misfortunes that they have had to confront as Indian immigrants in pre-independence Malaya. In weaving the threads of these two periods, Sellamma's personal eco-identity is shaped by the ideals of natural picturesqueness passed down from her "rubber plantation parents" (*BL*, p.16) during colonial times, where land, to her, appears "valuable…stretching from the laterite trail to the river and on to the fringes of a jungle…a bit of scenic country" (*BL*, p.1). Indian migration to Malaya during the British colonial administration was brought about as a result of global depression in the 1920s and 1930s,

necessitating the massive relocation of Indians to avoid poverty (Hosking, Rutherford and Khoo 2010). Natural environment creates a multifaceted ideological milieu for the construction of Sellamma's personal eco-identity by way of the nature's significance in facilitating an 'accepted life' amid the marginalised reality faced by her diasporic community. Sellamma and her family's quotidian affairs during the colonial era in Malaya depend heavily on nature's resourcefulness whereby in weathering the travails and mishaps of colonial circumstances, the fertility of land is much needed for growing fruits, vegetables, and cattle for her and her family to live a sustainable life.

Such dependence is paradigmatic of mutual and relational interspecies constitution between human and nature where such correlation is reflected in the human will and determination to secure social recognition and dominance through nature. Indeed, the excerpt below is apt to illustrate the "marginalised realities" (Yeow and Tham 2024: 18) faced by those transplanted into their new, diasporic adventure in Malaya, although it is noteworthy that irrespective of the series of physical violence inflicted upon their ignored and abused community, Sellamma is determined that "our wings are here on the land" (*BL*, p.184) and that eventually, she will "see the world! A world better than the one in the Ramayana" (*BL*, p.89):

> Sellamma remembered seeing the white thurai beating their neighbour, one evening, all the while shouting in Tamil, 'Naai! Naai! Even the dogs know better! Why didn't you go to work this morning? Don't tell me about your shoulder ache, leg ache. I know the real reason. Your wife crying, your children crying! What do you do? Drink! Work is dignity!' And he beat the man some more (*BL*, p.89).

In asserting personal eco-identity through the visibility of his existence in a foreign land, Arokian, Sellamma's father, is determined to utilise nature as a driving force to exert his sway and dominance. Having been bestowed with the grant of land ownership to construct a house, Sellamma and her entire family "hurry through the blessing ceremony of their completed house, the celebration and the building of the other, simpler houses" (*BL*, p.102), noting in sheer pride that "it was like a festival" (*BL*, p.102). Despite Sellamma's mother's initial diffidence expressed in "her sobs in the estate" (*BL*, p.93), implying her covert opposition to the idea of relocation, having, perhaps, been too complacent in her abstemious life in the estate, a fresh assimilation into a novel and upgraded lifestyle as well as economic graduation from the plight of poverty to comfort aspired for by Arokian overrides her romanticised sentimentality. Arokian's physical engagement with "dirty nature" (Yeow and Tham 2024: 19) is woven into Maniam's authorial strategy which takes into consideration "the actual matter of bodies and things into our environmental discourses" (Sullivan 2012: 524) in order to free the characters from the marginality and to reclaim their existence by capitalising on the proceeds derived from the natural environment.

In *Between Lives*, Maniam presents a poignant exploration of the land not as a vehicle for wealth accumulation in the conventionally capitalistic sense, but as a space of individual assertion, dignity, and the reclamation of identity in the context of diasporic alienation. Whilst the broader colonial setting inflects the narrative with systemic inequalities, it is through the lens of personal effort, particularly in the characterisation of Sellamma's father, Arokian, that Maniam articulates an encouragement of personal eco-identity grounded in labour, memory, and spiritual rootedness. Sellamma's father is firm in his conviction that a relocation from their communal shelter to a private property is crucial as an emancipatory leap from humiliation to social acknowledgment. He believes that "all of us must raise this pillar" (*BL*, p.94) and insists that "everyone throw a bit of

soil around the pillar" (*BL*, p.94) so that "now the house will be strong" (*BL*, p.94). Arokian remains resolute, proudly declaiming that his "land and the house" (*BL*, p.103) shall make for a better living, for "he doesn't have to starve!" (*BL*, p.103). This is because his new ownership of the land would indispensably set his will in motion to prove his economic compatibility with other races and henceforth, to enable him to deconstruct the longstanding hierarchically classist mentality perpetuated in the wake of escalating Malay supremacy attitude, pervading across Malaya at the expense of the marginalised Indian immigrants to which he belongs who are often classified vilely as an othered community:

> The land was already flourishing with mango, coconut, papaya, pineapple, sugar cane, besides bunds of Malaikaran, Cheenan and Indian vegetables such as pandan, serai, puchok manis, bayam, lady's fingers, pumpkins, avarakai, chillie, brinjal, and murungakai. Now with the dusun Pat Mat was helping to start, they would have seasonal fruit trees: chiku, chempedak, jack fruit, mangosteen, rambutan, langsat, and, of course the most exotic of all fruits, the durian! (*BL*, p.109).

The unravelling of intricate social layers inherent in the natural environment cannot be heedlessly ignored without careful interrogation into the dynamics of ecology and human psychology within the context of the assimilation of diasporic community into local society. Anguished by the perpetually morbid reminder of past financial misery, Arokian does not simply surrender himself to fate. Instead, armoured in steely resolve and with spirited rapidity, he "turned with greater determination to the land, and worked late into the evening. If he was resting between spells of *changkuling*, he sat gazing at the jungle beyond the river" (*BL*, p.112). The prospect of a much better life, to Arokian's mind, is only attainable

through physical drudgery on the land which has stirred others' swift "envy of his growing prosperity" (*BL*, p.120) and earned him the respectful moniker "Saar" (*BL*, p.120) amongst his peers. Here, with Arokian's experience in the "polluted history of encounter" (Tsing 2015: 29) with poverty and marginalisation, Maniam places nature at the interplay of colonialism and social classism as a way to challenge the othering discourse of privilege (Yeow and Tham 2024) which otherwise undermines the ontological separation between human and culture in the observation of personal eco-identity construction.

Holding earnestly on to the creed that "the world will come to us" (*BL*, p110) and arising from such elevation of material circumstances, Sellamma and her father feel that "their days were being meaningfully filled, and an invisible and benevolent power, somewhat like the white man, was at last watching over them" (*BL*, p.110). The land on which Arokian laboriously works drives his human impulse in seeking social recognition that has long eluded his family due to economic hardship and social oppression, thereby accentuating his personal eco-identity. The land, as a sanctuary of certainty in the future of Sellamma's family, serves as remarkable bastion against which any form of material or social impediment can be thwarted to ensure the success of the patriarch's vision of social elevation.

The psychological fortitude demonstrable in Arokian far outweighs the lackadaisical attitude shown by the other Indians, as "those people in other houses don't dream", "don't work on the land properly", and "even sell the land and run away. Don't keep their houses properly. Don't look after themselves properly. Drinking samsu all the time. Dreaming on their backsides!" (*BL*, p.115). Arokian's personal eco-identity is fortified by the conflict between labour and his assimilation with nature as well as the prospect of natural abundance which he

perceives to be the only way to end his family's displacement as those "only in exile" (*BL*, p.149) and to reclaim their dignity in consequence.

Arokian's experiential aspect of nature as an interactive factor in human behaviour by "acknowledging the interconnectedness of the environment and society, both locally and globally, and interpreting the larger reality as socially developed" (Abdul Hamid and Ahmad 2024: 20) is formed significantly by the human-nature mutually constitutive entanglement. On this score, he appears determined that "we've to show them" (*BL*, p. 149) and through physical industry, he "returned to the land" (*BL*, p.182) which "cannot be traded for anything" (*BL*, p.298), as "the land will save you all" (*BL*, p.146), "like birds finding their wings after the cage is suddenly opened" (*BL*, p.190). Arokian's efforts to cultivate the land and integrate into the colonial economy, albeit fraught with challenges, shores up his personal eco-identity, shaped indispensably by his interactions with the land and his struggle with the colonial economic system, highlighting a dynamic interplay between human agency and environmental conditions.

Arokian's unflinching determination in the face of a daunting 'natural' trial reveals a moral contrast with others in the community who, weakened by defeat and alcohol addiction, have abandoned their relationship to land. For Arokian, hard work on the land is both a form of moral clarity and social defiance. In reclaiming the soil, he also reclaims a voice for his family in a country where that voice has long been muted. The land becomes a pivotal space of agency, where physical toil translates into visibility, not only within the colonial framework but also within his own diasporic psyche. Thus, Maniam constructs a specific personal eco-identity not merely rooted in environmental purity or resistance to capitalism per se, but in the desire to matter — to exist fully in the face of systems designed to ignore or diminish. Through Arokian's and Sellamma's perspectives, *Between*

Lives tells us that sometimes, working the land is not about yield or proceeds, but about becoming visible in a history that prefers you invisible.

For Arokian, the land is a proving ground — a tangible site where social marginality might be confronted and, perhaps, reversed. The traumas of indentured Indian labourers, brought into Malaya by colonial administrators, haunt the narrative's background. But rather than being paralysed by this historical displacement, Arokian responds with embodied eco-resilience. When given the opportunity to build a house and work a plot of land, he insists that "all of us must raise this pillar" (*BL*, p.94), a symbolic gesture that not only consecrates their new home but reclaims the land as a source of collective visibility and familial permanence.

Whilst Maniam shows the economic motivations behind this effort, the emotional and psychological stakes are deeper. Arokian's relationship with the land is not transactional; it is redemptive. He labours intensely, turning the once-empty plot into a flourishing space of cultivation: "mango, coconut, papaya, pineapple…durian" (*BL*, p.109). This abundance is not framed as excess but as a testament to human tenacity and to the will to thrive where once there was only erasure. His personal eco-identity is not based solely on ecological stewardship, but on the act of carving out meaning and self-worth in a land that has historically excluded him. Sellamma, reflecting on her father's work, internalises this eco-consciousness in a deeply personal way. Even in her fragmented memories — shaped by aging and trauma — what remains most vivid is the land: "our wings are here on the land" (*BL*, p.184). Her language reveals a symbolic merging of body and Earth, where belonging is not dependent on societal validation but on one's sensory and spiritual immersion in place. Maniam uses this intergenerational link

to suggest that personal eco-identity is not static — it is inherited, reinterpreted, and sustained through stories, gestures, and devotion to land-based continuity.

4.5.4 Section Review

The novels examined in this section illuminate the formation of personal eco-identity as a process shaped by the intertwined dynamics of environmental entanglement and socio-economic aspiration. Whether in Pendekar Atan's commodification of land for personal gain, Abu's grief-laced metaphors of ecological violation, or Arokian's tenacious reclamation of dignity through agricultural labour, each character demonstrates that identity is not merely informed by nature — it is constituted through it. These narratives articulate the principle of mutual constitution, wherein the self and the environment emerge in relation, each continuously reshaped by the other. The land becomes more than territory; it becomes a register of moral values, historical trauma, and personal striving. In contrast with the theme of survival and sustenance previously explored in Section 4.5, highlighting how endurance is inscribed in daily interactions with nature, this section shows how desire, power, and social visibility are likewise rooted in environmental practices. These are not binary opposites but interdependent facets of personal eco-identity, highlighting the drive to survive and the will to ascend are both forged through ecological relationships. Within the postcolonial Malaysian context, these stories resist neat dichotomies of exploitation versus preservation. Instead, they depict the self as an evolving product of entangled forces — historical, environmental, emotional, and material. In narrating these tensions, the selected novels exhibit that personal eco-identity is never a fixed trait, but a lived response to ongoing negotiations with land, power, and memory. The characters' actions, whether exploitative, resistant or redemptive, demonstrate that the environment is not just a site of human ambition, but a co-creator of identity itself. It is through this relational framework of mutual constitution that the full complexity of personal eco-identity in Malaysian pre-independence fiction is brought into view.

4.6 EMOTION, AFFECT, AND THE ECOPSYCHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

This section explores the intricate relationship between human emotion and natural setting in *Yalpanam*, *No Harvest but a Thorn*, and *Jungle of Hope*, illustrating how the characters' interactions with their environment influence their emotional responses and contribute to the construction of their personal eco-identities. The conception of self, constructed as a result of emotional responses to nature arises markedly out of the internalisation of human immersive experience in or exposure to nature based on the postulation that "humans have inherited a genetic tendency to respond to the natural environment in certain ways, particularly with certain emotional responses" (Clayton 2003: 48). Through the notion of mutual constitution from the perspective of personal eco-identity formation, the pervasive idea of dualism inherent in the deterministic thinking that humanity and nature are detached by their own respective classes is restructured anew by perceiving identity as a dynamic product of multidimensional construal. The novels analysed in this section reveal a complex web of human-nature's mutual constitution, dismantling the dualistic binary that places human and nature as two disparate units with existential values exclusive of each other. In inscribing the notion of mutual constitution by way of fluid intermingling between humanity and nature (Wang et al. 2021), the latter acts both as a mirror and a mould which shape and reflect the inner lives of the characters who, in turn, manifest their environmentally immersive and participative emotion and affect through these experiences, observations, and reflections.

4.6.1 *Yalpanam*

The emphasis of nature on human emotion and attitudinal tendencies during colonial period in *Yalpanam* takes centre suggesting the multifaceted discourses on the strength of interconnected relation that nature, in and of itself, and its entities share with human. Together, they form a unifying force, capable of manifesting the forepart of the latter's feelings as well as of oiling the mental cog of their otherwise least observed behaviours through natural representations and nature's pertinent relatedness. Through ecocritical exploration, these boundaries are blurred, respective significances, homogenised and most importantly, their disparate wholes become conjoined into a singular node where "the boundary of self is extended into the environment" (Evernden 1996: 101 cited in Yeow and Tham 2024: 21). It is postulated that the coalescence of both human and environmental ontologies may lead to a dismantlement of dualistic thinking and an accentuation of similarities between the self and nature (Maitra 2021). On this score, the non-human or 'natural' catalyst by which human emotion and affect are engendered is exemplified in *Yalpanam*. The Yalpanam residence, itself a relic of colonial history, becomes a conduit for Pushpanayagi's reflections on life and identity. Her feelings of isolation and timelessness are deeply intertwined with the physical space in which she inhabits. The old colonial house, juxtaposed against the encroaching modernity of new bungalows and malls, amplifies her sense of being out of time, a spectral figure lingering in a world that has moved on without her. Her interaction with the lush gardens and the sea nearby highlights her deep connection to nature, which both comforts and isolates her, reflecting her complex emotional landscape.

Sivagurunathan presents *Yalpanam* as the "geospatial metaphor" (Pillai, Amarasekera and Wong 2023: 265), evident in the depiction of its principal character, Pushpanayagi, a woman living in solitude and having taken up her permanent abode in Yalpanam which was built "one hundred and thirty-eight years ago" (*Yalpanam*, p.2). She often immerses herself in a deep reflection on "a surreptitious suspicion of her deathlessness, her 'I' immortal, a placeless, times mass of something" (*Yalpanam*, p.6) as she constantly breaks into a constant dirge over the torment of her life. Her personal eco-identity is activated by her acute observation on her spatial and natural surroundings, consequently begetting the deep sense of dispiritedness because of her isolation and solitude. Her dialogues with plants and daily contemplations by the sea are poignant examples of how her personal eco-identity is shaped not only by Pushpanayagi's social interactions, but also by her profound and personal relationship with nature. This relationship reveals a thematic dualism — her connection to nature provides solace, yet it also reinforces her isolation.

In *Yalpanam*, nature is tightly bound with Pushpanayagi's emotional interiority, and her solitude in the colonial house on Coal Island triggers an extended meditation on mortality, memory, and the persistence of presence. The old colonial house, surrounded by lush gardens and the distant sea, becomes more than a physical space — it is an emotional landscape, one that reflects her isolation whilst anchoring her sense of self. Her deep contemplation of her possible "deathlessness" (*Yalpanam*, p.6) emerges not in social terms but in relation to the land and the plants with which she communes. Her whispers to vegetables, her rituals of bathing from the well, and her solitary wanderings all reflect a personal eco-identity initially shaped and consistently maintained in dialogue with a landscape that both comforts and estranges.

The house, built "one hundred and thirty-eight years ago" (*Yalpanam*, p.2), evokes layers of colonial violence and abandonment, yet Pushpanayagi's continued presence and quiet stewardship of its grounds resist its erasure. The vegetation around her does not merely symbolise her emotions — it becomes the very medium through which she processes them. When she asks, "How long must I wait to be released?" (*Yalpanam*, p.8), her voice is echoed by the rattling doors and stirring shadows, suggesting that nature itself becomes responsive to human emotion. Her affective ecology — marked by loneliness, yearning, and an unresolved relationship with time — constructs a personal eco-identity that is both poetic and political. Despite moments of despair, Pushpanayagi ultimately remains grounded in the present through her connection to place. Her gesture of lifting her arms to the sky and inhaling the "cool fragrance" (*Yalpanam*, p.233) signifies a moment of affective equilibrium — a tacit acceptance of solitude not as suffering, but as embeddedness. The house becomes a vessel for grief, but also for continuity, echoing Neil Evernde's assertion that the boundary of self extends into the environment (Evernden 1996; see also Yeow and Tham 2024).

Her restlessness is impressed upon by her observation on contrasting realities — one of yore and the other at present — as she compares "the burgeoning of concrete, middle class bungalows, the pale blue sea, turquoise in the maddening midday sun", and "the brand new rectangular body of the island's first mall" (*Yalpanam*, p.1) to the sea that "was always there, somewhere in the distance, water, waves, salt, over there" (*Yalpanam*, p.1). She wistfully despairs her desolate-self, regarding it as all but "a mere memory" just like how she conceives the Yalpanam house as "an old colonial affair" and one which merely "sits on the hill and sighs quietly within its walls, standing aloof, a vague member of a neighbourhood named after angels rumoured to have fled following years of neglect" (*Yalpanam*, p.1). The aestheticism of nature is further foregrounded to exhibit the sense of nothingness in Pushpanayagi's self-assumed immortality

where she feels indefinitely "tucked away on a slight hill, a small jungle behind it, sighing privately in its spectral sphere" in the Yalpanam house which "stands apart from the rest of Coal Island" (*Yalpanam*, p.4). The house, together with "the trees within the compound" (*Yalpanam*, p.20) around which "year after year, she looked for the spot" (*Yalpanam*, p.18), emerges therefore as Pushpanayagi's personified "nostalgia, a prophesy" (*Yalpanam*, p.19) that, through the recognition and the dyads of nature and emotion, characterise the state of her overwhelming seclusion and quietude:

> The twentieth century came and went and the twenty-first century took over and Pushpanayagi lived on, harvesting vegetables and fruits, bathing from the well behind the house, gliding through inner waves of peace, alone. From time to time, she sits in the garden and tells her vegetables of the deathless realm, of her never-ending life, of the bitter loneliness of living forever, and when she says, 'How long must I wait to be released?', the doors of the house rattle and the shadows within stir (*Yalpanam*, p.8).

Deep in her aversion to life and in her yearning for lifelessness, Pushpanayagi attempts to translate her fear into action. She readies herself to bid adieu to the world as she "fell into the unmoving spot, into its deep silence" (*Yalpanam*, p.33), with her heart wholly convinced that "from nothing we come, into nothing we go" (*Yalpanam*, p.33). Feeling that death is nigh, Pushpanayagi does not halt to "nod goodbye now to everything that had come into life — coldness churned in her stomach and rushed to her heart — everything, one by one, karma complete" (*Yalpanam*, p.30). However, Pushpanayagi's intention is thwarted by the sudden realisation of the need to face her reality like that of a barren tree that is home to "a spirit called Nunu that lived inside its trunk, which

made sense since the way the tree's branches curved away from its roots and up towards the lady's house, it looked like it wanted to grow in Yalpanam" (*Yalpanam*, p.9). Also, in spite of her world seeming "the blue of melancholy, of the darkest ocean" (*Yalpanam*, p.218), Pushpanayagi "staggered up, took in the darkness around her, undisturbed by its depth" and "lifted her hands to the sky, closed her eyes and smelled the cool fragrance as if that was all she needed to at that point, in that moment" (*Yalpanam*, p.233), refusing to model after another morbid character, Mary, whose "heart was caged", "like the birds they hang in painted cages in the market" (*Yalpanam*, p.162). In this way, *Yalpanam* frames Pushpanayagi's survival as an act of ecological resilience, where her renewed will to live is anchored in a reconnection with the natural world that offers both refuge and quiet defiance against despair.

In the sombre painting of her life, Sivagurunathan's employment of natural element is intensified to reinforce its influence over the characters' varying emotions in order to describe Pushpanayagi's life experience in the Yalpanam house. The author embarks on an exploratory expedition to demonstrate Pushpanayagi's emotions by projecting the notion of mutual constitution between nature and the characters' varying emotions onto Sivagurunathan's narrative. The natural sway is especially manifest in presenting the emotional and affective bearings on which individual disposition is cultivated, simultaneously mirroring a reflection of personal eco-identity that is formed as a subconscious product of their relationship between human and nature (Thoma, Rohleder and Rohnes 2021).

Apart from the overwhelming sense of temporariness in life that Pushpanayagi experiences in the later years of her residence in the Yalpanam house, nature surrounding the place, however, not only creates harmony but

provides a peaceful ground on which reflections on the self appear fertile, solidifying further her personal eco-identity. Her idealised simulacra of peace and joy have materialised themselves in the spectacle of, and indeed, in her communion with "a carnival of feeding insects and mating birds, wild pigs, phytons and cobras, spiders the size of an average human fist, sometimes even birthing cats" (*Yalpanam*, p.183). Her emotional intercourse with nature in and around the Yalpanam house as a matter of daily ritual is not only a mere force of habit or out of sheer monotony. Instead, such habit is essentially embedded because Pushpanayagi's appreciation of the house is not only as a matter of material site appropriate for assured physical safety, but also that which serves as a spiritual sanctuary which she believes as an "old warm land of Mother, Yalpanam, dark sea of Shakti's womb" (*Yalpanam*, p.17). With her "hoe in hand, earth between her toes and luxuriant vegetables, fertile, surrounding her" (*Yalpanam*, p.7), Pushpanayagi's contemplation about life and the maudlin recollection of her past deepen on the strength which nature kindly obliges her.

Pushpanayagi's constant rumination about how "death had been different" (*Yalpanam*, p16) and that "death was supposed to be one final slip into nothingness" (*Yalpanam*, p.16) is amplified intensively by her reflection on the natural splendour of Yalpanam's verdure, unravelling the vile exposé of human frailty in which she embodies. Marked by her feeling of "nothingness" (*Yalpanam*, p.16) amid the luxuriousness and fecundity of the land around the Yalpanam house, Pushpanayagi's personal eco-identity is therefore implied by the interconnecting element of nature, compelling her thus to repose in abject suppression beneath the surreally lustreless, insipid rhythms of life as she submits to the crescendo of void and a deadening thrum of nihility.

4.6.2 *No Harvest but a Thorn*

Through constant and reflexive interaction with nature in literary texts, the expression of human sentiment is made possible for close scrutiny, with nature acting effectively as a mediating agent which provides a breeding ground enabling the relational dimension of nature in invoking human emotion and affect. Human emotion and affect are potently evoked through the indispensable link of mutual constitution of human and nature where the use of natural elements in Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn* elicits subconsciously physiological and physical reactions. Relative to this, Ahmad brings to the fore both the emotional and behavioural forces through the fertile literary site appropriate for imagination that is harvested creatively at the crossroads of the interiority of human feeling and the physicality of the natural world. The interconnecting nuances of human and nature within this scope emphasise the paradox of the latter as a forceful impetus attracting a sense of submission, on the one hand, and indurating tenacity and resistance, on the other.

In *No Harvest but a Thorn*, Lahuma and Jeha's emotions are rendered through an intense struggle with nature's volatility. Lahuma's faith and fear are inseparable from his understanding of land as both sustainer and destroyer. Nature, in the form of pests, floods, and injury, generates emotional responses that reveal Lahuma's deeply spiritual and psychological investment in his work. His declaration that the rice is "God's gift" (*NHBAT*, p.3) encapsulates his belief in divine providence, but this belief does not preclude active struggle. On the contrary, Lahuma's emotions are rendered in sweat and prayer, in both physical labour and metaphysical supplication.

In Lahuma's submission to what "God gives, I merely receive" (*NHBAT*, p.1), referring to the bounty from his farming works where rice is "God's gift" on which he depends "to support life" and that which "had sustained life throughout the ages" (*NHBAT*, p.2), Lahuma is nevertheless prepared to fight against "thousands and ten thousand of those white crabs" (*NHBAT*, p.7) or even "the jungle, rising straight and formidable beyond the village", and ready, by the might of his "rough calloused palm" that "the smaller trees would certainly fall prostrate at the touch of that parang edge" (*NHBAT*, p.8). As a faithful Muslim, Lahuma's assiduity and remarkable industry to ensure a promising future and positive continuity of his and his family's livelihood are grounded fundamentally in his belief in the power of predestination which then allows him to face any challenges that might thwart his farming strategies. Whilst he accepts that "if the crabs run amok again this year, it'll be the end of our rezeki" (*NHBAT*, p.10) and that "if they come we just let them be" — loyally resigned to the fate that "only God can check them" and that "only God the Almighty has the power to stop them" (*NHBAT*, p.11) — Lahuma remains steadfast, nevertheless, in his determination that as "the struggle starts", he "would have to struggle against all manner of natural disasters to fill his belly, his wife's belly, and the bellies of his seven children" (*NHBAT*, p.12). All the while he is confident in God's help to "keep away all disasters that can hinder my family in seeking our rezeki" (*NHBAT*, p.15) as he "raised his hands to the sky" praying against the attack of pests that might "hinder my struggle and family's struggle" (*NHBAT*, p.14). Thus, in *No Harvest but a Thorn*, Lahuma's perseverance reflects a harmonious blend of spiritual submission and human resolve, where faith in divine providence fortifies his unwavering commitment to labour against the adversities of nature.

Lahuma's life as a farmer is emblematic of the struggle against natural forces. His determination to cultivate rice despite environmental adversities illustrates the mutual constitution of human control and nature's unpredictability.

His interactions with the land — battling pests and weather — are visceral manifestations of his emotional state, swinging between hope and despair, reflecting the broader theme of survival against ecological and economic challenges. In his assertiveness, Lahuma is neither consumed in doubt nor dithering in resolve to bow submissively to the compulsive power of nature that he perceives as a sheer menace to his paddy fields which are his only means of survival. Apostrophising the "buffalo leeches" that "got stuck on the newly-sharpened edge of the parang" (*NHBAT*, p.12) and the potential onslaught of the crabs, Lahuma declares with fervour, "you suck my blood, I will kill you one and all" and "I will kill you if you run amok on the stems of my young rice-plants. I will step hard on you with my rough heels. I will pound you with the handle of this parang of mine. I will catch you and boil you until your bellies and shells are all torn up" (*NHBAT*, p.13). Lahuma's fixity of purpose in negotiating the trepidation of circumstances is interlaced spiritually with a profound sense of acceptance and unequivocal faith in the divine wisdom and certainty that he would "leave everything to God" (*NHBAT*, p.19) as the only determinant of his fate:

> Lahuma would not dream of stepping down from his house early tomorrow morning without first asking permission from the One God. Thus he held up his palms in prayer. And his heart forgot all problems as it concentrated on God: 'Oh God the Highest the Greatest. Let it be Thy will I start working tomorrow, and me throughout Thy protection. Keep away from me all natural disasters, all diseases, the poisonous sting of centipedes and snakes and scorpions. Keep away the big floods that can drown my rice. Keep away long droughts that can dry up my rice-fields. Keep away all misfortunes that can hinder us (*NHBAT*, p.9).

Adverting to the above, it is manifestly clear that Lahuma's intense language when confronting the "white crabs" and "buffalo leeches" (*NHBAT*, pp.7–13) reveals an emotional register that is not simply reactive, but performative. His rage is sacred; his resistance, theological. His interactions with nature are not passive reflections of inner feeling, but deliberate expressions of an identity forged in hardship. His personal eco-identity thus emerges as both devout and defiant, shaped by the unrelenting cycles of growth and devastation.

Nature continues to amplify the thrill of emotion in the novel's other characters especially Lahuma's wife, Jeha, who is galvanised by the terror and shock of Lahuma's foot injury due to the *nibong* thorn that stuck into "the sole of his right foot" (*NHBAT*, p.50). The incident sends her into varying degrees of emotions especially those of worry over the challenges and of fear for the responsibilities that are now emplaced upon her shoulder to carry alone without Lahuma: "all these years Jeha had never once had to work on the rice-field without Lahuma" and "even before Sanah was born, it was Lahuma who had done the work. Jeha had only helped, although after a while it could no longer be thought of as 'helping'. It had become a duty to her" (*NHBAT*, p.54). Jeha's emotion is now muddied by the rueful reflection on their exacerbating circumstances as is Lahuma's sentiment on the reminiscence of their past ordeal during Jeha's near fatal brush with "a black cobra a *depa* away from his wife, its head reared knee-high" (*NHBAT*, p.21), where Lahuma feels "as though his right arm was broken" (*NHBAT*, p.30). In *No Harvest but a Thorn*, these episodes of melancholy and infinite sorrow reveal how the natural world heightens emotional stakes, binding Jeha's fears and responsibilities to the same environment that both sustains and endangers her family's survival.

In a welter of resistance compounded by the strident chorus of inner resilience in the face of tragedy, Jeha is left with no choice but to spurn at all costs every ounce of romanticised pain and agony underlying her embattled condition. It is now up to her to soldier on, acknowledging valiantly that "now it was different. They had seven children. All their seven needed rice four times a day. Whatever happened, those fourteen relongs must be planted as usual, as in all the past seasons when Lahuma was not sick. As in the seasons when Lahuma and she had walked from the house to the rice-field and from the rice-field back to the house" (*NHBAT*, p.54). Jeha's abiding intent in materialising the success of their agricultural enterprise stays aflame even upon Lahuma's tragic death. To Jeha, the "rice must be looked after" as though it were "Lahuma's life" (*NHBAT*, p.81). Actuated by her resolve and reluctance in surrendering to the will of fate, Jeha is persistently reminded by Lahuma's warning voice, "flood will come" and "you must fight" whereupon she pledges doggedly, "I will fight with these hands" against "the flood", "the crabs", "the birds" and the "worms" that "nest in the leaves of their rice-plants" (*NHBAT*, p.92). Jeha's steadfast defiance in *No Harvest but a Thorn* embodies the fusion of personal eco-resilience and ecological duty, where her fight to protect the rice fields becomes both a tribute to Lahuma's legacy and a testament to human endurance against nature's trials.

Following Lahuma's injury and eventual death, Jeha's affective world takes centre stage. Her grief is immediate, but it swiftly transforms into a sense of duty. Her decision to continue the work alone reveals a shift from shared to solitary emotional labour. Her memories of Lahuma become instructive; she invokes his voice as a source of strength, imagining his presence in every part of the field. Even in death, Lahuma is part of the ecology that sustains her and her determination to fight the floods, birds, and worms (*NHBAT*, p.92) is a testament to a personal eco-identity forged through love, loss, and land. In their individual efforts, Lahuma

and Jeha embody the affective complexity of rural survival, where emotion and environment are inextricable.

Jeha realises that "Lahuma was everywhere" and that "it was only from her eyes that he vanished" (*NHBAT*, p.82), and she has since "mobilized all her children", "from Sanah right down to Kiah" (*NHBAT*, p.87) to exert their every last sinew for Lahuma's sake, for Jeha believes that "when all the seedlings had been pulled up, grass began to grow here and there on Lahuma's grave" (*NHBAT*, p.89). The characters' personal eco-identities are constructed upon a personal struggle against a litany of natural disasters. Likewise, it is demonstrable from the concatenation of events surrounding Lahuma and his family that the personal eco-identity of the characters in *No Harvest but a Thorn* is deeply ecological and defined by the relentless and thoroughgoing efforts to sustain their agrarian living. Lahuma's prayers and rituals, as are others, in seeking divine intervention to protect his crops signify a synthesis of their spiritual beliefs and ecological practices, showing how their personal eco-identities and well-being are inextricably linked to the natural environment and their earnest dependence on its fertility.

4.6.3 *Jungle of Hope*

In *Jungle of Hope*, Pak Kia's emotional landscape is shaped by his steadfast resistance to colonial attempt to effect modernity on the colonised subjects. His attachment to his rice fields is not merely economic — it is spiritual, ancestral, and affective. His unremitting refusals to shift to rubber-planting, despite the persuasive arguments of his brother Zaidi, reveal a profound sense of self that is rooted in land. His declarations that rice cultivation is his "heaven" and that rubber planting is "sheer hell" (*JOH*, p.9) are emotionally charged and ideologically saturated. For Pak Kia, the environment is not interchangeable or fungible — it is a moral geography.

The struggle of the rural Malay community faced with an immense environmental challenge in the colonial policies and regulations, specifically relating to the land in the novel, appears to be a birthing site of the characters' prevailing indomitability, marking an influential marker to observe the vagaries of characters' emotions. In Pak Kia's struggle to emancipate himself from the ecological destruction which compels him thereafter to chart his life anew, albeit with a heavy heart, in the jungle of Ketari, the author offers an insight into Pak Kia's persistence in preserving his ancestral land despite the lure of material benefits that may easily drive him contrariwise. In spite of Zaidi's advice that "it's true that if you work hard, the rice and the fruits from the ancestral land are enough for you to live on; but for the future, why not start a rubber plantation?", Pak Kia is "not bothered" and "would not listen" (JOH, p.8). He views that, for his family, "rice-fields, rivers orchards were equally their domain" (JOH, p.11) and that exerting himself to rubber-planting as opposed to traditional farming to which he has been conditioned for many generations is "sheer hell" and that he "yearned to return to his heaven, his rice-field" (JOH, p.9).

Pak Kia's refusal to abandon traditional farming for rubber plantation is laden with emotional and ecological significance. His steadfastness not only highlights his personal eco-identity — rooted in a traditional way of life — but also portrays his emotional response to the ecological and cultural disruptions ascribable to colonial economic policies. His struggle is a microcosm of the larger emotional and ecological battles faced by the community. Amidst the cross-currents and shifting sands of the capitalistic economy brought upon by the colonial British in Ketari, Pak Kia is resolved to go beyond the external surface of reality by adhering to his identity as a farmer, insistent that "Ketari folks remain Ketari folks forever" (*JOH*, p.18) as "he himself had never thought of leaving his little orchard and rice-fields" (*JOH*, p.14). In *Jungle of Hope*, Pak Kia's refusal to abandon traditional farming affirms the reinforcement of his personal eco-identity rooted in ancestral continuity, where the land is cherished not simply as a means of subsistence but as an enduring symbol of cultural heritage and personal integrity.

In spite of the lucrative prospect and appeal of rubber-planting to many, Pak Kia "certainly won't sell our little plot and rice-fields", and is steely that "whatever will happen, let it happen" (*JOH*, p.33) as "I am strong", "I am hard-working", and "I am sturdy" (*JOH*, p.51). He does not "feel safe planting rubber", for he is adamant that "for a proper village life, we must have rice-fields", and by that very fact, "planting rubber is not a proper way of life" (*JOH*, p.62). Pak Kia's strong conviction in the superseding importance of traditional farming and his uncategorical refusal to kneel in capitulation to the colonial economic pressure reveal his strong emotional connection to the natural environment. Pak Kia's resistance and unfailing conviction are further concretised by his steady disbelief in the conniving ruse orchestrated by an "invisible" white man called Tuan Pekok and his intermediary, Pendekar Atan, whose desire for the Ketari villagers to sell their lands to him lies only in the intention to reap upon the monetary proceeds of

the purchase, himself having been amassing "their riches through slogging, or cheating or grabbing other people's property" (*JOH*, p.49):

> That's the truth of the matter. The Ketari folks must sell their land, not because their lands are damaged beyond hope, but because Tuan Pekok wants to open a huge mine stretching from Perting right up to Benus and Cegar Medang. Soon the entire Bentong area will be ravaged by the white man's dredge…Our people will flee to the jungle (*JOH*, p.32).

In the case of Zaidi, although he stands in firm opposition to Pak Kia's way of thinking, despising the latter's "inflexible resolve" (*JOH*, p.50), he admits, however, that "it was clear too that his brother had not taken the easy way to riches" (*JOH*, p.49). Zaidi's disdain of his brother's outlook in life, which he considers "beyond saving" (*JOH*, p.50) in terms of the latter's preference for traditional farming to rubber-planting which he believes to afford "a far higher standard of living" (*JOH*, p.49) than Pak Kia's present quality of life, is roused however neither by condescension nor avarice. Rather, his intention is fostered by a genuine sense of familial camaraderie. Zaidi harbours an earnest hope for Pak Kia to see reason and galvanise a positive shift purely in the interest of his financial stability. Whilst Pak Kia "still looked strong and sturdy" (*JOH*, p.47), Zaidi's only fear lies in the impending horrors of Pak Kia's bleak future, questioning "how much longer would he remain strong and sturdy?", "if he did not begin to acquire a bit more property now, when will he ever do it?", and more importantly, "when Karim and the other children grow up, would they have to fend for themselves…should their fathers lose that strength and sturdiness" (*JOH*, p.48).

Zaidi's disillusionment deepens when Pak Kia and the other villagers finally decide to relocate to Janda Baik in furtherance of their intention in rice farming. He feels that his "dream of getting all or most of the villagers to revive their rice-fields and to open rubber plantations…could never come true" (*JOH*, p.61). However, to Pak Kia, such "novel experience" (*JOH*, p.91) shall purposefully serve "the best of the Malay way of life" (JOH, p.90). Zaidi maintains that Pak Kia's overt obstinacy that "however tough, however hard, I don't want to go and live in Ketari again" (*JOH*, p.160) and that his affirmative and vocal declaration that "a Malay village could not be modernised in the way Zaidi wanted" (*JOH*, p.172) are only a regressive mentality with which he sincerely commiserates. Zaidi genuinely believes that "there was no limit to the riches one should strive for; everything that the world had to offer must be acquired to achieve his idea of a comfortable life" (JOH, p.89). Such is yet another evident proof of Pak Kia's tenacity to break free from colonial dictates despite its accompanying challenges, therefore, enforcing Keris Mas' ideals that what is otherwise perceived as an ignorant decision to make is actually a bold act of anti-colonialist sentiment which purports to hinder progress and to undermine the capability of the Malays (Banks 2009).

In Pak Kia's persistence in keeping his traditional means of livelihood, deemed as regressive by others, he holds deep sympathy for others' passion in monetary pursuit. Believing as he always does that it is indeed a gross error of choice from which dreadful ramifications shall undoubtedly ensue, Zaidi, on the other hand, commiserates with Pak Kia's ignorance which "could twist wrong beliefs into truth" (*JOH*, p.121) on account of the former's belief in Islam that, "those who were contented to live in ignorance must incur God's wrath", and "those who were knowledgeable and did not act to end the ignorance incurred God's wrath even more" (*JOH*, pp.121–122). Zaidi becomes all the more rueful as a result, "that life was now split in two. One half was himself, who longed to spread his wings and fly all over the wide world. The other half was his brother,

who yearned to shrink and plummet down again to a buffalo's back" (*JOH*, pp.73–74).

In the upshot, Pak Kia's personal eco-identity is a counter-narrative to the materialistic aspirations encroaching upon his community. His emotional resilience in the face of economic temptations manifests a profound mutual constitution between his agrarian conception of self and the land which he cultivates. It is apparent that the constitutive relationship between human identity and environment illustrates a thematic mutual constitution that challenges the anthropocentric view of nature as merely a materially commodifiable resource at human disposal. Pak Kia's emotional commitment is especially visible in his response to natural disasters. As rain destroys his crops, he feels not only anxiety but deep despair. Yet even in the face of adversity, he refuses to commodify the land, excessively and rapaciously. His sighs, frustrations, and refusals are all emotional expressions of his personal eco-identity grounded in continuity rather than in change. His affect is not demonstrative, but enduring, and it contrasts with Zaidi's pragmatic concern for economic security. Zaidi's frustration with Pak Kia is born not only of care, but also of fear — he fears for his brother's survival and for his children's futures. In this emotional divergence, both brothers reflect different modalities of eco-affect — Pak Kia clings to land as his form of identity whilst Zaidi sees it as an economic potential. Yet the narrative privileges Pak Kia's vision, suggesting that emotion tied securely to place can be a form of resistance. His final relocation to Janda Baik is not a retreat. Rather it is his intentional and loud reassertion of his values — a quiet affective victory over the pressures of colonial development.

4.6.4 Section Review

In *Yalpanam*, *No Harvest but a Thorn*, and *Jungle of Hope*, emotion and affect are not merely a psychological register but a co-created expression of environmental immersion. Pushpanayagi's isolation is not a personal wound alone — it is echoed and shaped by the spectral house and verdant gardens of Coal Island. Lahuma's rage against the crabs and Jeha's sorrow at her husband's absence are not only internal reactions but acts of ecological participation that reconfigure the meaning of land as both burden and sustainer. Pak Kia's attachment to rice fields is equally affective and ecological — the fields shape his worldview, even as his decisions determine their fate. In each of these texts, emotional intensity arises not from individual feeling alone, but from a deep ontological entanglement with place. The self is formed not apart from but through the rhythms, obstacles, and offerings of the natural world. These novels render emotion and affect as an ecological force — dynamic, reciprocal, and constitutive of identity. In doing so, they affirm that personal eco-identity is not only shaped by affective encounters with nature, but also shapes the very conditions under which nature is perceived, inhabited, and lived.

4.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 has explored the construction of personal eco-identity through the lens of mutual constitution, showing how survival and sustenance, dominance and materialistic quest, and emotion and affect shape the entanglement of human and non-human worlds. Through the close reading of *No Harvest but a Thorn*, *Jungle of Hope*, *Between Lives*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Yalpanam*, the analysis demonstrates that identity in the colonial Malayan context emerges not in abstraction but in relation to land, forests, rivers, and ecological rhythms. The economic changes brought about by colonial and capitalist pressures introduce significant disruptions to traditional lifestyles, which are deeply entwined with the natural world. These narratives explore the emotional landscapes that unfold as communities confront and adapt to these economic shifts. The authors detail how these changes affect not just the physical landscape but also the materialistic and emotional terrains of the characters, influencing their decisions, relationships, and ultimately, their survival strategies. These texts reveal that the environment is never a passive backdrop but an active participant in self-formation — one that mediates endurance, struggle, exploitation, and resistance. The variability of these portrayals underscores the richness of Malaysian literature in English, which resists uniform patterns and instead, offers diverse pathways into understanding the co-formation of identity and ecology. At the same time, the chapter has foregrounded how personal eco-identities are shaped by material struggles and embodied encounters with nature, thereby setting the stage for a deeper examination of their spiritual and relational dimensions. The concerns of the following chapter — Spiritual Landscapes and Relational Ecologies in Personal Eco-Identity — move beyond the material and economic registers explored here and consider how belief systems, ritualistic practices, and inter-human relationships further reconfigure the nexus of self and environment. By extending the inquiry to spiritual landscapes and relational ecologies, Chapter 5 deepens the

exploration of personal eco-identity, highlighting how metaphysical orientations and human relationships, no less than material conditions, contribute to the ongoing negotiation of personal eco-selfhood.

CHAPTER 5

SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPES AND RELATIONAL ECOLOGIES IN PERSONAL ECO-IDENTITIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter enquires into the formation of literary characters' personal eco-identity in the selected works, built indispensably upon and defined critically by the notion of mutual constitution. The notion demonstrates, in essence, that human identity and nature are linked not only by the sheer utility of the latter in influencing the dynamics of the former, but due to the inosculating nature of their relationship, the imbrication of natural imperatives into human conception of self offers a site of useful cross-fertilisation and constructs a model of environmentally morphed identity formation. This is because human lives are not conceived strictly within the remits of social or cultural perspectives but extend broadly to an ecological one. In this view, the analysis in this chapter is reinforced by the other two manifestations of personal eco-identity, *videlicet* **(i)** spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices, and **(ii)** dynamics of inter-human relationships. Similar to those explored in Chapter 4, the thematic strands presented in this chapter are likewise a pertinent upshot of the conceptualised notion of mutual constitution inhering within the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity posited in Chapter 3. This chapter, on the whole, expands into relational and spiritual ecologies, completing the personal eco-identity arc through human ties in community, spirituality, and the inescapable nexus between self and nature, which buttresses the efficacy and desirability of nature in facilitating human's psychological journey to self-discovery, conception, and introspection.

5.2 SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND RITUALISTIC PRACTICES

In navigating an ecocritical reading of literary texts, a conscientious and multi-layered introspection into the human-nature relationship mirrors the complexity of humanity's interaction with spiritual beings using the environment as an agent through which natural elements function as a ritualistic intermediary. The intersecting lenses of the environment and its perceived magical as well as mystical significances have since inspired humanity to attempt at establishing a human-spirit communion for various purposes, the most fundamental of which is for the protection against harm and any other orgies of worldly horrors. The decussating interplay between nature and the spiritual aspect of nature reveals a nuanced aspect of such dynamic mutual constitution. Applied locally to the Malay culture, these practices are rooted traditionally in the Malays' belief in animism wherein plants, animals, and any other non-human beings are deemed as proxies inhering within spiritual souls. It is suggested that the genesis of these animistic beliefs hail mystically from the Malay concept of *tubuh*, translated as 'body', and *semangat*, referring to 'soul', which governs the practice of Malays' predominant activities in fishing, farming, and hunting as their daily means of subsistence (Davison 1998: 80). In *Long Road to Merdeka* and *Jungle of Hope*, the emphasis on human-nature's reciprocal formation on this account shows how these ritualistic practices are not merely acts of faith, but appear essential in maintaining the balance between human and the supernatural elements believed to be connate in nature. This secures the characters' spiritual practices directly to their ecological surroundings. In these novels, the rich tapestry of human-nature relationships reveals the bidirectional constitution between nature of the environment — as both a physical resource and a spiritual gateway. These narratives delve into the complex interplay between human rituals and the natural world, showcasing how Malay cultural practices of animism intertwine with everyday life, thereby influencing personal eco-identity.

5.2.1 *Long Road to Merdeka*

Julian Davison's (1998) attribution of Malay spirituality to the animistic concept of both body and soul appears to be the prevailing force through which, in Ariff's *Long Road to Merdeka*, a personal eco-identity by means of spiritual interactions is established using natural aid intended for human purposes. In the construction of this particular identity, the author methodically deploys "literary primitivism", which is itself a psychologically implicated literary aesthetic which illustrates the discursive consilience of the "corporeal" and the "imaginary" bordering on "the natural" (de Shield 2024: 94). Amid the uproar over Omar's sudden and unknown illness, rendering him listless "on a thin mattress on the floor whimpering with fever" (*LRTM*, p.1), Latif's help is summoned on the strength of his renowned ability as the village's shaman "who had experienced such an illness once before" (*LRTM*, p.2), to heal Omar using "a bunch of green bracken leaves" and "three tender coconuts, the tops of which had been sliced flat" (*LRTM*, p.2). Recalled by the oft-forewarned devilry of the forest, Omar is prompted thus to the following reflection:

> Omar remembered his Grandma once cautioned him not to stray away in the forest at mid-day. A lot of forest spirits around. He became really scared and could feel his body temperature rising. He felt his head turned heavy as though a big rock was over it. He felt suffocated and thrashed about, and suddenly, heaving himself to a sitting position against the window, he vomited a dark greenish fluid into the darkness outside…He then collapsed back onto his bed whimpering and looked up. The demon, like a vortex of energy, was still at the ceiling above peering at him (*LRTM*, p.6).

Here, Latif, the village shaman, employs natural elements like green bracken leaves and tender coconuts during his healing rituals in order to implore spiritual assistance to cure illnesses attributed to supernatural forces. These practices depict the Malay belief in a universe animated by spirits, where human health and well-being are directly connected to maintaining a harmonious relationship with the natural world (Ryff 2021). The rituals are not mere acts of faith — they are vital interactions that reinforce the community's personal eco-identities, portraying human as part of a larger ecological and spiritual system. The spiritual exchange between Latif and the demon reflects the embedded Malay tradition in ritualistic practices that are made possible through the help of nature, both functioning as a spiritual corrective to any undesired disturbances and a means to interact with the otherworldly beings for healing purposes. Concluding that "this is no ordinary high fever" (*LRTM*, p.5) upon learning Ananti and Omar's account of their previous brief expedition in the forest that "when they were about to leave the forest, a large iguana lizard emerged suddenly from a nearby old stump and startled them for a second" (*LRTM*, p.5), Latif applies his healing paraphernalia to Omar and "muttered a strange spell and then suddenly blew out a pungent breath over the patient's face" (*LRTM*, p.6). Omar's ritualistic treatment proves responsive when "he seemed to see an angry old demon on the ceiling above", chastising him, "didn't you see my children playing?", which immediately galvanises Latif to intensify "his muttered spell over the basin of water whilst gently and rhythmically rocking the green bracken leaves" (*LRTM*, pp.6-7), as a gesture of peace offering to the spirit.

The process of Latif's treatment involves a considerably heavy use of plants and other natural properties, believing them to contain potent spiritual power to secure his patients' swift convalescence. In another instance of Saunah's illness where "her lips looked twisted" (*LRTM*, p.133) and where she could not move her "left hand" (*LRTM*, p.134), Latif is swift to attribute her sudden, mysterious

atrophy to Saunah's interference with "the guava tree by the window" (LRTM, p.133) and expedites the process by procuring "a certain type of medicinal plant" (*LRTM*, p.142), insistent that "the turmeric rice" (*LRTM*, p.135) and "a bamboo raft" (*LRTM*, p.136) be prepared for Saunah's exorcism during which he is able to penetrate into and communicate with the incorporeal realm of the jungle spirit, which later manifests itself through the bodily agency of Latif himself:

> Outside at the guava tree, near the opened window, he saw lights glowing. Suddenly Latif's head snapped backward and his breathing became deep and heavy. His eyes opened wide and he looked at Saunah…Then his voice came as a low growl and said, "The guavas are for my children too. She was trying to chop down the tree. She should be thankful that I only block her hand (*LRTM*, p.135).

Here, Latif plays a central role in demonstrating how spiritual practices shape human personal eco-identity through a reciprocal relationship with nature. This identity is not only shaped by his ability to interpret signs from nature but also by his spiritual interventions that employ natural elements to maintain equilibrium between human life and unseen forces. His treatment of Omar's illness using "a bunch of green bracken leaves" and "three tender coconuts" (*LRTM*, p.2) reveals his role as a mediator between the physical and the metaphysical. Latif's ritual is not simply symbolic — it involves material interactions with nature that reflect a belief in its animate potency. His muttered spells, his breath over the basin of water, and his rhythmic movement of the leaves construct a ritual that is simultaneously healing and apologetic to the forest spirits.

Latif's personal eco-identity is further defined by his ongoing responsibility to maintain spiritual and environmental harmony in the village. His worldview sees plants, animals, and geographical spaces like rivers and forests as inhabited by sentient beings whose balance must be preserved. When he speaks through the spirit — "The guavas are for my children too" (*LRTM*, p.135) — Latif is no longer just a healer; he becomes a vessel through which nature conveys its grievances. His practices demonstrate a spiritual ecology that treats nature not just as resource, but as community. Each healing act deepens his connection with the land and reinforces his role as both guardian and mediator. In the case of Omar's experience, it also highlights a spiritual formation of personal eco-identity rooted in ancestral warnings and embodied fears. His feverish hallucinations and his memory of his grandmother's warning — "not to stray away in the forest at mid-day" (*LRTM*, p.6) — resurface when he perceives a demon on the ceiling. The environment is encoded not only with danger, but also with a moral order to which he has been conditioned, that he must not, under any circumstances, violate. His personal eco-identity unfolds in tension — between his modern rationality and inherited spiritual knowledge and between youthful adventure and ancestral caution. His illness becomes a moment of reckoning, where nature's spiritual agency is both feared and respected.

Nature continues to stand as a cynosure in the workings and dealings of human affairs in *LRTM*, appearing doubly as a protection against the danger of spiritual threats and misfortunes. In the face of infrastructural paucity in times of colonialism, the villagers are deprived of access to healthcare, accompanied by the long-standing tradition of and belief in natural aid for this purpose. Based on the narrator's impression of Gunung Nuang, located in Kampong Sungai Serai and described as "a small village where Omar and Ananti were born and grew up" (*LRTM*, p.29), "the first foreigner to ascend it" (*LRTM*, p.32) notes that his aides have refused to join his assent to the summit because "the mysterious spirit that

guarded the mountain top would get angry" and ascribes the success of his expedition to the spirit that "must have had pity on this strange white intruder" (*LRTM*, p.33). Also, the villagers' "gotong-royong" activity to enhance the quality of the irrigation system in Kampung Sungai Serai is held only after Latif "had consulted one of his wetland spirits and had conveyed to Ismail the most appropriate time to build the dams" (*LRTM*, p.13). Latif's expertise is constantly solicited in the villagers' hope that the "wetland spirits would hold the weather free from rain" (*LRTM*, p.63) for "this community project to be successful" (*LRTM*, p.63). These depictions affirm that, in *Long Road to Merdeka*, nature is not only a material resource but also a spiritual ally whose perceived agency continues to guide, safeguard, and unify the community in both practical and symbolic ways.

Latif's highly recognised ritualistic prowess proves especially heartening to Saunah whose rice "yield is much better than last year" thanks to spiritual assistance. Prideful of her excellent harvest, Saunah credits the success in part to the efficacy of the former's "magical spells" who administers "the green water into the dam" (*LRTM*, p.71), and in another, to her own initiative by preparing the "mythical Rice Mother" to avoid its displeasure, believing that "it would be offended if we did not show gratitude" (*LRTM*, p.129). The author's depiction of ritualism innate in the daily routines of the villagers is not merely a pastoral aesthetic device, but a critique denoting a strategic ideological source (Camayd-Freixas 2020) which further complicates textual interpretations by revealing the psychological stakes of nature. The multiplier effect in the spiritual power inherent in natural spirit on Saunah extends to her belief in the standard to be strictly observed during seasonal celebrations. At her insistence, Omar's "favourite chiku tree in front of the house had to be cut down" to make way for Haniza's wedding reception as "it's a bad omen for us when your Aunty Haniza leaves our house after the wedding if this chiku tree she had planted still remains standing" (*LRTM*, p.93). These moments reveal, rather definingly, how ritual practices, entwined

with ecological belief, govern not only agricultural success but also social customs, reinforcing the deep entanglement between spiritual reverence for nature and the rhythms of communal life in *Long Road to Merdeka*.

It is at this juncture that it becomes apparent that Saunah's character also provides useful insight into how individual ritualistic adherence forms personal eco-identity. Her reverence for the "mythical Rice Mother" (*LRTM*, p.129) and her insistence on removing the chiku tree before Haniza's wedding (*LRTM*, p.93) reflect Saunah's personal eco-adherence to ritualistic codes. These actions are not performative — they are grounded in deep anxiety about imbalance and the unseen consequences of spiritual negligence. Saunah's personal eco-identity is shaped by a vigilant, almost maternal care for harmony with natural spirits. Her belief that failing to show gratitude would result in punishment underscores a psychological proximity to the land that is both reverent and fearful.

The natural affiliation with mystical power is further reinforced in the author's other account suggesting an invocation of spiritual wrath due to human offensive behaviour. Following Salleh's death whose body is found in the "motionless, over-stuffed and now docile python" where "not the slightest sound of cicadas or birds was heard" (*LRTM*, p.39), it is instantly rumoured across the village that his animal-hunting avocation has angered the spirit, as proven by the sighting of his having been eaten alive by the python. Such incident hastens to amplify the belief propagated amongst the villagers that "it was an omen for bad things to come" (*LRTM*, pp.39-40). On a separate occasion, whilst curing Saunah's illness, through the spiritual help of the wetland spirit, the ritualistic exorcism conducted by another shaman, Ismail, enables him to confront the "angry demon" (*LRTM*, p.146) who, appearing in the form of phantasmagorical "smell of fermented durian" (*LRTM*, p.147), expresses his wrath and desire to exact its

revenge on Saunah for "chopping down the guava tree" (*LRTM*, p.146) that appears to be a location on which it resides. Through such interaction, Ismail "could see an image of the green venom", suggesting the mystical reason behind Saunah's physical infirmity, but manages to quell it using "the shiny turmeric rice" which he administers at "the river Langsat for disposal downstream" (*LRTM*, p.147). The villagers' conviction in the spirits and demons taking shape in the forms of animals and trees, dwelling "in one of the big orchards" in the village and "because spirits and demons interfered in the daily life of the village", has since led to the appointment of a mystical guardian whose "responsibility is to keep nature in balance and not to give special treatment to any particular animal or person" (*LRTM*, p.88). These narratives reproduce the community's enduring perception of nature as an inhabited moral realm, where mystical forces actively arbitrate human conduct, enforce ecological boundaries, and safeguard the delicate balance between people and their environment in *Long Road to Merdeka*.

In summary, Ariff's portrayal of nature in *Long Road to Merdeka* reflects a profound sense of human-nature's interconstitutive relation on spiritual and ritualistic accounts. As nature is a living entity believed to be inhabited by spirits that is in constant interaction with human, the novel limns a subtle reminder that nature serves human practical needs, in that the former provides materials for traditional medicine and spaces for spiritual encounters. Such relational dynamics highlight a critically constitutive interconnectedness where the spiritual and material realms coalesce, forming a holistic view of the natural environment that is deeply ingrained in the characters' identities and cultural practices in literature (Linklater 2014). The intercalation of nature into the functionality of human lives by dint of human dependence on nature's perceived power suggests the potent agency of nature where, by their mutual constitutions, the characters' personal eco-identities are constructed. Indeed, the interconnecting significance of human and nature in Ariff's novel is clearly demonstrable in the contrast between the

materialistic and spiritual uses of nature in his narrative. These characters navigate their physical needs for nature especially in matters of healing and protection and in human's spiritual engagements shown in their acts of appeasing spirits and a score of other ritualistic practices with the natural environment, showcasing the conflicting yet complementary ways that nature is revered and utilised and most importantly, how nature predominantly shapes the personal eco-identity of these characters. Through these characters, *Long Road to Merdeka* constructs a spiritual ecology in which identity is neither fixed nor secular. It is mediated through rituals, shaped by fears, healed by incantations, and embedded in an environment alive with meaning. The novel thus repositions the natural world as a moral agent and a spiritual guardian who oversee the practices that maintain ecological and psychic balance.

5.2.2 *Jungle of Hope*

Apropos of the interconnecting relationship between nature and human, spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices in *Jungle of Hope* are likewise manifested with avidity, reflecting individuals' recognition of natural imperatives in providing a spiritual refuge from any unwelcomed supernatural forces. The articulation of spiritual power in the novel extends beyond the author's act in merely introducing the element of spiritualism for its own sake. It can be seen that Keris Mas attempts to show a sense of rootedness arising from the cultivated dynamics between human and non-human beings in the space that the latter occupy (de la Cadena 2015). Indeed, Keris Mas' narrative demonstrates one such construct as he integrates natural environment into his exploration of personal eco-identity formation on the basis of human ritualistic behaviours and practices contingent upon nature. The novel describes how Pak Kia and Pak Abu, *inter alia*, in their new settlement in Janda Baik, engage in a ceremony involving natural symbols like soil and leafy twigs to communicate with forest spirits. This ritual, intended to ensure the success of their land-clearing efforts, illustrates how personal eco-identity transcends the physical use of land for agriculture, embedding spiritual respect and understanding into the fabric of their environmental interactions.

In *Jungle of Hope*, spiritual beliefs and rituals are deeply embedded in individual expressions of personal eco-identity, particularly through the characters such as Pak Kia and Tuk Pawang. These practices reflect personal attempts to forge respectful relationships with nature, framed through animistic traditions and Islamic belief. The rituals serve not only to negotiate human-spirit relations but also to define one's place within an ecological and spiritual order. Pak Kia's personal eco-identity is marked by humility and attentiveness to spiritual balance, emerging clearly in his decision to hold a ritual before clearing

the land (*JOH*, p.106). His choice signals a personal eco-ethic that does not assume human precedence over the forest. Unlike Zaidi, who sees land as a material resource, Pak Kia sees it as relational. His involvement in the ritual — gathering "a handful of soil" and "seven leafy twigs from seven types of trees" (*JOH*, p.106) — is a deliberate act of recognition, a gesture of respect to the spirit world. His participation is not merely out of deference to passive tradition. Instead, it is a deeply personal act of reverence that anchors his sense of eco-belonging.

It bears emphasising that the interlacing of ritualistic and religious observations is followed strictly and adherently by the villagers in Janda Baik. It may be observed that these practices are underpinned by the faith subscribed to by the people in the omnipotent power and will of Allah as a final divine determinant — a belief that is shared, in equal ardour, by all villagers who, too, hold on to the idea that the agricultural success in Janda Baik rests equally with the pleasure of the spirits, yet whose displeasure will not materialise unless it is willed so by Allah. To illustrate this point, a senior member of Janda Baik, Jusuh, hastens to remark, "Allah willing, the hot season will be a long one this year" (*JOH*, p.140) as he qualifies his certitude, in mollifying the villagers' growing disquiet over the looming inclement weather that may potentially harm their crops. Whilst he takes due account of Tuk Pawang's foreboding that the latter "had a flash of insight about the mishap to that boy, what's his name, Pak Kia's son, when we had a ceremony appeasing the ceremony" (*JOH*, p.145), Jusuh, amid the ferment of public anxiety, "neither approved nor believed in Tuk Pawang's flash of insight, but he himself prayed special prayers for the safety and success of the work on Pak Kia's and Pak Abu's land" (*JOH*, p.145). Jusuh is convinced that any bad omen, nay actual disasters for that matter, whether physically or through the misdeed of spiritual interference can be warded off only by "asking protection from Allah the Almighty" (*JOH*, p.145). This fusion of spiritual tradition with Islamic conviction reveals a layered ecological worldview in *Jungle of Hope*, where the divine will

ultimately governs human and non-human agency, demonstrating that notwithstanding the villagers' prevalent belief in all rituals, omens, and natural signs, they remain subordinate to the sovereignty of Allah.

Ingrained in the desire for a peaceful co-inhabitation obtainable through an affinity with the extramundane beings, both Pak Kia and Pak Abu, upon their relocation to Janda Baik to begin their life anew, deem it fit that a ceremony "be held there to mark the start of the clearing work" (*JOH*, p.106). The said ceremony, intended to appease the spirit, is headed by the village shaman, Tuk Pawang, who oversees the rites by administering "a handful of soil from each corner of the jungle that was to be cleared" and "seven leafy twigs from seven types of trees, large and small" (*JOH*, p.106), all "laid out on a platform that had been erected by the river" alongside "a little gong fastened to a freshly cut branch, a bar of living wood supported on two posts which were young hardwood trees" (*JOH*, p.107). In the following excerpt, it is described that Tuk Pawang's approach to summon the forest spirits is executed through the aid of natural apparatuses as he attempts to intimate to the spirits that the land which has never before been "adulterated" and "inhabited" by human is now to be occupied so that "every kind of spirits in the jungle knew what Pak Kia and Pak Abu wished to do" (*JOH*, p.107):

> He recited incantations for several seconds over the water in the deep bowl. He blew into the water three times before replacing the bowl on the platform. Then he took the seven coconut leaf ribs tied with the pencana thread and dipped their tips in the water in the deep bowl. He took the seven types of leaves tied with the pencana thread and dipped their tips in the bowl. Then he tied the seven coconut-leaf ribs and the seven types of leaves together (*JOH*, p.107).

Tuk Pawang's ritualism is, however, not wholly dehors Islamic guidelines as he precedes the rituals with a prayer to Allah the Almighty so that the process runs smoothly and without undue interruptions. This underscores his intention that human fate does not lie at the sole pleasure of the spirits. Rather, he believes that the interaction with the otherworld, albeit unseen to the naked human eye, is merely an ordinary interaction between Allah's creatures of equal worth, like that of all humans. Zaidi, in his remonstrance "against all this pawang business, especially healing efforts through trances and genies" (*JOH*, p.119), refuses to attend the ceremony as he is "totally against the rites for appeasing spirits and incantations against genies and the like", viewing that "it was not Islamic and idolatrous" (*JOH*, p.114). He is adamantly opposed to supernatural interactions, alleging that it is not in line with the teaching of Islam as "the pawangs recite incantations with a sprinkling of Quranic verses in them, but ask favours from spirits and devils" (*JOH*, p.119). His apprehension intensifies as he "realised how magic vied with religion in the village when Tuk Pawang and Tuk Imam were invited to sit side by side at the head of the gathering" (*JOH*, p.120), aggravating further his irritation at the sight of an incense burner that is used to conclude the spirit appeasement rites.

The observation made above offers an insight into Tuk Pawang's psyche as he is seen to embody the hybrid eco-spiritual figure whose ritual practice is both mystical and theological. His incantations, water rites, and use of *pencana* thread (*JOH*, p.107) reflect an intimate knowledge of the forest's spiritual topography. However, his ingeminated invocation of "Allah willing" (*JOH*, p.109) reveals his consciousness of monotheistic hierarchy. His personal eco-identity is thus forged at the intersection of belief systems — animist, Islamic, and ecological. His rituals are careful negotiations as he does not command spirits. He merely entreats them, using natural instruments to communicate his intention and to offer his apology.

This dual awareness allows him to serve as both spiritual guide and ecological custodian.

In spite of Zaidi's displeasure at the villagers' uninformed belief in the power of spiritual rites and his outright repudiation of these practices, contending that "the guns that he and the Assistant Penghulu were carrying, were more important than any incantations or incense in facing the perils of the jungle" (*JOH*, p.123), the people in Janda Baik remain faithful in the potency of supernatural elements accorded by nature as an expedient of human-spirit communication in order to foster an amenable understanding amongst them. It is described that "in Janda Baik it was not just Tuk Pawang who felt strongly about appeasing the spirits" and that "the villagers were even more bent on it" (*JOH*, p.135). Zaidi's resistance to these practices adds complexity to the eco-spiritual discourse. His discomfort — "totally against the rites for appeasing spirits" (*JOH*, p.114) — reflects a more modernist and rationalist perspective rooted in reformist Islam. Yet his emotional responses — distaste, frustration, and concern — signal that even rejection is a form of engagement. Zaidi's personal eco-identity is defined by tension. He believes in action, planning, and control; values that are at odds with the deferential posture of ritual. But his worry for Pak Kia and his eventual realisation that "life was now split in two" (*JOH*, p.74), show that ecological belonging is not easily severed, even by those who resist spiritual frameworks.

On a separate occasion, devoted unflinchingly to the spiritual advice recommended by Tuk Pawang, Pak Abu thinks it objectionable to begin the construction of his house in Janda Baik without first appeasing "any spirits before clearing the site and building the hut" (*JOH*, p.135), fearing that the spirits may take umbrage at such indiscretion. Eagerness expressed in the villagers' yearning to succeed and the hankering for the promising future they "had chosen for their

family, on the edge of the village in the middle of the jungle" (*JOH*, p.87), have galvanised, perhaps too inordinately, both their subscription and submission to the supremacy of mystical might inherent in nature, believing it to ease the workings and handlings of their affairs with dispatch. To this end, not only are Tuk Pawang's instructions religiously followed, they are discharged blindly:

> Before going down to the rice-fields, Tuk Pawang said it was enough just to scatter roasted paddy around the place, but some villagers wanted a special food offering to be made to the spirits. When the paddy pants were pest-ridden, attacked by numerous worms, birds and wild boars, those who had not appeased the spirits had the villagers' wrath heaped on their heads. Jusuh once earned the villagers' bitter enmity because that year the wild boars ran wild, wallowing in the rice-fields and destroying the padi grains which had filled out beautifully…The villagers turned against him because he never appeased the spirits by scattering roasted padi before going down to the rice-field (*JOH*, p.135).

Jusuh, an elder in the village, offers yet another perspective rooted in pragmatic faith and long experience with nature. Though wary of mysticism, he joins in rituals and prays for good weather (*JOH*, p.145). His personal eco-identity is pragmatic but still spiritual nonetheless, shaped by his trauma actuated by a lifetime of environmental unpredictability. He invokes "Allah willing" not as superstition but as a gesture of humility before the uncontrollable. Jusuh does not dismiss the unseen. Instead, he integrates it into a worldview that balances piety and practicality.

Equally worthy of appreciation in the ritual performed by Tuk Pawang is that the various ritualistic ceremonies over which he presides hinge on the tenet of Islamic faith wherein an adherent's belief in the unknown and the unseen is mandatorily demanded and signals his faith in the omnipotence of Allah as the creator of all beings. Their religious leader, Imam Mamat, at the behest of Tuk Pawang, "as if mesmerised, immediately [sits] on the ground, followed by all present" and begins "to recite a short prayer" (*JOH*, p.108). Tuk Pawang's reminder that only "after seven days" that Pak Kia and Pak Abu "can start felling the trees" and that "there can be no hunting in the jungle" upon placing "a gawar-gawar, seven coconut leaves woven in siku seluang pattern" (*JOH*, p.109) is to be strictly obeyed to ensure the success of their novel agricultural endeavour in Janda Baik.

Notwithstanding Tuk Pawang's assuredness of his method, he concedes to the divine omnipotence, reflected notably in his platitudes that "Allah willing, it will be well" (*JOH*, p.109). He is conscious that in appeasing the jungle spirits through these ritualistic ceremonies, his effort is not in total rejection to the superseding will of Allah, the most powerful determinant of providence who may, at His prerogative, ordain otherwise should He will so. In a separate instance, when Karim "fell on his face" causing an injury to his arm, it prompts Tuk Pawang instantly to use "the bamboo jar which contained the water from the jeluk bowl" (*JOH*, p.110) as part of his spiritual healing. The latter concludes his ritual by reminding his onlookers that the promised efficacy of his cure lies in the absolute discretion of Allah. Although he attributes the incident to the spiritual indiscretion committed by Karim as a result of the "breaking of the taboo" that "would affect their work of clearing the jungle", Tuk Pawang is nonetheless convinced that "Allah willing, no harm will come of it" (*JOH*, p.110). Thus, Tuk Pawang's practices embody a syncretic balance between deference to spiritual tradition and submission to divine authority, affirming that in *Jungle of Hope*, any form of human

engagement with nature may only and ultimately unfold under the supreme will of Allah.

On reflection, the portrayal of spiritual practices foregrounded in *Jungle of Hope* not only facilitates a deeper connection with nature, but also forges a personal eco-identity amongst the characters. This identity is shaped by the recognition of nature's dual yet interconnected roles as both a provider and a protector, embodying a living tradition that respects ecological boundaries whilst drawing on its resources. Pak Kia, Tuk Pawang, and Jusuh reflect, as explained above, an acute awareness of the spiritual agency of nature, which informs their personal understanding of the place within the ecological and supernatural worlds. Indeed, the idea that identity is formed at the instigation of spiritual and ritualistic beliefs is echoed by Lily Tope, positing that such beliefs, "which are essentially narratives of nature, should not be divorced from the conception of Malay identity — that is, not as appendages or afterthoughts, but as affective factors" (Tope 2024: 174). Furthermore, Keris Mas' text critically reflects on the sustainability of these traditional practices in the face of environmental challenges. *Jungle of Hope* poses pertinent questions about the efficacy and relevance of traditional eco-spiritual practices in contemporary settings, encouraging readers to consider how modernity influences and reshapes personal eco-identities. It is imperative to note that the novel richly illustrates the mutual constitution between the spiritual and the ecological through the culturally peculiar lens of Malay practices. It reveals how these intertwined relationships form a complex web of personal eco-identity that is deeply ecological, spiritual, and inherently interconnected, offering profound insights into the ways human understand and interact with the otherworldly beings, rendering the latter an aptly generative property which contributes to the formation of personal eco-behaviour (Tan 2024).

In summary, it can be observed that through the behavioural depictions of these characters, *Jungle of Hope* constructs a variegated aspects of eco-spirituality that reflect personal belief, cultural memory, and emotional investment. It is not homogeneous — it is interpreted differently by different people. What unites them, however, is a shared recognition that the land is not empty but densely populated by forces that demand respect. The ritualistic acts in the novel appear to be the mode of communication and the space in which human and nature celebrate their co-existence. For Pak Kia, Tuk Pawang, Jusuh, and even sceptics like Zaidi, the environment is moral and responsive, requiring human to act with care, humility, and belief.

5.2.3 Section Review

In *Long Road to Merdeka* and *Jungle of Hope*, spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices emerge not as peripheral or folkloric devices, but as integral modalities through which personal eco-identities are formed in dynamic relation to the environment. Characters such as Latif, Saunah, Omar, Pak Kia, Tuk Pawang, and Jusuh engage with nature not solely as passive recipients of its bounty or condemned victims of its dangers, but as relational agents embedded in an animate cosmos. Their rituals — ranging from offerings and chants to plant-based healing and spirit appeasement — are acts of reciprocal engagement that reflect and reshape their sense of selves. These narratives show that identity is not formed in abstraction from the environment but through active, embodied negotiation with its physical and spiritual forces.

This ontological reciprocity is most clearly visible in how characters read the land for signs, attribute meaning to natural phenomena, and respond through culturally specific rituals that bind them to the moral logic of place. Nature is not a backdrop, but a co-participant in shaping human fate and self-understanding. Latif's healing practices, Saunah's ritualised gratitude to the Rice Mother, Tuk Pawang's incantatory diplomacy with jungle spirits, and Jusuh's pious pragmatism collectively construct a vision of personal eco-identity in which spirituality and ecology are indispensable and inextricable. These figures do not merely act upon nature — they are shaped by it in spiritual, emotional, and ethical terms.

By foregrounding rituals as both a form of cultural continuity and a mode of ecological responsiveness, these texts challenge secular, anthropocentric models of identity and environmental engagement. In addition, they offer a deeply localised epistemology in which personal eco-identity is shaped through the iterative practices of respect, apology, negotiation, and interdependence. In this way, these novels construct a relational ontology grounded in co-constitution — where human and more-than-human agencies shape one another through affective, spiritual, and ecological entanglements. Such portrayals reinstate the sacred within the ecological, revealing how Malay ritualistic traditions continue to structure personal eco-identity not in resistance to, but in dialogic co-creation with, the natural world.

5.3 DYNAMICS OF INTER-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

This section examines the notion of mutual constitution through environmental imperatives perceived as a great impetus to the improvement of human relationships in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Between Lives* or its compromise caused thereby. In these novels, it is shown that the complex interplay between the environment and human relationships through the active vessel of their interconnectedness unfolds the practicality of nature serving not only as a physically aesthetic backdrop, but also as an ecopsychological catalyst in shaping human interpersonal dynamics. These narratives explore the dual yet cognate influence of the environment as it both mirrors and constructs the inter-human connections as well as enhances human kinship in the face of environmental challenges that test these bonds. It is important to observe that the harmony between human and the environment in respect of their magnetic effects on each other reflects human interpersonal and social interactions fostered by this congruence. The social impact of the environment on humanity bears predominantly on the latter's experiences in and engagements with the former (Baxter and Pelletier 2019). Prevalent in environmental psychology is the idea that nature acts primordially as a guiding barometer which measures the degree and depth of social interactions and serves as a useful medium through which opportunities for congealing social cohesion and promoting collective resilience are possible (Kuo and Sullivan 2001). Similar in effect respecting the nature's impacts on human relationships is its roles in adding fuel to intergroup relations through human lived and shared experiences within a natural setting. In the context of the ecopsychology on social identity, it is suggested that nature proves invaluable as a connective in augmenting social cooperation between individuals and in mitigating their conflicts (Shteynberg et al. 2020). This section demonstrates that natural relatedness to human social correspondence in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Between Lives* offers a resourceful insight into the construction

of human kinship reinforced essentially by such mutually constitutive embeddedness.

5.3.1 *Jungle of Hope*

The mutual constitution between human and nature is especially palpable in the latter's role of shaping the characters' personal eco-identities and that of influencing the dynamics of their interactions. In *Jungle of Hope*, the ongoing conflict between Pak Kia and his brother, Zaidi, over the future of their land exemplifies this — Zaidi's push for modernisation through rubber-planting contrasts sharply with Pak Kia's desire to preserve traditional rice farming. It shows the manifest conflict which strains their familial ties yet also highlights their deep-rooted connection to the land. This disagreement underscores a critical aspect of their respective personal eco-identities, in that Zaidi is drawn to the economic benefits of new agricultural practices, seeing them as a path to progress, whilst Pak Kia views traditional farming as a vital part of his heritage and a guardian of ecological stability. It is worth noting that Keris Mas' narrative delves into the concept of comingled dynamics (Banks 2009), showing how human relationships and environmental stewardship are mutually reinforcing (Phuoc Nguyen and Quynh-Anh Ngoc Nguyen 2024). In the novel, the natural environment in Janda Baik becomes a space where Pak Kia and his community can enact their mutual vision of traditional living, which is in harmony with nature. This decision not only affects their social dynamics, but also reinforces their respective personal eco-identities by embedding the values constitutively found in ecological surroundings into their personal lives and interpersonal relationships.

On this score, an observation on the way in which environmental ordeal bears undesirably on the kinship between human appears salient in the conflict implicating Pak Kia and his family. The prevailing dilemma faced by Pak Kia between giving in to modernisation and upholding his traditional agrarian

practice beckons an impending compromise in his relationship with his brother, Zaidi. The latter, who is against "the usual practice" (*JOH*, p.30), prefers that Pak Kia embrace changes by allowing "his little orchard and rice-field" (*JOH*, p.34) to be converted into a rubber plantation as opposed to "living from hand to mouth" (*JOH*, p.33) by simply planting rice. To him, Pak Kia's insistence on traditional farming "would give them barely enough to eat" (*JOH*, p.34). Egged upon by Tuan Pekok's inducement to sell their ancestral land for development along with his already intensifying frustration over the long "stretch of rainy days" (*JOH*, p.3), Pak Kia and his fellow villagers feel all the more compelled to flee the scene of natural misery surrounding Ketari as they lament the sad spectacle of their houses hovering helplessly "on lone little islands on an expanse of water" (*JOH*, p.6). Pak Kia and Zaidi find themselves in an abiding apathy towards each other's view on "progress". Whilst the former is "ill at ease", thinking that tapping rubber is "a sheer hell" (*JOH*, p.9) and that "rice-fields, rivers, orchards were equally their domain" (*JOH*, p.11), the latter, realising "how adamant his brother could be" (*JOH*, p.49), perceives his "inflexible resolve" (*JOH*, p.50) in moving to Janda Baik to retain "the unchanging tradition of the Malays" (*JOH*, p.51) as an ill-advised mentality of "simple people" who "were neither made to understand, nor given a chance to consciously face up to challenges, and the reasons for the changes, brought by the British rulers" (*JOH*, p.57). This fraternal rift illustrates how environmental hardship and differing visions of progress strain kinship bonds, revealing, in *Jungle of Hope*, the deep entanglement between ecological allegiance, cultural tradition, and the politics of modernisation.

Zaidi, though cast as a modernist antagonist, offers a complex view of environmental engagement and familial strain. His desire to modernise the village and provide educational opportunities for Karim stems from genuine care. He laments that Pak Kia "was not striving earnestly" and warns of "gradual extinction" in the jungle (*JOH*, p.57). His disappointment is emotional as much as

ideological. Despite his disapproval of traditionalism, Zaidi's actions lay bare a spectacle of personal struggle — his love for family conflicts with his belief in reform. Thus, his personal eco-identity manifests itself as one forged through tension, questioning, and unresolved love.

Pak Kia's commitment to traditional rice farming is a defining act of individual resistance and identity that affects his relationships. His refusal to convert his land into a rubber plantation creates conflict with his younger brother, Zaidi, who believes in progress through modern agriculture. Zaidi expresses his frustration, arguing that Pak Kia's choices are likely to lead to poverty and ignorance: "We are not striving earnestly to get abundant yields, we only work half-heartedly" (*JOH*, p.27). Meanwhile, Pak Kia defends his chosen path with quiet conviction, stating, "I am strong. I am hard-working. I am sturdy. And I am at home with a spade, a chopper and an axe" (*JOH*, p.51). Their relationship deteriorates as their conflicting personal eco-identities play out, but the emotional core — brotherly concern and mutual love — remains, even though reciprocal understanding falters.

Contrary to Pak Kia's attitude that "everything being predestined through God's *qada* and *qadar*; that if *rezeki* you were allotted was meagre, you could never make yourself more prosperous" (*JOH*, p.43), Zaidi vehemently argues that "the result of our hard work", in reference to traditional rubber-tapping, appears "so meagre compared to that of the non-Muslims" because "we are not striving earnestly to get abundant yields, we only work half-heartedly" (*JOH*, p.27). Zaidi seethes in rage upon learning that Pak Kia's son, Karim, is forced to give up his education at Pak Kia's command so that Karim would be able to continue his legacy as a farmer. Insistent that "he must not be taken out of school" (*JOH*, p.74), Zaidi becomes all the more convinced that Pak Kia and others' injudicious decision

to relocate to Janda Baik would be their downfall as "they were being driven into the jungle to face gradual extinction" (*JOH*, p.58). It is these differing stances which further aggravate the insidious tensity in the familial ties between Pak Kia and Zaidi, which becomes ever more pronounced when Pak Kia, in reflecting on such discord, laments sorrowfully "You grow more and more different, Zaidi. I find it harder and harder to understand you" (*JOH*, p.67). In his expression of frustration over their widening differences, Pak Kia adopts this self-debasing, yet confident tone:

> I can't be like you, Di. You went to school, I don't. You are smart, I am not. You studied under the new-fangled religious teachers, I did not. You read the newspapers, I did not. But I am strong. I am hard-working. I am sturdy. And I am at home with a spade, a chopper and an axe. Let me go to Janda Baik. I'll plant dry rice first. Then I'll start another rice-field, maybe better than the present one. I have no faith in rubber planting (*JOH*, p.51).

In his commitment to the generational practice of traditional farming, Pak Kia remains unperturbed by Zaidi's relentless disapprobation over his decision to move to Janda Baik. He realises that in order to free himself from the prolonged anxiety over Zaidi's swelling pressure following his decision, Pak Kia needs the support of his son, Karim, whom he hopes to lead "the best of the Malay way of life" (*JOH*, p.90). His aspiration however is not unmet with Karim's covert yet visible remonstrance at the initial stage of their relocation. Karim "felt out of place" (*JOH*, p.94) and as if "awakened from a dream-filled sleep" (*JOH*, p.103), Karim is strongly beset by cluelessness, apparent from his face, palpably "expressionless, calm, unheeding" (*JOH*, p.105). Pak Kia recognises Karim's behaviour whose indifference to him emanates solely from the latter's rebellion "against being

pulled out of school into the jungle" (*JOH*, p.81) but notes understandably that "the change of environment was not easy for him. Leaving school still affected him. Alone, without companions, far from his old village, his brothers and sisters, and his friends, Karim was bound to feel the strain" (*JOH*, p.102). This generational tension reflects how the relocation to Janda Baik tests familial loyalty and adaptability, underscoring in *Jungle of Hope* the challenges in sustaining traditional ecological values amid the personal upheavals of change.

By the shared inspiration and mutual desire to succeed in their new settlement in Janda Baik, Pak Kia and Karim's relationship gradually improves upon Karim's growing confidence in Pak Kia's assurance that farming, like that of "the enormous tree which gave shade to the whole" (*JOH*, p.84) of the jungle, "is the beginning of your world" (*JOH*, p.84), and that "you shall not see the sky from the jungle of your life unless you grow as big and tall as this" (*JOH*, p.84). Karim eventually realises that "works in the village or the jungle begins and ends with the tools" (*JOH*, p.95) and that the ability "to learn all the ways of surviving in the jungle" (JOH, p.159) until "we have built a village as good as the one we left in Ketari" (*JOH*, p.169) is instrumental in ensuring their newly ventured farming endeavour. Their reconciliation affirms that perseverance in shared labour not only rebuilds livelihoods but also restores familial bonds, highlighting in *Jungle of Hope* the unifying power of ecological commitment and mutual resilience.

Investigating deeper into Karim's psychological reaction to what he deems as a forced relocation, it appears that he is caught between two opposing forces — of adolescent complacency and of family expectation. Initially resentful of being pulled from school to work in the rice fields, Karim views his father's dictatorial decision with confusion and mild resistance. His resentment because he "felt out of place" is externalised through his "expressionless, calm, unheeding" look (*JOH*,

p.105), suggesting inner turmoil. However, through working the land alongside his father, Karim comes to appreciate the value of labour and the dignity embedded in tradition. Their shared struggle softens his indignation and, in turn, cultivates their closeness. As Karim matures, he takes on the mantle of responsibility, believing that "the land is to be passed down the generations, and nobody and nothing would ever harm or touch it" (*JOH*, p.273). In this emotional evolution, Karim's personal eco-identity is forged not only through nature but through his father's steadfast influence.

Further, Karim finally understands that in order to save his and his father's lives, he has "to kill the number one enemy" (*JOH*, p.241), to wit, human desire tainted by cupidity and arrogance, or any such attempt which may disrupt the traditional aspiration of farmers. The gradual yet eventual growth in the keenness of his interest is demonstrated by his sheer industry to grasp all the needful skills which have "matured him into a man" (*JOH*, p.273). He has become steadfast in his genuine belief that the land, as a symbol of his heritage and identity, is only meant "to be passed down the generations" (*JOH*, p.273) and "nobody and nothing would ever harm or touch it" (*JOH*, p.273). Understanding fully the importance of strength, diligence, and persistence, Karim echoes Pak Kia in the latter's sentiment that "those who want a good life must work hard", and that "one could work well and produce a lot…to buy the necessities of life. Thus, one must have a lot of produce from the rice-fields and farm animals, fruit trees and vegetable plots, so that some of it could be sold to get the money needed" (*JOH*, p.96). Not only have Karim and Pak Kia become aligned in their vision, the shared insight has also significantly improved their erstwhile corroding familial propinquity through Karim's resolute emulation of Pak Kia's "strength, courage and determination" which progressively becomes "part of Karim's character" (*JOH*, p.253), giving him, in subsequence, a more psychological fillip for the nurturing of his personal eco-identity.

The narratives of *Jungle of Hope* offer a nuanced exploration of how the natural environment is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the drama of human relationships. The novel shows that the dual nature of the environment — as both a resource and a relational space — plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the interconnectedness and personal eco-identities of the characters within the story. The text reflects on the formation of the characters' personal eco-identity, shaped by their ongoing interactions with the environment. The diffusive effect of nature on identity is seen in the birth, evolution, and indeed, maintenance of the characters' personal identity with their experiences and challenges faced within the natural and social landscapes. For example, Pak Kia's steadfastness in maintaining traditional farming practices despite economic pressures, and Pak Abu and as well as Jusoh's industry in attempting to adapt their quotidian agricultural practices in their newly-ventured life in the jungle, reflect adaptive strategies that are deeply ecological in their essence.

5.3.2 *Long Road to Merdeka*

The machinery of human affairs and interpersonal interactions within natural domain in *Long Road to Merdeka* present yet an impactful manifestation of nature as a platform where inter-human relationships are nurtured and maintained. In depicting the dynamics in human relationships, nature appears as a boosting force in constructing a concrete mutual bond between human that is coalesced out of the characters' affinity with others. In the novel, nature acts as a medium through which human relationships are both tested and strengthened. The narrative details how villagers collaborate to enhance local agriculture and manage natural resources, thus fostering a sense of unity and collective resilience. These efforts are deeply intertwined with their cultural identity, which is informed by a symbiotic relationship with their surroundings. The villagers' communal ties are inspired through shared environmental challenges, illustrating how kinship and personal eco-identity of the characters are respectively envisaged and constructed.

Implicit in the role of nature reflected in Ariff's novel is its facilitating effect in the bolstering of social unity. This is exhibited explicitly in the villagers' synergetic endeavours to ensure peace and harmony in Kampung Sungai Serai. In the collective attempt to enhance the economy of the fellow villagers, a village committee is established, composing of "two sub-committees — security, development and environment and the other, welfare and education" (*LRTM*, p.9). The establishment of this committee arises out of the villagers' concern over the dalliance of the British Military Administration that is seen to pay more attention to "more urgent priorities" than the wellbeing of the villagers, prompting the said committee "to organise itself; to look for its own funding" (*LRTM*, p.9). In one particular instance, a session is convened and chaired by Ismail, who has been "an active social worker" and is portrayed as "trying to prove himself a worthy

member of JKKK" (*LRTM*, p.16). By virtue of his appointment, Ismail takes a proactive step "to enable folk with land holdings to plant rubber" (*LRTM*, p.9). Here, Ismail is depicted as a central figure whose individual initiative fortifies the community bonds through environmental actions. As a leader in the village committee, he helps organise rubber planting and infrastructure development. His proactive stance goes beyond logistics. Ismail's work fosters collaboration, such as when "they spread themselves out downstream clearing the tall weeds and hammering in poles" (*LRTM*, p.64), transforming collective labour into social eco-solidarity. His personal eco-identity is, therefore, inseparable from his relational role, showing how one man's vision can cultivate trust and cohesion through the land.

Through the support of the committee combined with the cooperation shown by all "peasants and small holders planting rubber", their applications are successfully submitted for sanction from the District Office in Kajang for the grant of "new Malay reserved lands in the whole district of Ulu Langat" (*LRTM*, p.9). The effort demonstrated by the villagers instantiated by this collective enterprise provides a solid ground on which social capital is built and community welfare is enhanced. The narrative illustrates how interactions within a shared natural environment can lead to a unified relationship, highlighting the role of nature as a bridge that connects individual actions to collective outcomes as a positive consequence of human-nature's mutual constitution.

Indeed, the presence of kinship through natural encouragement is apparent in *Long Road to Merdeka*, bringing to the fore the idea that nature is capable, ecopsychologically, of engendering social dynamics. This is particularly evident in the group activity participated by all the residents during the rice cultivation season in the village. Ready with their hoes and sickles, "Ismail and Latif joined

Ali and the other men in brook" and "they spread themselves out downstream clearing the tall weeds and hammering in poles on those parts of the banks that had eroded" (*LRTM*, p.64). The otherwise challenging struggles and laborious tasks become gradually unencumbered by the strong bond of mutual cooperation extended by the villagers who are all "set to convert the sleepy brook once again into an irrigation system leading the water into the paddy field" (*LRTM*, p.63) and excited for the dams that "were to be constructed" (*LRTM*, p.64). It is described that "four men, including Ali, drive in mangrove poles closely together across the brook" (*LRTM*, pp.64–65) assisted by Kandan who mobilises the help of his "men from the Morib coast" to erect the poles "firmly into the river bed" (*LRTM*, p.65) together with Ismail and Latif who graciously offer their helping hands "to dig a few outlets on the upstream side of the first dam, and then strengthened the sides of the outlets with a few more pole implants" (*LRTM*, p.65). These scenes affirm that in *Long Road to Merdeka*, collective engagement with the land not only sustains agricultural productivity but also reinforces communal eco-solidarity, weaving ecological cooperation into the fabric of social life.

The apt portrayal of cultural and social narratives in the novel in respect of the ecopsychologically nourishing trait of nature exposes the essence of mutual constitution between nature and human behaviours, illustrating the intersecting importance of the natural environment in how human relationships are navigated. The depiction to this effect is especially helpful in examining the sustainability of human relationship and the degree to which human dynamics are cultivated owing in great measure to human affiliative interaction with nature. Nature, in *Long Road to Merdeka*, pervades across all aspects of human behaviours especially in terms of the way in which the maintenance of human relationship fostered by the characters in the novel is secured. It is shown in the manner in which the mutual consensus amongst all villagers is sought when deciding that the best way to diversify their personal incomes is through the venture into rubber-planting

which "brought in more cash than rice cultivation" (*LRTM*, p.125). Halimah reflects that Omar's deceased father, having first mooted the idea, had once "inquired at the State Agriculture Department in Kuala Lumpur if there was financial aid for villagers to plant rubber" (*LRTM*, p.126) as "rubber is tolerant to a wide range of soils, both undulating and properly drained lands" (*LRTM*, p.127). Despite the authority's discouragement that "the old policy that peasants in Malay reservation lands should stick to rice cultivation still stands" and that "it had been decided that rice cultivation was for the Malays, manual work in the foreign rubber plantations was for those who came from India and tin ore extraction was for the immigrants from China" (*LRTM*, p.126), the villagers' inexorable will to improve their livelihood continues unaltered, evident in their efforts to materialise their common goal. With the help of the village committee, "led by the headman and Ismail" who "collected money from the villagers interested in the project", their project is guided by the expertise of "Mustapha, who had a considerable replanting experience — he worked in Perang Besar rubber research in Sepang" by propagating "a selected RRIM clone to produce seedlings in a nursery in Sungai Serai village with Khuzri" (*LRTM*, p.127). The assiduity seen in the villagers' relentless labour proves immensely fruitful by early 1949 when "daily tapping to extract latex had commenced", thereby luring other entrepreneurs to "seize on the business opportunities offered by rubber planting" (*LRTM*, p.127). This episode demonstrates how, in *Long Road to Merdeka*, nature serves as both the impetus and the medium for collective economic transformation, reinforcing the reciprocal shaping of natural environment and community through shared enterprise.

Indeed, the values and spirit of cooperation within human community refine the notion of mutual constitution in *Long Road to Merdeka*, underpinned fundamentally by environmental influences. The portrayal of selflessness and collaborative behaviours in the novel is evoked distinctly in the villagers' generosity in helping with Haniza's wedding reception. The author describes that

all "family members contributed by helping in the preparation of the wedding", where "a large rectangular shed made of nipah palm roof, with a wide-open square in the middle, was erected in front of Saunah's house" (*LRTM*, p.93). Whilst "Omar, Ananti and Arumugam helped to cover the wooden platforms", "the decoration was done by some of Kandan's men" using "wild bananas plants and weaved coconut leaves" (*LRTM*, p.93) to decorate the bamboo pillars. Another fellow villager, Mak Som, kindly volunteers to oversee the cooking activity involving a slaughtered bull "to make a spicy beef rendang as the main dish" and other "volunteers, both men and women, stayed half a day chopping the meat into small pieces, peeling potatoes, slicing the onions, galangal and gingers" (*LRTM*, p.93). The amount of happy bustle pouring in the village beckons a picture of enlivened cordiality and "an unstoppable orgy of screaming and hysterical laughter, punctuated by shouted obscenities" (*LRTM*, p.94) especially during the "*ronggeng party*" (*LRTM*, p.96), a Malay traditional dance, succeeding the "*bersanding*" (*LRTM*, p.97) or wedding reception, arousing further sheer "excitement on everyone's face" (*LRTM*, p.97). These depictions reveal that in *Long Road to Merdeka*, communal celebrations are deeply interwoven with environmental elements, demonstrating how nature not only frames cultural expression but also reinvigorates the bonds of mutual care and social unity.

Saunah, a figure of quiet resilience, embodies how ritual and nature connect people. Her faith in spiritual ceremonies, including honouring the "mythical Rice Mother" (*LRTM*, p.129), shapes her relationships through a shared cultural framework. She works alongside neighbours during the harvest, where rituals turn into communal expressions of gratitude. Her reverence for natural rhythms encourages others to respect not only the land but each other. This ritual-based personal eco-identity conjointly embodied by them is one of emotional interdependence, marked by respect, gratitude, and the reinforcement of kinship through shared belief. The villagers' collective efforts in rubber planting reflect the

cumulative power of individual initiatives. When "peasants and small holders" (*LRTM*, p.9) begin replanting, it is with the guidance of individuals like Mustapha and Ismail. The project's success — marked by "daily tapping to extract latex" (*LRTM*, p.127) — is social as well as economic. It is built upon a shared dream of improvement and mutual reliance. Similarly, their participation in Haniza's wedding showcases how nature, culture, and affection intersect — "wild banana plants and weaved coconut leaves" adorn the venue, whilst Mak Som oversees a feast made possible by volunteers (*LRTM*, p.93). The environment becomes both a literal and symbolic backdrop for social flourishing.

On a personal scale, the friendship between Omar and Ananti deepen positively through various instances during their exploratory trips to the forest near Kampung Sungai Serai, where platonic intimacy which later blossoms into romantic fondness is harboured by their complementary dynamics in negotiating any natural challenges. Tempted by the account of Omar's mother "when ants fly out in great numbers from the highlands, it was a sign that edible white mushrooms will be there in abundance", Omar and Ananti spare no time in coursing along "the hilly narrow road leading to the reservoir a mile westward from the village", where "from a distance they could see white mushrooms glowing softly in the filtered rays of light that penetrated the canopy" (*LRTM*, p.3). In the height of their mania over the lush expanse of edible mushrooms growing "in wild abandon on the spongy ground" (*LRTM*, p.4), they are faced with a dreadful encounter with "a large iguana lizard" which "emerged suddenly from a nearby old stump and startled them for a second. It seemed annoyed at their disturbance and was unafraid!" (*LRTM*, p.5), prompting the duo to hasten their egress from the forest homeward. Notwithstanding the unexpected affliction befalling Omar, believed to be mystically actuated subsequent to such incident, Ananti stands unfazed and remains by Omar's side as the former "lay on a thin mattress on the floor whimpering with fever", hoping in vain if there is anything

"she could do to be of help" (*LRTM*, p.1). In spite of such misfortune, Omar and Ananti continue to immerse in the splendour of nature, adopting it as an emotional formula by which their sense of affinity is then cemented.

In yet another of their fishing adventures to a river at a nearby orchard, "Dusun Parai" (*LRTM*, p.147), both Ananti and Omar perceive that the undisturbed sphere of their privacy is "an opportune time to try their luck" (*LRTM*, p.148) in exploring the extent of their friendship. Their collaborative venture is observable in their fishing stint where, together, and "using the fleshy red bait, they cast their lines far out into the middle of the lagoon. Not long after Ananti had a strike! The fish put out a powerful fight swimming further away. He helped her pull the line. It took him a while to bring the fish under control" (*LRTM*, p.148). These shared encounters show that in *Long Road to Merdeka*, nature becomes both the setting and catalyst for emotional connection, nurturing a bond between Omar and Ananti that grows from companionship into enduring affection.

Seen in this light, human experiential aspect of the natural environment continues to act as emotional spur, leading Omar and Ananti to experience the whole gamut of romantic emotion. Nature's impactful effect which contributes to a strong bond of amity between Omar and Ananti is demonstrated in their eco-exploration by cycling "south to Seremban" (*LRTM*, p.163) followed by "more than two hours to Guthrie Lukut rubber plantation and then to the seaside town of Port Dickson" (*LRTM*, p.164) and the "historical landmarks" (*LRTM*, p.166) in Melaka, punctuated by a brief stop at a small, isolated bungalow "on a small hill" which is "very quiet except for the sound of birds" (*LRTM*, p.171) in Muar before proceeding to "camp near a mangrove swamp behind a village" (*LRTM*, p.176) in Batu Pahat and to "the beach facing the Strait of Johor" where they are treated to a magnificent view of "the Sultan Ibrahim Building with its blend of eastern and

western architecture" (*LRTM*, p.179). The interconnecting impact of nature vitalises the stability of their kinship and the deep attachment between them have become ever more solidified. What is initially felt as a mere platonic relationship between Omar and Ananti has elevated their friendship into an emotionally romantic closeness thanks to these natural explorations. It is especially distinguishable in their conversation which later enfolds into an expressive pledge of mutual love "as they walked along the beach overlooking the coastline of Singapore" (*LRTM*, p.182). Ananti confesses to Omar, "I wouldn't have made it this far without you", acknowledging that "you have been good to me" as "she held his hand and leaned her head against his shoulder", to which Omar declares in return that instead of remaining only "as friends when we complete schooling", he is firmly strung by his desire to "be more than just friends", as he sees Ananti and himself as "two hearts with two bodies", pulsating unshaken nevertheless "with one feeling" (*LRTM*, p.183). In *Long Road to Merdeka*, these journeys affirm how immersive encounters with nature can transform companionship into profound romantic attachment, weaving emotional intimacy into the very landscapes the characters traverse.

The friendship-turned-romance between Omar and Ananti demonstrable through these interactions unfolds within lush, sensory landscapes that foster emotional openness. Their mushroom foraging trip during which Omar unexpectedly falls ill after a forest encounter is a turning point. Ananti's loyalty during his sickness deepens their bond. Their later expeditions, from fishing in Dusun Parai to cycling through Melaka and Port Dickson, are interwoven with emotional revelations. "I wouldn't have made it this far without you," Ananti admits, whilst Omar hopes they will be "more than just friends" because they are "two hearts with two bodies…with one feeling" (*LRTM*, p.183). Their shared eco-journeys mark the development of their respective personal eco-identities built upon mutual care and emotional growth.

Indeed, in echoing the nature's overarching contribution to individuals' personal eco-identities, *Long Road to Merdeka* offers a multifaceted exploration into the natural environment, with the latter not acting merely as a backdrop but an active participant in the breeding, enhancement, and maintenance of inter-human relationships. Ariff's novel evinces the ecopsychological power inherent in the natural environment, both as a resource and a relational space, playing a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the co-emergent importance of human-nature relations in the construction of its characters' personal eco-identities. The construction of this identity characterised by the force of inter-human relationships through environmental influences is not activated by the individuals' mere physical involvement with nature which causes the said identity on such account to emerge per se. Instead, it emanates essentially from the polysemic voices appearing not only in human lips but also in the participatory, integrative, and complementary tune found in the natural environment which contributes, therefore, to the cultivation of their solid personal eco-identities by sheer virtue of such ontological confluence of human-nature dyad.

5.3.3 *Between Lives*

Nature does not cease to function as the foremost catalyst in the uplifting of human bond in *Between Lives* through Maniam's introspective narrative evident in the dimension of cultural acceptance and identity formation. At the heart of the novel lies the migrant characters' constant search for self-empowerment, oftentimes punctuated by the varying degrees of conflicts and dilemmas embattling the characters. Nature, in its mediative role, emerges as a subtle yet powerful force to ameliorate such disconnect. Not only does nature mirror these characters' emotional unease and physical struggles in their attempts at assimilation into a foreign land, it, more actively and participatively, presents itself as a shared space within which the formative steps taken by these characters to secure a successful social and cultural integration remain unshaken and bear great success. This is particularly demonstrable in the case of Sellamma's father, Arokian, who, in his determined mind, stops at nothing in breaking himself free from his Indian community and joins the company of other races in his hope to excel at local farming:

> Her father felt that he was without knowledge or skill, so, he only watched Pak Mat doing the work. But he learned the touch, as he said later, from Pak Mat on how to layer the roots of the fruit-saplings with the correct amount (*BL*, p.109).

Recognising the social inferiority of his position as a newly arrived migrant in Malaya, Arokian's earnest desire that "we've got to bring back into live what was not living properly" (*BL*, 68) motivates his will through land survival. Arokian remains unflinching in his pride when he tells his family that "your life is here"

(*BL*, 103) and in his constant reminder to them that "this is where we live now" (*BL*, p.120) because "if not, we won't find our dream" (*BL*, p.125), Arokian does not dither in his aspiration to compensate himself against the extremity of poverty by doing his utmost to create a meaningful life for his family away from their homeland despite a multitude of personal impediments. To this end, he is unaltered in his conviction that it is only through ceaseless and uncompromising industry in land cultivation that his decision to start his life anew in Malaya will not be in vain and that his assiduity will elevate not only his economic status to a new height but, to a considerable extent, improve the quality of the relationship with his newly assimilated community via active collaborations and even more engaging behaviours through nature:

> The land was already flourishing with mango, coconut, papaya, pineapple, sugar cane, besides bunds of Malaikaran, Cheenan and Indian vegetables…Now with the dusun Pak Mat was helping to start, they would have seasonal fruit trees (*BL*, p.109).

The elevation of Arokian's social status as a result of his relentless diligence and through natural agency, in this instance, is not to be imagined restrictively as the author's portrayal of Arokian's sole aim in assaying a comfortable life in Malaya. His deserving rise in social hierarchy, must, of necessity, be viewed as a positive effect of the transformative role of nature, not only in facilitating his social and cultural integration, but as a counterpoint to alienation and displacement. Such appears to be the case, evincible at the zenith of Arokian's success, when others have begun to address him with a salutary title, "Saar" (*BL*, p.120), denoting respect and admiration for his proven industry and, at the same time, indicating his peers' "envy for his growing prosperity" (*BL*, p.120). The social esteem which Arokian has since commanded does not stop on a personal level — it is recognised

widely and glorified communally as he is deemed to hold a powerful voice of ultimate authority amongst the community members. Not only is Arokian treated as equal amongst his peers, he is also revered as a prominent leader on whom people place reliance and from whom assistance is sought in the face of inner conflicts. In Sellamma's reflection on Arokian's powerful sway over his inferiors, she recalls that "the head of the delegation came forward and raised his palms in a salute to her father" (*BL*, p.192), obsequiously prefacing his speech and remarking with sheer meekness, "maybe we shouldn't have disturbed you, Saar. Maybe we only wasted your time" (*BL*, p.192). In *Between Lives*, Arokian's journey illustrates how steadfast engagement with the land can redefine identity and social standing, transforming nature into a catalyst for both personal empowerment and communal leadership.

The imbricating role of nature as an influential factor amplifying the dynamics of inter-human relationship in the novel can also be seen through Maniam's intentional foregrounding of the natural environment as a source of cementing familial bond between the two other principal characters — its protagonist, Sellamma and her sister, Anjalai. As Sellamma walks past "the chicken coop" (*BL*, p.44) and paces down "a slope, past patches of thick grass and leafy bushes, where the cows and the bull are tethered, their claves frisking around them" (*BL*, p.45), she is transported instantly to her cherished memory of Anjalai with whom the former spends her formative teenage years, regarding her natural surrounding as their "play place" (*BL*, p.99), where they enjoy their eco-journey in the "rough passage, winding away among the thick bushes, creepers and branches" (*BL*, p.99). Here, *Between Lives* shows how shared experiences within the natural world can preserve and enrich sibling bonds, embedding familial affection within the textures and memories of the environment itself.

By employing an eco-memory strategy, Maniam also signals Sellamma's ability to reminisce the minutia of her relationship with Anjalai. Nature, in this context, is represented as neither passive nor silent. Au contraire: nature becomes a space which shapes familial camaraderie where the bond of sisterhood is bolstered, differing perspectives, coalesced, and individual understandings, solidified. On many occasions, Sellamma finds emotional solace by visiting the river "as had become her habit whenever she pondered over some matter" (*BL*, p.123). Together, Sellamma and Anjalai would indulge in deep cogitation about their "dream" (*BL*, p.123), equating their excursions to the river to "entering dreamland" (*BL*, p.126). Through these moments, *Between Lives* affirms nature's role as a living archive of shared memory, where landscapes become a repository of emotional connection and mutual understanding between the sisters.

Sellamma and Anjalai's attitude in externalising their deep sisterly affection is further vivified by their constant rumination about the future throughout their natural explorations. Sellamma is determined "to find my own wings" (*BL*, p.124) as they "walked along the other bank, the roar of the waterfall growing faint behind them, and all that jungle stretching away in front of them" (*BL*, p.124), whilst Anjalai is convinced that "we're getting new eyes now" (*BL*, p.126), regarding the jungle and all of its contents as "their dream, a vast teeming of breaths, and a vast teeming of shapes, all around them" (*BL*, p.127). Not only for the comfort of reflection and introspection do Sellamma and Anjalai hasten themselves to the embrace of nature, but nature also becomes an essential conduit through which their shared pain and frustration are confronted, alleviated, and negotiated. Natural space is creatively made noticeable by Maniam not solely for its aesthetically effective impact on readership by foregrounding it as a physical setting but also as a fecund and lush space which offers an opportunity for his characters to internalise the profundity of his characters' mutual grievance —

especially one over the lurking impossibility of living together due to Sellamma and Anjalai's impending separation:

> When they got to the riverbank, she ran through the bushes on the bank, letting the leaves, twigs and creepers sting her on her legs, arms and face. Then she changed into her bathing sarung and lay in the shallow waters, shifting this way and that, as if to sooth her bruises and cuts (*BL*, p.190).

Across the broad canvass, personal eco-identity, observed in the characters of Maniam's *Between Lives*, bears largely on the corresponding effect of nature on human in ultimately exemplifying the characters' formation of personal eco-selves. Defined co-constitutively by the nature's significance in aiding the dynamics of inter-human relationships, nature is, therefore, seen as a unifying force, holding powerful sway over these characters' respective identities mediated through natural agency. The nature's interventionist attribute in shaping human behaviours accentuates its mutually integrative value in the conception of individuals' personal eco-identities by virtue of such interrelatedness. Indeed, the portrayal of nature in *Between Lives* is distinctive not only in its symbolic reflection on the physical aspect of human life, but, to an appreciable length, in its ecopsychological emphasis on how the characters' personal eco-identities are conceived and sustained on account of the vitality and vibrancy of inter-human relationships, instrumentally and primordially, at nature's instigation.

5.3.4 Section Review

In *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Between Lives*, individual efforts within ecological settings powerfully shape inter-human relationships. Whilst Sellamma, Pak Kia, Karim, and Tuk Pawang navigate emotional terrains rooted neither in operatic sentimentality nor melancholia, but instead, in faithful adherence to tradition and steadfast resistance; Arokian, Ismail, Omar, and Ananti build bonds through community leadership and shared adventure. These narratives reveal that nature is not just an external landscape but a co-creative partner in human connection. It is within these emotional, relational, and ecological interactions that personal eco-identities are meaningfully forged through various processes of reciprocal shaping. In these texts, personal eco-identity does not arise in isolation from natural environment, but indispensably through an ongoing, situated entanglement with it — a relational ecology where the self is formed in and through its embeddedness in more-than-human networks of meaning, labour, and affection.

5.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5

The complex tapestry of human-environment interactions portrayed in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Between Lives* elucidates a profound narrative on the formation of personal eco-identity as the authors leverage the natural environment not merely as a setting but as a pivotal force that reflects and shapes human spirituality and societal dynamics, especially under the strain of colonial influences. The portrayal of nature in the narratives, not only as a reflector human piety, but also a shaper of social resilience, vividly depict nature's role as a mirror and mold, reflecting and influencing both the spiritual and social states of the characters. This dual function of nature is crucial in shaping the characters' responses to their changing worlds, offering a lens through which they reassess their identities and cultural legacies. The tumultuous relationship between characters and their landscapes in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Between Lives* showcases how environmental challenges directly sculpt their personal resilience, spiritual enrichment, and social interactions. Further, characters' isolation within their environments often leads to a deepened sense of personal eco-identity, as seen in the introspective journeys they undertake. This isolation does not just separate them from others but also deepens their connection to the natural world, allowing for a unique personal growth that is intimately tied to their surroundings. These narratives highlight the transformative potential of solitude in nature, facilitating an embraced reconnection with one's roots and an introspective understanding of one's place within the ecological and social fabric.

In these stories, nature serves both as a sanctuary and a battleground, where characters negotiate their existence and identity amidst ecological and social upheavals. The interplay between these elements brings to the forefront the indispensable role of the natural environment in crafting and understanding

human personal eco-identity. It is this dynamic relationship that underscores the necessity for a symbiotic coexistence between humans and nature. By weaving together these themes, the conclusion underlines the critical role of the environment in shaping human narratives, both spiritually and as a social unit. It fittingly calls for a broader recognition of how deeply human identity is intertwined with the ecological context. The authors challenge the traditional narratives of development and progress by showcasing how deeply environmental factors penetrate the fabric of personal eco- identity, urging a re-evaluation of our relationship with nature. This enriched conclusion not only synthesises the critical insights from the analysis but also highlights the urgency of integrating ecological consciousness into our understanding of personal and collective histories and futures. Through their literary exploration, these authors articulate a compelling call to action — to reforge our bonds with the natural world and recognise its profound impact on our identities and societies — through the spiritual and social paradigms.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 EPILOGUE

As this study reaches its final chapter, it is fitting to pause and reflect on the complexity of investigative exercise thus far undertaken in analysing the problematics of personal eco-identity formation revolving around the literary characters of the selected Malaysian novels in English. What initially began as an exploratory mission in search for human ecological selfhood by analysing the ontological connections between self and soil, identity and ecology, and mind and matter, has fruitfully unfolded into a layered exploration into Malaysian English literature's capacity to articulate belonging through place, memory, and nature. The antecedent chapters have each contributed to an evolving understanding of how literary narratives rooted in specific historical, cultural, and environmental contexts shape the contours of personal eco-identities. Now, this concluding chapter synthesises the key insights, revisits the research questions, and offers a closing reflection on the broader significance of the study.

6.2 REIMAGINING PERSONAL ECO-IDENTITY

This section reflects on the construction of personal eco-identity through Malaysian English literary narratives that foregrounds individuals' interactions with their natural environment based on the close textual analysis of the selected works. In shifting the focus from large-scale ecological or national discourses to

more intimate experiences, the chapter foregrounds the social, emotional, spiritual, and ecopsychological dynamics that shape how these literary characters relate to nature. The characters' personal eco-identities are not generalised simulacra of national consciousness but specific and situated responses to land, weather, plants, spirits, work, and memory. By tracing these nuanced forms of belonging and survival, the chapter argues for a re-reading of Malaysian ecocriticism that makes space for personal narratives of endurance and becoming.

In Malaysian context, the trope of identity has often been framed in relation to broader environmental degradation and land appropriation. Whilst these macro perspectives are crucial, they sometimes risk overlooking the human-scale dramas — stories of families, farmers, migrants, and ordinary people — whose identities are formed through daily and embodied interactions with the natural world. The selected texts examined in this thesis offer diverse perspectives on how individuals navigate ecological, social, and spiritual terrains under the conditions often shaped by colonial legacies and socio-economic marginality.

What binds these narratives aptly together is their narratorial insistence that nature is not merely a passive backdrop, but an active participant in shaping human identity. Whether through rituals, memory, grief, farming, or resistance, the characters in these stories form personal eco-identities that are constantly in process — reacting to and reflecting the world around them. The human relationship with nature is rendered not in abstract terms, but through the very texture of daily life — planting, praying, walking, remembering, and resisting. This chapter thus engages with a mode of ecocriticism that foregrounds the affective, relational, and experiential dimensions of personal eco-identity.

In attending closely to individual experiences in these texts guided by ecopsychological markers, these texts consider how Malaysian literature in English represents personal eco-identity not as a static attribute, but as something continually negotiated through memory, belief, emotion, labour, and interaction. Rather than pursuing neat binaries — between modern and traditional, human and non-human, and spiritual and material — they trace how characters inhabit the often-ambiguous space between self and environment. In doing so, these selected eco-texts hope to reveal how personal eco-identity is shaped by the small yet significant acts of living with, working on, and feeling through nature. What follows is a summary reading of each of five literary texts that centre the individual in ecocritical inquiry, offering insight into how identity is shaped within and through the natural environment that these characters call home.

The literary works of Ahmad's *No Harvest but a Thorn*, Keris Mas' *Jungle of Hope*, Maniam's *Between Lives*, Ariff's *Long Road to Merdeka*, and Sivagurunathan's *Yalpanam* demonstrate how the natural environment is intricately tied to the construction of personal eco-identity, reflecting both the cognitive and emotional realms of human experience. These narratives elucidate the interconnecting role of nature as both a reflective surface for human emotion and an active agent in shaping human behaviour. This duality underscores the co-dependence between human and their environment, highlighting how personal identities evolve in response to environmental contexts. The authors present nature not just as a backdrop, but also as a dynamic participant in the narrative, driving the characters' decisions, relationships, and their very understanding of self. Through the environmental lens by dint of mutual constitution, each author explores how personal eco-identity is both influenced and expressed, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between an individual's internal world and his external surroundings. These authors paint these novels respectively as an environmental parable to show both the strength and the frailty of human psychology in the face

of climate change. This theme is particularly evident as the characters navigate colonial impacts that alter their traditional ways of life, thereby reshaping their interactions with both the land and each other.

In these narratives, nature acts as a mediator and moderator of human relationships, embodying the mutual constitution that defines both conflict and cooperation within communities. In view of the relative characteristics of environment to humanity, it is demonstrated that the colonial narratives in these works serve as a symbolic platform on which an effective form of human cognition enables human to articulate their emotions and behaviours as well as the manner of managing and guiding human affairs. The authors articulate this through the complex social dynamics that unfold in natural settings, where the environment both challenges and supports the characters, fostering, therefore, a sense of community and highlighting the social implications of environmental changes.

For instance, as characters in *Jungle of Hope* and *Long Road to Merdeka* adjust to colonial and ecological transformations, their relationships and community structures reflect these adaptations, revealing the deep-seated links between their cultural practices and the natural world. It appears that both animosity and differences are positively bridgeable through natural inscription into human interaction. The imperatives of nature as a tool to bring about interpersonal relations are fundamental in developing a dynamic identity negotiated through natural relatedness. The fostering of human relationships is potentially incapable of effective cultivation solely on the strength of human-oriented model, necessitating the dismantlement of hierarchical exclusivity of this model which employs natural elements as a means by which its agentic potency to encourage the dynamics of human relationship proves fruitful. Moreover, these works accentuate the discourse on mutual constitution by asking how individuals engage

with their environment in ways that reflect their dual need for both economic survival and spiritual connection. The environment is portrayed in *Long Road to Merdeka* and *Jungle of Hope* as a source of material resources essential for physical survival and a spiritual entity that demands respect and understanding, influencing the characters' actions and life choices.

Through their pre-independent narratives, the authors utilise historical space in order to critique the exploitation of nature for economic gain, contrasting it with indigenous practices that convey a pertinent message of harmonious coexistence with the natural world. On this score, a marked juxtaposition is drawn by the authors in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *No Harvest but a Thorn* in illustrating the individuals' unwavering resolve in facing challenges in order to secure their safe and sure survival within a natural realm wherein the yields gleaned from the natural surrounding are vital for the continuity of human subsistence. Determination and resistance are the central themes entrenched in the authors' narratives in these works, articulating their attempt to accentuate the significance of the natural environment as an important economic imperative for the society whose means of livelihood depends majorly, if not entirely, on the balanced and sustainable utilisation of natural resources. This implies that natural exploitation is a threat to which the characters' instinctual resistance is triggered, galvanising them, in subsequence, to confront environmental dangers that appear to be a menace to themselves. Similarly, the notions of power and the individuals' drive to materialistic dominion in *Jungle of Hope*, *Yalpanam*, and *Between Lives* are assertively expressed through these interconnecting effects of nature, where it is demonstrated that greed is sanctified in the name of human needs pursued not only at the cost of nature but also to the detriment of human themselves.

The notion of mutual constitution is further espoused through the characters' recognition of their reliance on and responsibility to the environment, which informs that their personal eco-identities and social roles are relative to a world revolving climactically around natural elements and causes. This relationship is described by the authors as a dialogue between human and nature, where each influence reshapes the other in significant ways such as those in *Yalpanam*, *No Harvest but a Thorn*, and *Jungle of Hope* where human emotion and affect are seen to be closely interlinked to the sway over which nature indispensably holds. Human emotion is painted through the characters' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours in the face of conflicts. Nature, lain at the forepart of these narratives, suggests an inextricable connection that is useful in unifying human thoughts, feelings, and actions by the guidance of natural compass. The duality of nature and human is therefore deconstructed by this mutually constitutive interconnectedness, making the harmonisation of these dyads more visible through the dynamic force between nature and human as a conjoined entity.

Ultimately, these narratives call for a critical reconsideration of the hierarchical dichotomies that have long governed human-environment relations. By foregrounding the formative role of nature in shaping personal eco-identities, these selected texts are imbued with a relational model of human ecology — one that recognises the embeddedness of cultural, emotional, and spiritual life within ecological systems. Nature, in these works, functions not as an inert setting, but as a dynamic agent that co-produces meaning, memory, and subjectivity.

6.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It is demonstrated that personal eco-identity, as represented in the selected texts, emerges through ongoing processes of interaction, negotiation, and reciprocity between individuals and their environments. Rather than viewing human and non-human as discrete categories, these literary narratives reframe identity as a product of ontological entanglement — what may therefore be termed a co-constitutive or reciprocal ecology. In attending to the material, affective, and symbolic dimensions of these interactions, this section highlights the need to reconceptualise identity neither as autonomous nor abstract, but as historically situated and ecologically embedded.

For ease of reference, the following tables below provide the analytical dimension of personal eco-identity of the characters in their respective thematic manifestations:

1. Survival and Sustenance in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka* and *No Harvest but a Thorn*

The thematic strand of Survival and Sustenance encapsulates how characters draw upon ancestral traditions, agricultural labour, and ecological familiarity to ensure their continuity of life. This strand of personal eco-identity reveals the intimate link between livelihood and the natural environment, where endurance is tested by both environmental challenges and colonial disruptions. In *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *No Harvest but a Thorn*, survival is not merely physical — it becomes a moral and cultural stance, with characters' personal eco-identities forged through steadfast connection to the land. The following table outlines the analytical dimensions through which these narratives express survival and sustenance.

Analytical Dimension	***Jungle of Hope***	***Long Road to Merdeka***	***No Harvest but a Thorn***
Personal Survival and Sustenance	Pak Kia's heavy reliance on the rice field and his preference for ancestral farming to rubber-planting renders his survival a game of endurance.	Every villager's source of livelihood centres wholly on natural resources. Despite patent paucity, people like Ismail are assured of the sufficiency of natural proceeds for them and their family's survival.	Lahuma's farming endeavour is pursued not in search of personal wealth but to ensure continuity of his and his family's survival.

Relationship to Land	Profoundly attached to the ancestral value of farming, Pak Kia is emboldened by the spirit of continued tradition by venturing out into a foreign land in Janda Baik for self-contained land cultivation.	Amid a life of uncertainty, Ismail regards nature as his dependable companion through his constant participation in nature-related activities.	Rice field is a symbol of endurance and the work around it is symbolised as both a test and blessings from God, rendering it a source of personal conviction and strength.
Colonial Pressure	Colonial capitalism via rubber-tapping and tin mining and the constant pressure from exploitative middlemen like Pendekar Atan.	Colonial commodification alienates traditional farming endeavours by abandonment of traditional means.	Shorn of technologies advanced by the colonisers, Lahuma and Jeha are confronted with the difficulty to financially support their agrarian works and are embattled with both physical and emotional hardships.

Personal Eco-Identity Construction	Pak Kia stands by his environmentally shaped identity against colonial exploitation of nature, affirming his personal eco-identity through unfazed tenacity.	Steadfast resistance to colonial capitalism and profound passion in the rural way of life shape a personal eco-identity of individual resilience and private sense of continuity.	Personal eco-identities are shaped by Lahuma and Jeha's fortitude in preserving the land as it is incumbent upon them to preserve their individual dignity.

Table 6.1 The Analytical Dimension of Personal Eco-identities in the Thematic Manifestation of Survival and Sustenance

2. Dominance and Materialistic Quest in *Jungle of Hope*, *Yalpanam* and *Between Lives*

The thematic strand of Dominance and Materialistic Quest explores how ambition, economic aspiration, and resistance to commodification shape personal eco-identity. In these narratives, land becomes a site of contest — desired for its ancestral value, political significance, or economic potential — whilst characters navigate the tensions between tradition and material gain. *Jungle of Hope*, *Yalpanam*, and *Between Lives* illustrate the complexities of asserting control over land, whether as an act of dignity, reclamation, or social elevation. The table below presents the analytical dimensions of how dominance and materialism intersect with personal eco-identity in these works.

Analytical Dimension	***Jungle of Hope***	***Yalpanam***	***Between Lives***
Individual Effort	Pak Kia resists social and familial pressure to sell his land and continues traditional rice farming despite flooding and poverty.	Pushpanayagi quietly reclaims space by remaining in a house built on exploitation and Abu voices pain through metaphor and memory.	Arokian toils to convert marginal land into flourishing property, earnestly insistent on physical work as a marker of dignity.

Relationship to Land	Pak Kia's deeply emotional and ancestral attachment to the land, valuing it as a moral and practical extension of the self.	The Yalpanam house is haunted and politicised due to Pushpanayagi's attribution of the land and the house to trauma and their manifestation of personal endurance and rootedness.	Land appears aspirational and redemptive as it enables social visibility, healing and diasporic rootedness.
Colonial/Material Pressure	Colonial capitalism via rubber-tapping and tin mining and constant pressure from exploitative middlemen like Pendekar Atan.	Legacy of colonial violence by British commodification of land, bodies, and nature rendering the Yalpanam house as site of memory and erasure.	Economic and racial marginalisation of Indian diaspora indicated by the social exclusion rooted in colonial plantation history.
Personal Eco-Identity Construction	Pak Kia affirms a rooted, sustainable identity that resists commodification, solidifying his personal eco-identity through resilience.	Pushpanayagi and Abu retain voice, memory and resistance despite trauma. Their personal eco-identities are shaped through poetic endurance.	Arokian and Sellamma reclaim visibility and dignity through labour and land ownership, strengthening their personal eco-identities in the sense of social assertion and renewal.

Table 6.2 The Analytical Dimension of Personal Eco-identities in the Thematic Manifestation of Dominance and Materialistic Quest

3. Emotion and Affect in *Yalpanam*, *No Harvest but a Thorn* and *Jungle of Hope*

The thematic strand of Emotion and Affect focuses on how the natural environment acts as both a mirror and a trigger for characters' inner worlds. Emotional responses — whether grief, determination, solitude, or resistance — are deeply intertwined with the ecological contexts in which they arise. In *Yalpanam*, *No Harvest but a Thorn*, and *Jungle of Hope*, feelings are externalised through rituals, agricultural labour, and interactions with landscapes shaped by history and colonial pressure. The following table maps these emotional and affective dimensions as they contribute to personal eco-identity.

Analytical Dimension	***Yalpanam***	***No Harvest but a Thorn***	***Jungle of Hope***
Individual Emotion and Affect	Pushpanayagi expresses isolation, grief, and endurance through communion with her surroundings and house.	Lahuma and Jeha experience anguish, perseverance, and spiritual resistance shaped by ecological threats.	Pak Kia's emotional resistance is quiet but intense, rooted in tradition and fear of loss.
Relationship to Environment	Haunted colonial house and lush garden reflect emotional entrapment and moments of solace.	Fields, pests, floods all act as emotional triggers and expressions of hardship.	Land is ancestral and sacred; environmental damage evokes anxiety and refusal to conform.

Colonial or Historical Pressure	Legacy of British exploitation embodied in the house and surrounding landscape.	Persistent natural disasters and economic instability underlie emotional labour.	Colonial encouragement of rubber and tin commodification threatens emotional and cultural continuity.
Emotional Outcome	Solitude is both suffering and strong; emotions externalised in ritual and sensory experience.	Grief turns into determination; spiritualised emotional responses become strategy for survival.	Refusal to yield to economic temptation reveals emotional depth and ideological resistance.
Personal Eco-Identity Construction	Poetic personal eco-identity grounded in memory, introspection, and attachment to disrupted land.	Personal eco-identity forged through labour loss and a theology of resilience.	Personal eco-identity as a moral and affective stance—resisting colonial change through stoic attachment.

Table 6.3 The Analytical Dimension of Personal Eco-identities in the Thematic Manifestation of Emotion and Affect

4. Spiritual Beliefs and Ritualistic Practices in *Long Road to Merdeka* and *Jungle of Hope*

The thematic strand of Spiritual Beliefs and Ritualistic Practices reveals how faith systems and traditional ritualistic ceremonies mediate human-environment relations. Here, rituals become acts of ecological negotiation — blending animist, Islamic, and local customs to maintain harmony with the land and its unseen forces. In *Long Road to Merdeka* and *Jungle of Hope*, spiritual observances not only protect and heal but also shape the characters' personal eco-identities through human reverence for nature. The table below details the spiritual and ritualistic elements that contribute to personal eco-identity in these narratives.

Analytical Dimension	***Long Road to Merdeka***	***Jungle of Hope***
Spiritual Mediators	Latif (shaman) conducts healing rituals with natural materials; Omar and Saunah rely on his guidance.	Tuk Pawang performs land-clearing rituals; Pak Kia, Jusuh partake; Zaidi rejects.
Ritual Elements	Bracken leaves, tender coconuts, turmeric rice, chiku and guava trees, basin of water, spells.	Soil, seven leafy twigs, incense, coconut leaves, water bowl, *pencana* thread, and prayers.

Spiritual-Ecological Belief System	Animist and Islamic blend; nature as moral agent requiring ritual appeasement.	Animist-Islamic syncretism; nature inhabited by spirits that must be honoured.
Emotional Tone	Reverence, fear, guilt, and gratitude; emotional bonding with nature through illness, healing, and seasonal rites.	Faith, respect, defiance, and humility; emotional responses vary from awe to scepticism.
Conflict/Resistance	Tension between ancestral caution and youthful rationalism (Omar).	Zaidi rejects rituals as idolatry; inner conflict about tradition and progress.
Personal Eco-Identity Construction	Personal eco-identity grounded in mystical respect and relational reverence to nature and its spirits.	Personal eco-identity shaped by belief in spiritual interdependence and humility towards natural order.

Table 6.4 The Analytical Dimension of Personal Eco-identities in the Thematic Manifestation of Spiritual Beliefs and Ritualistic Practices

5. Dynamics of Inter-Human Relationships in *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka* and *Between Lives*

The thematic strand Dynamics of Inter-Human Relationships examines how environmental factors influence family ties, community cohesion, and social recognition. Land cultivation, resource management, and shared environmental challenges often become the catalysts for reconciliation, unity, or social mobility. In *Jungle of Hope*, *Long Road to Merdeka*, and *Between Lives*, nature functions as an agent that mediates conflict and fosters collective personal eco-identity, binding people together through shared ecological experiences. The following table outlines these dynamics and their role in constructing personal eco-identity.

Analytical Dimension	***Jungle of Hope***	***Long Road to Merdeka***	***Between Lives***
Environmental Conflict and Family Strain	Pak Kia and Zaidi clash over traditional farming vs. rubber planting, straining brotherhood due to differing personal eco-identities.	Villagers form committees to manage land use and secure rubber planting rights, reinforcing social unity under environmental stress.	Displacement and diasporic inferiority galvanise Arokian into intense land cultivation to secure a meteoric rise in social hierarchy.

Generational Tension and Reconciliation	Pak Kia and Karim begin with conflict but gradually reconcile as Karim embraces farming, reinforcing familial ties.	Villagers' collaboration in irrigation and agriculture builds kinship and a shared environmental ethic.	Respect accorded to Arokian by the title 'Saar' restores his dignity and elevates his social status as a result of successful land cultivation.
Community and Collective Identity	Relocation to Janda Baik leads to collective action and shared aspirations amongst villagers, reinforcing traditional ecological values.	Social bonding at weddings and harvests demonstrate nature's role in fostering mutual care and cooperation.	Arokian's great industry in farming has mobilised great support from different races — he is revered by his own community.
Personal Eco-Identity Construction	Karim's bonding with his father through shared farming and jungle survival strengthens emotional ties and personal growth.	Omar and Ananti's friendship matures into love through shared nature explorations, highlighting eco-mediated intimacy.	Sellamma and Anjalai's sisterly bond blossoms as happiness and sorrow are shared and externalised through natural explorations and encouragement.

Table 6.5 The Analytical Dimension of Personal Eco-identities in the Thematic Manifestation of Dynamics of Inter-Human Relationships

Across these five texts examined in this study, a shared thematic undercurrent emerges — that personal eco-identity is not a fixed or monolithic concept, but actively dynamic and deeply personal as well as culturally transforming. From Pak Kia's quiet defiance in *Jungle of Hope* to Pushpanayagi's contemplative solitude in *Yalpanam*, from Lahuma and Jeha's enduring struggles in *No Harvest but a Thorn* to Sellamma's reflective resilience in *Between Lives* and Omar and Ismail's communal efforts in *Long Road to Merdeka*, the individual becomes the locus through which ecological meaning is encoded and generated. These characters do not simply respond to nature — they live through it, feel with it, and are metamorphosed by it.

The analysis has demonstrated that the natural environment in Malaysian literature in English do not function necessarily as a setting or symbol, but as an active force in shaping interpersonal dynamics, spiritual beliefs, emotional landscapes, and cultural memory. Nature becomes an indispensable site of negotiation and reimagination where histories of colonialism, poverty, migration, and modernisation are not only inscribed but also resisted and re-envisioned. In these texts, personal eco-identity is often formed through labour, ritual, memory, and emotion — elements that are typically marginalised in traditional ecological or nationalist readings. What we see instead is a mosaic of lived experiences, in which identity and ecology are co-constructed in the intimacy of daily life.

By way of peroration, it is worthy to note that in the analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5, the key strands or manifestations of personal eco-identity as conceptually proposed in Chapter 3 are not demonstrated in each of the chosen corpus. This is because whilst some of the strands or manifestations are scrutinised prominently in one novel, they are glaringly non-existent in another. Such seeming inconsistency notwithstanding, it should not serve to invalidate the crux of which

this research seeks to uncover— that these selected novels essentially carry five thematic strands of personal eco-identity as manifested in their literary characters. In fact, this clear absence of a consistent theme across the selected novels indicates a key aspect of Malaysian literary tradition in English whereby Malaysian English writers possess distinct narrative styles that set them apart as being in a unique literary class by themselves.

Equally deserving of notice is the fact that, in consonance with the research objectives, this thesis does not aim to 'prove' the notion of personal eco-identity in the selected corpus. Rather, it seeks to render visible how the sense of self is represented via the characters' respective experiences with their natural environments. The discussion on the unfolding themes establishes that whilst some depictions of nature and its contributory effect to human's personal eco-identity are apparent in one work, such portrayal is completely missing in another. To illustrate, whilst some authors draw a deep relation between a character's personal eco-identity and his longing for improved livelihood, some others instantiate this relation through the monetary value of nature which drives the character's desire for materialistic endeavours, *inter alia*.

In literary studies, neither absolute proof nor rigid substantiation is essentially a pre-condition in the probing of the man-society-culture nexus. As such, this thesis is not meant to 'verify', per se, the legitimacy of the personal eco-identity framework. Contrarily in fact, this study seeks to explore various possible interpretations of human identity in relation to nature, portrayed by the authors from their sui generis standpoints. Hence, instead of viewing such inconsistency as a weakness actuated by the supposed dearth of authors' literary creativity, it ought to be celebrated as a diversity which reveals the subversive potentials that Malaysian English authors can individually exploit to reformulate the

anachronistic binary of nature and man in the conception of human's environmentally influenced identity.

Against the wider backdrop, this study has, in essence, argued for the necessity of attending to individual voices and experiences in ecocritical readings of Malaysian literature in English. By foregrounding the personal, we gain access to the subtle textures of environmental consciousness — how people come to know themselves through the land, how belief and affect shape ecological belonging, and how everyday acts of resistance or care foster enduring attachments to place. Arguably, these characters' respective personal eco-identities may not be heroic or spectacular, but definitively, they are deeply meaningful. They remind us that ecological thinking must begin not only with the global or the national, but with the emotional, the embodied, and the personal. In reimagining personal eco-identity from the ground up, Malaysian literature in English offers a quiet but powerful counterpoint to dominant ecological narratives — one rooted in feeling, relationship, and indeed, the long work of survival.

6.4 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have since been explored:

1. How is nature represented within the historical and socio-political contexts of the selected Malaysian novels in English, and how do these representations shape the formation of personal eco-identities?

2. In what ways do emotional responses, spiritual beliefs, and ecological memory function as internal mechanisms in the formation of personal eco-identities in the selected narratives?

3. How do behavioural engagements with the natural environment and interpersonal dynamics further constitute and express the personal eco-identities of individual characters?

In reflecting the above, it is important to bring together the insights gained from these close readings in response to the study's research questions. The analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5 were developed around five interconnected analytical elements, aimed at succinctly capturing the complexity of environmental action and engagement within the selected novels. However, through detailed analysis, it becomes evident that these strands do not function independently. Instead, they possess some shared foundations, intertwining and mutually shaping each other within the narratives, reflecting the dynamic and interconnected nature of developing personal eco-identity. This indicates that, in order to effectively synthesise these findings and prevent fragmentation of the analysis, the five strands have been examined and consolidated into three

overarching categories. Consequently, each category represents a fundamental mode of personal eco-identity formation, whilst simultaneously maintaining the inherent diversity of the original strands. This synthesis facilitates a more collaborative examination of how ecological experience, affective response, and lived practice collectively contribute to the formation of personal eco-identities. This synthesis is presented in Tables 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8 respectively and demonstrates a conceptual integration amongst the five elements within the three overarching categories.

This section essentially revisits the key inquiries guiding this thesis and presents three comparative tables. These tables consolidate how nature is portrayed across the selected texts, how history and emotion shape personal eco-identities, and how the characters' behaviours and relationships with nature reflect their individual ecological-selves. This comparative synthesis clarifies the conceptual threads linking the literary corpus and reinforces the value of literary ecocriticism in Malaysian studies. To provide a concise visual summary of how these research questions have been addressed across the corpus, the following tables present the similarities and differences observed in each novel:

Portrayals of Nature and Their Impact on Personal Eco-Identity

Novel	Nature Portrayal	Impact on Personal Eco-Identity
No Harvest but a Thorn	Harsh, oppressive, yet sustaining	Shapes endurance and resignation in personal eco-identity
Jungle of Hope	Lush but threatening, mirroring uncertainty	Develops resilience and moral ambiguity
Between Lives	Fractured and symbolic	Fosters fragmented yet self-reflective personal eco-identity
Yalpanam	Fantastical, surreal, interspecies	Enhances playful but critical ecological self-awareness
Long Road to Merdeka	Historicised landscape, site of struggle	Anchors personal eco-identity in national consciousness

Table 6.6 Portrayals of Nature and Their Impact on Personal Eco-Identity

Historical Conflicts and Emotional-Spiritual Engagements

Novel	Historical Conflict	Emotional/Spiritual Elements
No Harvest but a Thorn	Feudal agricultural oppression	Spiritual detachment and hardship
Jungle of Hope	Colonial industrialisation	Existential anxiety and spiritual dissonance
Between Lives	Post-war displacement	Grief, introspection, and spiritual fragmentation
Yalpanam	Postcolonial malaise	Irony, absurdism, and metaphysical reflection
Long Road to Merdeka	Struggle for independence	Sacrifice, longing, and collective purpose

Table 6.7 Historical Conflicts and Emotional-Spiritual Engagements

Behavioural and Relational Reflections of Personal Eco-Identity

Novel	Characters' Behaviour(s)	Nature of Human-Nature Relationship
No Harvest but a Thorn	Enduring hardship in silence	Utilitarian and survival-based
Jungle of Hope	Negotiating moral compromise	Cautious cohabitation with the environment
Between Lives	Introspective withdrawal	Alienation followed by reconnection
Yalpanam	Subversive and imaginative	Coexistent often in blurred boundaries
Long Road to Merdeka	Collective action and sacrifice	Landscape as identity site and moral compass

Table 6.8 Behavioural and Relational Reflections of Personal Eco-Identity

Taken conjunctively together, these tables illustrate how each novel uniquely configures the relationships between landscape, emotion, and identity. Despite differences in narrative tone and historical setting, all five selected novels treat nature as an active force — one that shapes, disturbs, heals, or inspires. Through their portrayals of forests, fields, and rivers, these texts express a weighty awareness of ecological belonging. More importantly, they reveal the many ways in which human identity is shaped not only in response to other people or social structures, but also through interaction with the natural world.

In exploring the relationship between humanity, nature, and their dynamic interactions, the works of Malaysian literature in English often challenge the dualistic thinking that appears to categorically distinguish human and the environment as disparate from and exclusive of each other. The misfortune of such duality flows unavoidably from the oft-drawn human assumption of humanity's superiority in existence to its littoral beings — nature. The decentring of non-human imperatives in the equation of importance undermines, if not fractures, the ecological ties necessary to the previously expounded Baradian concept of "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (Barad 2011: 130), postulating that human and nature are indispensably corresponding parties to the comingling nature and structure of life on Earth.

Indeed, it is to the purpose that equally pronounced yet apparently disturbing in the entrenched binary between human and nature is the simplistic hierarchising of interspecies' order of importance which assigns nature as inferior beings to human — the idea which only accentuates humanity's anthropocentric position, viewing and scourging non- human as the servile as opposed to human who, in their deemed supremacy, are revered as the most hallowed. This, in

consequence, only perpetuates the danger of reductionist duality where the universe is upheld in myopic regard and only through the individualistic spectrum where humanity is led to believe indefinitely in its boundless primacy over others. By critically examining such assumed hierarchy which places human above nature, the analysis of these selected novels advocates for a reconsideration of the natural world and for a corrective to the misalignment in value where humanity often sees itself as an ultimate master, and indeed, an all-powerful creator of nature with a distorted sense of dominion over it. Thus, these narratives, viewed in their rich ecocritical underpinnings, revisits the putative 'worlding' of man-mandated nature in order to decentre conventional human superiority.

6.5 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This thesis contributes to postcolonial ecocriticism, ecopsychology, and Malaysian English literary studies by advancing the concept of personal eco-identity. It demonstrates how the natural world, rather than serving merely as a background, functions as an active agent in shaping human identity. By examining how place attachment, historical trauma, and emotional engagement with nature shape literary characters, the study offers a new interpretive framework for Malaysian fiction. Furthermore, it introduces an interdisciplinary approach that integrates ecopsychological insights into postcolonial critique, thereby enriching and, indeed, expanding the remit of both scholarships. The integration of postcolonial ecocriticism and ecopsychology on the notional strength of mutual constitution allows for a deeper understanding of how ecological awareness is entwined with personal eco-identity. This interdisciplinary approach enables a richer reading of the texts, attending to both historical specificity and ecopsychological depth. Close textual analysis utilised as a methodological tool proves valuable in uncovering productive representations of personal eco-identity in literature. The attention to setting, symbolism, and character interiority are especially effective in revealing how nature functions beyond backdrop, thereby influencing the trajectory of personal eco-identity formation.

6.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In general, future research could extend the inquiry into personal eco-identity by incorporating literary texts from other linguistic traditions or focusing on contemporary themes such as climate change, indigenous environmental knowledge, and urban ecological crises. Comparative studies across Southeast Asian literatures may potentially uncover shared patterns of ecological belonging and cultural memory. Additional attention could be given to children's literature, speculative fictions, and digital narratives, which offer emerging forms of environmental storytelling. More specifically, the Framework of Personal Eco-Identity posited as a guiding conceptual device *in casu* by which to uncover the different strands of personal eco-identities inherent in the literary characters of Malaysian literary novels in English during the pre-independence period may well be employed in predicting personal eco-identities of literary characters in the narratives of different historically significant periods such as post-independence modernity, conflict and war, plagues, pandemics, and mental health whether in Malaysia or that which transcends local demographics. Also, the literary framework such as one at present used in exploring the construct of personal eco-identity may usefully function as a precursor to the exploration from the eco-linguistic perspectives or those which arise from different areas of scholarship such as gender, queer, or Marxist theories, *inter alia*, otherwise left out of account in this thesis.

6.7 FUTURE CRITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In tune with the prelude with which this research commences at the outset, this thesis, in restating the purpose and import of this study, affirms that Malaysian literature in English is not only a space of cultural negotiation but also an arena for ecological consciousness. The selected novels remind us that identity is not just a matter of blood, language, or legal identification, but also of place, memory, and the sensory rhythms of the natural world. To be locally rooted, and by extension Malaysian, in Malaysian English literary works is to be grounded, not merely in culture but in soil, not solely in language but in leaf, river, and stone. These narratives remind us that the self is a terrain — eroded, cultivated, flooded with memory, and sometimes reclaimed. When characters walk into jungles, sit by rivers, or tend to their gardens, they are not escaping nature — they are returning to it, and, in fact, they are returning to themselves.

In the revisioning of human-nature polarities and dichotomies, a liminal space is explored, merging the binaries, of humanity and nature and of nature and culture — dialogically — into a fresh and non-hierarchical ontology, and dismantling these human-non-human and natural-artificial dualities. It also serves as a reminder, not only of human interconnectedness with the Earth and all its inhabitants by mere virtue of their interdependence, but also of the relational entwinement manifest in their inalienable rights and values as equals. Environmental ethics intrinsic in the selected novels under examination in this thesis exhibits an ontological shift from a distorted, simplistic idea that natural environment functions solely to facilitate human means to sustained livelihood to a solid ecopsychological foundation of human eco-identity construct on the strength of their mutual constitution, pointing, in effect, to the advent of a novel

trans-theoretical approach to the reading of eco-texts on this account. Ultimately, the research undertaken by way of this study accentuates the significance of environmentalism as an ecopsychological phenomenon and also as a new and non-western ecocritical lens, rich in the epistemic potentials into which its scholarly proceeds could be tapped expansively across literary traditions and geo-political boundaries which must, of necessity, be explored by delving into the stories that tell of how we cognitively perceive ourselves through the extraneous yet interlinking and inosculating agency of nature.

In postlude, in an age of climate crisis, this thesis urgently calls for a renewed literary and critical consciousness — one that sees nature not as a passive backdrop but as an enduring presence instrumentally shaping who we 'ecologically' are. The story of personal eco-identity is one which dismantles, once and for all, the hubris of solipsistic claim that human and nature are ontologically opposed to each other, and narrates the story of learning to belong again — not just to a nation, but, indispensably, to the Earth. Hence, these selected Malaysian literary eco-texts, in all their multiplicity and interlacing social sentiments, offer not only a mirror to society but both a path back to and a segue into unified wholeness that lays bare the true import of nature in human lives. Indeed, in their echoing jungles in which the chirping sound of crickets hovers around the characters' ears and quiet rivers that either further reinforce or allay their communicational impasse, these novels whisper that identity is not only remembered, but also, to a considerably expansive extent, re-grown, presenting the semiotics of nature, therefore, not only as a mere spectacle of circumstantial accompaniment to the quotidian workings of human lives, but also as an indispensable source and resource of moral equilibrium, of social unity, and most importantly, of human identity.

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