

Reconnecting with the Earth: An Ecocritical Analysis of *Moana* and *The Mistress of Spices*

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, in partial fulfillment for the  
award of M.A degree in English Language and Literature.



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## Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *Reconnecting with the Earth: An Ecocritical Analysis of Moana and The Mistress of Spices* is a bona fide record of sincere work done by, Safarin Sadiq, Register Number: 210011004037, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2021-2023.

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## Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation is based on the research that I did on *Reconnecting with the Earth: An Ecocritical Analysis of Moana and The Mistress of Spices* under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Sreelakshmi P, Postgraduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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## Acknowledgement

I find myself fortunate to be surrounded by people who are forever willing to help and guide me. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Sreelakshmi P for guiding me in accomplishing my research work titled *Reconnecting with the Earth: An Ecocritical Analysis of Moana and The Mistress of Spices*. Her supervision and support truly helped in the progress and timely accomplishment of this research work.

I express my sincere thanks to Dr. Johnson K.M, Principal, Dr. Thara Gangadharan, Head of the Department, and all other faculty members of my college for their support and concern.

I'm also grateful to my beloved Mother and Father, family members and friends for their loving encouragement. Above all, I thank God Almighty for constantly supporting me and for blessing me with such wonderful people in my life.

Safarin Sadiq

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The dissertation by following MLA 9 format highlights the importance of nature for the human survival and it underscores the fact that human actions, including excessive exploitation of nature, will have adverse effects on the environment, resulting in species scarcity and environmental degradation. By analysing ecocritical films like Disney's *Moana* and the adaptation of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* demonstrates on how literature and cinema reflect and promote ecological themes, highlighting the healing power of nature. Thus the dissertation by using Ecocriticism as theory tries to analyze on how nature possesses intrinsic regenerative abilities, allowing it to recover and heal even after extensive disruptions caused by human activities.

Throughout history, literature has been a potent tool for expression. It is used to represent the marginalized ones by giving them a voice when they are silenced. Literary works could question the injustice with the help of words and satire. With the use of counter narratives literature arise as a tool against the prevailing ideologies and helps us to see from different angles. Literature provides a voice to nature. Nature quietly plays a healing role in our world, often overlooked, yet intricately intertwined with all life on Earth. Nature's cycles of rebirth and rejuvenation remind us that even in the darkest times, there is always the promise of new beginnings. The objectives involve exploring how literature and cinema portray and advocate for ecological concepts, with a particular emphasis on the rejuvenating influence of nature.

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in their famous work

'Ecocriticism Reader' (Glotfelty 18). It shows how literature portrays the natural world and helps in understanding and shaping our attitude towards nature and environment. It examines the distinctions between nature and its cultural creation by relying on the writings of natural scientists, authors, literary critics, anthropologists, and historians. The environment has become a significant public issue and a major topic of research in science, law, economics, sociology, public policy and many other fields. The environmental damage is caused majorly by the mankind who misuse nature for their needs and sees it as an enemy and focus on humans as the centre of the living world and all other species working and being exploited as resources for human benefits. It is this attitude that results in the notion that human beings are distinct and superior to the rest of the world

There were mainly two waves for ecocriticism. The first wave maintains the relationship between human and nature and to stand up for nature. The second wave led to the eco justice movement by the ways in which the subjugated and the oppressed people are affected by the climate changes and natural calamities. There are different types of ecocriticism which include: pastoral, wilderness and eco feminism. The pastoral, found in British and American literature provoke the idea of nostalgia. It was a basis for many of the classical works written in English. The wilderness, focus on how the wild is portrayed in works and as a place of exile. It also has a notion as wilderness which gives peace and solace from the urban life. Ecofeminism, the third one which is the most important and discussed among the concepts of ecocriticism deals with the interconnection between women and nature and they are dominated by men and their anthropocentric thought process.

Numerous writers throughout history have examined the complex relationship between literature and nature. Literature often draws inspiration from nature, and literature has also had a

significant impact on how people perceive and comprehend the natural world. In literature, nature frequently plays a significant role as a theme or setting. The beauty, strength, and symbolism of the natural world are frequently emphasized in works of poetry and fiction. In order to elicit feelings, establish mood, and improve the overall storytelling experience, writers frequently incorporate descriptions of landscapes, weather, and natural events. The natural world is also used as metaphors and symbols for portraying emotions. As a response to the environmental catastrophe, ecocriticism, mostly aims to assess the coherence and utility of texts and ideas. Nature was given different identities as a resource, as a refuge, a space for the outcast, nature as a purgatory, a place for redemption or metamorphosis

Not only in books but in movies also nature plays a vital role in setting the backdrop and portraying the emotions of the characters. Forests, nature and the water bodies are frequently used as a metaphor to reflect their internal struggle and the transformation of the characters. When the characters are isolated in an island or in a dense forest in movies, they rely on the available resources and their survival instincts work which shows the human connection with nature. In some of the movies, the nature itself becomes a character. This is very much related to the anthropomorphic qualities. Beyond only being entertained, people can discover a lot through films, including facts, knowledge, and information on current events that have been adapted into films. Films communicate not only through images it concentrates also on action, gesture, dialogues and sounds. Film compresses and expands the ideas of time, space and action, and they travel back and forth freely giving information about the past, present and future. Nature plays a vital role in Disney's *Moana* and Paul Mayeda's *Mistress of Spices*. Both of the movies are rich in myth, cultural ecology and ecofeminism, it also portrays the destruction of nature and how it affects the people around.



The *Moana* movie, which was directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, is 2016 American musical fantasy adventure movie made by Walt Disney Animation Studio. It's a story of an adventurous girl who decides to cross the ocean in order to get to Te Fiti, the mother island, and save her people. The importance of maintaining the ecological system's equilibrium is demonstrated in this animated film. It differs from other Disney films because of the unique relationship that people have with their surroundings, particularly the close relationship that Moana has with the ocean. In the film, the ocean plays a true part and undoubtedly has a distinct personality of its own. Moana, the young daughter of the chief has had a strong bond with nature since her childhood. And this is evident when she helps to restore the heart of the mother island, Te Fiti.

When Moana realizes that her island is dying she sets for the adventure to find the heart of the island and to regain its prosperity. Throughout the journey she faces many challenges but she is guided with the help of nature and the soul of her grandmother who knew that Moana was the chosen one. She seeks the help of Maui, the demigod who was also the cause of nature's destruction and it is he who teaches her to sail. In the end, Moana is successful in her quest and restores the heart.

The two major characters Te fiti and Te ka are clear representations and signifies earth as a source of life. Te Ka and Te Fiti, is the same goddess of nature, but show a role shift where Te Ka shows earth's anger when it is treated badly and all the natural disasters that followed. And when the heart is restored, the lush green side of nature is retained. This is where it is proven that nature can heal itself. The character Maui, the demigod of wind when he stoles the heart shows the human selfishness and the anthropocentric thoughts as men as the only superior beings.

*Mistress of Spices* is a 2005 film directed by American screenwriter Paul Mayeda Berges which is based upon the 1997 novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in the same name. The movie is rich with environmental imageries. It shows the magical properties of spices and nature and how it is connected with human beings. The film has characterized the lifeless spices as living characters. The whole movie revolves around the protagonist, Tilo, who dedicates her life to the spices and her relationship with it. Tilo was neglected by her parents in her early childhood as she was born as the second girl in a poor family and is a burden. Her mother was not able to feed her and it was nature who kept her alive

The first mother helps her to use the spices as a medicine to heal the problems of people. The healing property of nature is depicted in this part of the movie. Tilo, is named after sesame, which is the spice of nourishment. It means life giver and restorer of health and hope. She was able to interact with the spices and they were her companions as she was not allowed to leave the spice shop. Tilo, when she falls in love uses spices for her own benefits which strictly not allowed in the rules. This leads to her destruction. The nature's cycle is depicted from the beginning to the end of the movie and how she holds on to her culture is also visible in the movie.

Both the above movies show the human nature of superiority. But it also shows nature as a healer, protector and preserver and also can rejuvenate life from destruction. Nature's capacity for self-restoration denotes the innate capability of the natural world to recover and reestablish its equilibrium and well-being following different disruptions or harm. This phenomenon encompasses the self-adjustment and robustness of ecosystems, where natural systems can mend, adjust, and rejuvenate autonomously over time, frequently with limited human involvement. This

underscores the significance of safeguarding and conserving the environment to enable these self-repair mechanisms to operate efficiently.

By using Ecocritical theory the dissertation tries to analyse the regenerative abilities of nature allowing it to recover and heal even after extensive disruptions caused by human activities. The dissertation centers on the idea that human exertion of control over the environment can lead to extensive damage, but the Earth possesses the capacity to regenerate and recover from the harm inflicted by human interventions. The project explores nature's innate capacity to engage in self-healing and its inherent quality of renewal.

## Chapter Two

### Ecocriticism in Literature

Ecocriticism is a term used for the observation and study of the relationship between the literature and the earth's environment. It's an interdisciplinary study which aims at exploring the different ways in which literature shapes our knowledge and understanding of the natural world and connects us with its flora and fauna. The field draws its major ideas from environmental studies, ecology, wilderness, eco feminism, anthropocentrism etc. It also discusses environmental concerns and deep ecology.

Over the past few decades, ecocriticism has been a growing movement on a global scale. Studies of literature and the environment, referred to as ecocriticism or environmental criticism. William Rueckert coined the phrase "eco-criticism" in his fundamentally important 1978 essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism*. The words "eco" and "logy" are derived from the Greek words "oikos" and "logos," respectively, which have etymological associations with habitation and earth. Together they mean criticism of the house the earth as represented in writing. As indicated by Rueckert, ecocriticism applies environment or ecological values into the investigation of literature. Man is a social animal, and his decisions are influenced by his knowledge of other people and cultures. Man's perception of the natural world reflects his cultural adaptations. According to William Howarth, "a person who judges the merits and demerits of writings that portray the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating nature" (Howarth, 69). Ecocriticism focuses on the merits and faults developed by

the human being reflected in several literary works by different writers. This is meant to be the simplest definition to understand the theory.

The primary focus of ecocriticism is on how human development is mirrored in various literary works by various authors. Since nature is the mother of all life on Earth, this implies that nature is where all early forms of life originated. Ecocriticism can be succinctly of the relationship between literature and environment conducted of a commit to environmental praxis (philp,583). Nature, environment and ecology are different from one another they are interconnected in their function.

“Nature, broadly defined, refers to the physical world at all levels , especially when regarded as distinct from human beings and those things generated or substantially altered by humans” (New World Encyclopedia). *The Environmental Imagination*, a book written by Lawrence Buell and published in 1995, places environmental writing in the context of traditional and classic American literature. His writings offer an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of nature writing. Ecocriticism has many definitions and one of the most popular ones is given by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in their canonical work *Ecocritical reader*. It frames eco criticism as the relationship between literature and nature. *What is ecocriticism?* by Cheryl Glotfelty states "Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about how humans interact with nature, the moral and aesthetic quandaries raised by the environmental crisis, and the ways in which language and literature convey values that have significant environmental implications"(ISLE Reader xix). Valero-Garcés, famous writer and professor of Alacia (2011) defines ecocriticism as “the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view” (257). Michael P Branch and Scott Slovic in the *Introduction to the ISLE Reader* define the theory as “Eco criticism is the term now widely used to describe scholarship that is

concerned with the environmental implications of the literary text” (ISLE Reader xix). By providing this definition, they both expressed the conviction that any literary work may be examined from the standpoint of ecology.

The goal of Glen A. Love's work and writing was to build a bridge between the environment and humans. He believes that pastoral themes and the interaction between humans and non-humans are expressed in excellent writing in his book, *'Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment'*. He makes an effort to exhibit any work of literature while paying attention to the environment. According to him, “The concept of studying and teaching literature without referring to the natural environment and the conditions of the earth and unaware of the basic principles of ecology that underlie all life seems short sighted” (Love 18). Only human representations of non-human features and other natural aspects can be used to attempt this depiction.

Glotfelty takes an earth-centered perspective, looking at how nature more closely mirrors human life. It is nearly impossible to live without both the environment and literature. Literature’s primary aim is to make the human kind aware or to sensitize the society on issues like gender, class etc. Environmental awareness and the importance of protecting the land we live in is also reminded through literature. This is why different writers across the globe embrace different cultures have written on nature to make ecosphere worth living. There is always a relation between health and harmony of an individual and the environmental condition he lives in. Rousseau stated that nature was pure and whatever that was termed as civilized was corrupt. The development we acquired through capitalism, imperialism, industrialization was through exploiting nature (Dwivedi, 5). With the movements like colonialism and capitalism, nature got its new perception. Colonial powers termed natives as savage, the other, the uncivilized and

marginalized them. And these natives were part of nature that was meant to be civilized by the west and later on by the whole mankind.

The western perspective on the relationship between humans and non-humans changed with the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), which introduced the notion of evolution. Darwin's assertion that people were likewise animals led to a new definition of nature. In line with Darwin's theory, human existence is greatly influenced by nature, as survival ultimately depends on those who are well-suited to their environment and capable of adapting to it. The twentieth century witnessed scientific advancement and the growth of technology. Critics were constantly writing about modernity, how nature became the victim of modernity and wars. And they also started to write about the non-human world.

The literary foundation of ecocriticism comes from three significant American writers Margret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson and H. D. Thoreau. These authors, commonly known as the transcendentalists, aspired to artistic independence unhindered by social conventions. Emerson's philosophical essay 'Nature' illustrates how the natural world has affected him. In *Summer on the Lakes* (1843), Fuller's reaction to the landscape's naturalness can be recognized. Thoreau's two years spent living in a shelter on the shore of Walden Pond is remembered in the work *Walden*. The book asks us to return to the nature. The three texts listed above serve as the cornerstone of American eco-centered scripts. Raymond Williams *The Country and the City* (1973) brought eco criticism to England which shows how English Literature contributed to countryside, wilderness, hunger and poor living conditions. It shows how nature has been constructed in a cultural text.

The theory's major goal is to inspire people to think deeply about how people interact with nature, the moral and aesthetic challenges the environmental crisis presents and how language and literature convey values that have significant ecological ramifications. Early theories in literary studies highlight class, race, gender, and place as critical analysis factors. The late twentieth century has woken up to a threat: ecological disaster. Ecocriticism is the outcome of this recent realization that, unless humans take precautions, there won't be any more pleasant things in nature to write about in the near future.

Since the Vedic era in India and the early Greek thinking, the preservation of the natural world has always been the top priority. Because it is a new field of study, researchers are still working to define the objectives and scope of the field. As a relatively new field, eco criticism still lacks a well-established set of presumptions, beliefs, or methods. It is more than just a literary analysis exercise; it also broadens human conceptions of the global community to encompass nonhuman living forms and the physical environment.

When there is a major connection between the author and the setting as well as the characters and the setting, ecocriticism is best applied to a work in which the landscape itself is the dominant character. By definition, landscape comprises human views and alterations as well as the non-human components of a given location, such as the rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, and air. Several literary genres include references to the environment. Regardless of how the topic is approached, all of them promote environmental consciousness. Wilderness has long been depicted in nature writing; "environmental writing" is a synonym for this. Literature is not the only technique available for promoting environmental awareness,



In addition to that, movies, cartoons, television series, advertisements, etc. have demonstrated their interest in this area. Ecocritics, makes an effort to exhibit any work of literature while paying attention to the environment. Only human representations of non-human features and other natural aspects can be used to attempt this depiction. One of the most popular genres where ecocriticism has grown is fiction. There has always been a strong connection between men and animals. Even King Dashrath in ancient times, according to the "Ramayana," slaughtered the parents of Shraavan after mistaking them for deer and being cursed by them. Thousands of people still engage in the same behaviour nowadays despite stringent restrictions.

There are other harmful aspects of nature as well. Some authors have cited the same in their works. In reality, only humans are accountable for this; as a result, nature has amply demonstrated its superiority to humans. Nature has always shown to be more powerful than people. It has frequently demonstrated its strength by controlling human resources during natural disasters like starvation, drought, floods, and earthquakes. Because of the close relationship between man and nature, it is impossible for people to live independently of the natural world. The way that man has lived has contributed to things like tropical warmth, protracted drought, global warming, desertification, deforestation, floods, droughts, and pollution. The way that man is currently living, disregarding the environment, is truly disturbing. Everything about life on earth is impacted by the environment, including food, habitat, fashion, class, gender, psychology, religion, and economics. Eco balance is not specific to any one place or location. It has spread around the world. Irrespective of any country, locality, or habitat, the entire human race is accountable for maintaining a livable environment.

Environmental awareness and ecological consciousness are now inextricably linked to our daily lives. Because everyone now recognizes the necessity and significance of sustainable

development with the environment at its core, this problem has gained prominence. Literary critics and academics have developed an eco-focused strategy dubbed "ecocriticism" to address the ecological challenges. Environmental crises and disasters are not contemporary issues. Due to deforestation, ancient Greece also had environmental problems like soil erosion. Gods and Goddesses are depicted in nature, according to Indian culture as well. We revere the entire natural world as God. Most ancient religions and philosophical systems emerged as a response to man's mistreatment of the environment. In particular, our ancient writings attribute sacred purposes and symbolic significance to trees and forests. The forest "Aranyaka" is described in ancient Hindu mythology as a location where all the Gods congregate to talk about the advancement of humanity. Even now, in the midst of nature, people gather to talk about the wealth of humanity.

The first wave of ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s and focused on finding connections between the environment and nature. The primary focus of this is on literary representations of the natural world in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction that respect the preservation of the environment and a sense of place in readers. Some of the writings in this first wave of ecocriticism were influenced by the philosophies of Naess, Merleau Ponty, and Heidegger. The second wave of ecocriticism, in contrast to the first, has concentrated on concerns related to cities, industrialisation, and how these things affect the ecosystem. The relationship between nature and culture has been disregarded as a result of industrialization.

From the beginning, distinctions between men and women and between natives and settlers have been examined. This period of ecocriticism has given rise to a number of subfields that look into the varied, historically and culturally distinct ways that literature can influence how people interact with the natural environment in real life. Ecocritics examine underlying

elements including ecological principles, how the word "nature" is used, and how literature describes "place." Ecocriticism studies the representations of nature in literary texts as in Eden, Arcadia, virgin land, miasmal Swamp etc (Glotfelty 23). Eco critics look at how people see wildness, then explore how that idea has changed through time, and determine whether or not the current environmental problems are relevant to popular culture and contemporary literature. Ecofeminism is a type of ecocriticism which deals with the domination of woman and nature by men. It shows how nature is given female characteristics as its fertile and owned and exploited by men.

Stories can perpetuate the idea that humans are the most important or superior beings in the universe by emphasizing human achievements, ambitions, and difficulties while downplaying or ignoring the perspectives of non-human entities. This may strengthen the idea that humans are unique and neglect the interdependence of all living things and the natural world. Ecological literature usually referred to as Eco literature or environmental literature frequently focuses on the interactions between people and nature and tries to emphasize significance of ecological interconnection. These works may feature non-human characters, give voice to nature, or object to environmental exploitation by humans. Authors also gave voice to these non-human entities which are ostracized and thus focus on the ecological awareness and the equal rights of the elements of nature.

Rachel Carson, an American marine biologist in her book *Silent Spring* draws the reality between human and nature and how the methods of agriculture changed ecology. Carson writes, "On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh" (Carson 22). In some ways, Carson's portrayal of the extinct birds only

seems to be about the loss of bird song, but in a broader sense, it serves as a metaphor for a worldwide natural apocalypse. Every other species, including humans both collectively and individually, inhabit and make up a centre.

Nature has always been a strong force that can heal itself and regenerate. Over time, nature has a remarkable capacity to bounce back from calamities. Both ecosystems and organisms are capable of regeneration and environmental adaptation. Mother Nature, the originator of all life on Earth, serves as the foundation for the early development of living organisms. Devoid of Mother Nature, our actions are constrained. The natural environment underpins the infrastructure upon which human societies are constructed. Nature often takes on a somewhat mystical quality, fading from human consciousness when it functions smoothly and becoming a source of concern when it falters. In the realm of physical healing, people can find a reflection of ourselves within nature. Nature never discriminates against humans, whether we have physical limitations or other disabilities; it continues to embrace us as an integral part of its essence. Following natural disasters, the Earth undergoes a self-healing process. By promoting biodiversity and ecosystem services, which are crucial for preserving the delicate balance of life on Earth, nature serves as a healer and also heals itself. The healing powers of nature serve as a constant reminder of our interconnectedness with the natural world and the value of preserving it for both the planet's and our own health.

Ecocritical theory proves that when humans take over nature, they are questioning their own existence. And this viewpoint is evaluated with the help of literature and through different genres. Humans for their materialistic gains prioritise profit and growth over ecological wellbeing. This drive for profit leads to exploitation. The processes of nature are present in everything in the cosmos. Furthermore, no species has any control over this natural process. This

presumption offers a cosmic perspective that encourages the idea that the human race is not the only one in control of natural phenomena, and it will paint a different picture of the interaction between nature and humans.

In the movie "Moana" by Disney, nature is depicted as a formidable force with the capacity to nurture and rejuvenate itself. Te Fiti, a deity-like being, embodies the core of nature and its aptitude for regeneration and flourishing. The theft of Te Fiti's heart results in environmental deterioration and a disruption of equilibrium in the world. Nevertheless, as the film concludes, Moana's restoration of the heart illustrates the rejuvenating potency of nature, as thriving plant life and vitality return to the islands. In Divakaruni's "Mistress of Spices," nature possesses a remarkable restorative ability to mend the mental and physical well-being of others. Ultimately, following an earthquake, it also mends itself, demonstrating its innate capacity for self-healing. This highlights the concept that when provided with the opportunity, nature can restore and revitalize itself. By using the given theory as the base, the project aims at the relevance of ecocriticism in the present scenario and how nature functions as both a self-healer and a healer for others.

## Chapter Three

### Moana's Quest: Nature's Healing Journey

The *Moana* movie is a 2016 Disney musical fantasy adventure film directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. The movie's plot follows the adventures of Moana, a courageous teen who is also the daughter of the chief and her quest on saving her island. Even though her father, Chief Tui, restricts Moana from going into the sea, her grandmother, Tala holds the belief that Moana is the chosen savior of the land. The movie is set in the Polynesian island of Motunui which was once blessed with rich vegetation until the heart of Te Fiti who is the goddess of nature was stolen for man's material requirements.

It focuses primarily on the relationship between humans with animals and the natives who occupy the island of Motunui with all its other living beings and the ecosystem flourished as they had a strong bond. This is represented by the things that nature gifted to the people for their survival. The mountainous landscape and lush forest that envelop Motunui Island make it look like a green diamond floating above the ocean's sparkling blue waters and its abundant white-sand beaches. In the midst of the sun, coconut palms provide natural shade and a serene atmosphere. Since the colours blue and green are associated with coolness, they provide a sense that the environment is rather cool and how the marine world and the land are connected. The predominance of blue and green colors throughout the film contributes to the perception that it has environmental benefits. It says,

Grandma Tala: The legends are true. Someone will have to go!

Chief Tui: Mother, Motunui is paradise. Who would want to go anywhere else?

(Moana 00:04:35-00:04:41)

Motunui chief considers the island as a paradise where all people co-exist harmoniously with nature. The chief tries to convince his mother that no one will need to travel across the island because everything they need is already available on the island. The island of Motunui is a perfect example of how well all its residents can live because there are so many essential natural resources. The statement also has a hidden meaning that the island is safe for them and they don't have to sail across to find Te Fiti's heart.

In the beginning of the movie the background story of Motunui is presented. The character of Te Fiti, the goddess of nature who has the power to create life with the magical green stone is shown. When most of the people believed in the myths of the island, some of them were also blinded by power. They wanted to create life with the power of stone. The divine power of green stone soon became a treasure that everyone wanted. This is where Maui, a demi god who is also a shape shifter snatches away the green stone from Te Fiti. There was massive destruction all over the land. Te Ka, a lava monster started attacking Maui. Te ka strikes Maui down to the ocean and the green stone was lost forever. It was after this that the islands started deteriorating, the crops failed, marine world was dying as the lava from Te Ka poisoned the ocean. Nature's exploitation begins with Maui, even though he is a demigod stealing the stone. Nature is exploited by those who use their authority to seize natural resources, claim ownership of them, use them without planning for restoration, and or for reducing the impact of this destruction. This is what his successors did in one way or another. It says,

“Grandma Tala: In the beginning, there was only ocean until the mother island Te Fiti emerged. Her heart held the greatest power ever known. It could create life itself and Te Fiti shared it with the world”. (Moana 00:00:55-00:01:17)

The Motunui people worship the island goddess Te Fiti as the world's creator and believe that she has supernatural powers. It is this strong belief that led them to celebrate nature and to see nature as a source of life. The earth (aquatic and land) are viewed as being under the guardianship of mother Earth or the earth goddess (Dickie). It also explains the scientific discovery that the land that now exists was born from the sea. According to Motunui beliefs, all living things in this world, including the children of the mother island Te Fiti, are derived from the sea and were created in the sea. As a result, they have great reverence for Te Fiti, the mother island that gave them life and provided them with natural resources. The Motunui people are bound to repay the goddess by becoming more environmentally conscious for their sustainability and the love for their mother island. Earth is always associated as a mother. And in the eastern countries earth and all the other elements are worshipped. The movie portrays Te Fiti, recovering herself when Moana puts her heart back in its proper place. Te Fiti's actual essence is revealed during this treatment, and her island state returns to its lush and bright state as a symbol of her recovery and rejuvenation.

Moana, since her childhood was attached to the ocean, nature and the myths of Motunui told by her grandmother. She was asked to be responsible and was restricted to sail as she is the only heir and the future of the island. When she was a child, she saved a baby turtle from the vultures and helped it to reach the water. This gesture of Moana, made the ocean happy where she was gifted with the magical stone of Te Fiti. Even though she was kept away from the ocean, she felt like the ocean was calling her. She has a pet pig named Pua and a chicken throughout her



adventure. This shows her ecocentric values. Disney executes nature of Motunui with a song where the livelihood of the people is shown.

According to the traditional method of building houses, the ancient people utilize plant parts mainly woods, barks and leaves. Additionally, the materials tend to be environmentally sustainable and comfy for residents, which can have a favourable effect on their welfare. The use of natural resources as building materials is also seen in the Moana movie, where every structure on Motunui Island is fashioned primarily of wooden materials. In the movie, Fales, which resemble traditional huts, are the type of accommodation used in Motunui, where entire families reside in a single fale. The fales are not enclosed by walls, and the roofs are formed of dried palm leaves or fronds, as seen by their light brown tint, which resembles that of dry grass or leaves. In the movie, the palms are used to make roofs. It can be seen in the dialogue between a man and Moana,

A man: And every storm, this roof leaks, no matter how many fronds I add.

Moana: Fixed! Not the fronds. Wind shifted the post. (Moana 00:12:02-00:12:13)

From this conversation, it's evident that the island has been encountering powerful winds recently. This is believed to be linked to the island's ongoing climate changes. The inhabitants of Motunui have always shown unwavering loyalty to Mother Earth, relying on natural resources for generations, and their roofs have remained steadfast. However, it reveals that they are now witnessing the onset of climate change and the peril that is on its way.

The Motunui people have demonstrated how they engage with nature, exhibiting how anything in the natural world can be used by humans to exist. Humans have a great dependence among nature; they live within nature itself because it always provides what humans need.

“People have a fundamental physical, emotional and intellectual dependence on nature”  
(Kellert7).

As represented in the movie, the Motunui people depend on nature for everything. By observing how the Motunui people employ natural resources as the primary raw materials to create their clothing and accessories, the natural environment of the period is visible. They dressed in the clothes made of thick leaves that are secured with fiber rope. The Motunui chief typically wears a stunning feathered crown with vibrant colours to emphasise the idea that he or she is the group leader and to indicate that he or she has the authority to rule.

Tools and utensils are the other things that the islanders depend on nature for. A basket is the first item the Motunui people craft from plant materials. Palm leaf is the major material that is available and suitable for manufacturing particular crafts with specific techniques on Motunui Island, making it the primary material for making some types of baskets.

The lyrics from the song,

Consider the coconut

Consider its tree, we use each part of coconut it's all we need

We make our nets from the fibres

The water is sweet inside

We use the leaves to build fires

We cook up the meat inside (Moana, Minute : 00:08:52-00:09:06)

The nets are woven using coconut fibres. And the dry leaves are used to make fire. Motunui people use animal resources for their basic needs, being geographically bordered by the sea, the natives can easily obtain resources from both land and water. They consume both pork, chicken and obtain fish from the sea too. The crops and plants are essential for human survival. They are vital to human civilization because they provide a purpose that is necessary for humans to thrive, including giving us food, shelter, clothing, and a variety of other essentials. In Moana, all Motunui residents rely on agricultural resources for their livelihood, plants being their source of survival. The island is capable of producing different kinds of plants like bananas, coconut palms and taros. Most of the scenes of the island have these many shots which prove the mutual relationship between humans and nature.

Everything was going fine on the island until one day when one of the villagers informed about the coconuts getting spoiled and the fishes being poisoned. The whole lagoon was empty, which made Moana decide to go beyond the reef as she is the new tribal chief of Motunui. The dialogue speaks about the situation,

Villager: Traps in the eastern lagoon, the catch keeps decreasing.

Moana: Then we'll rotate the fish trap.

Villager: We have, there's no fish.

Moana: Oh, then we'll go fishing far aside from the alleys.

Villager: We've tried

Moana: The upwind side?

Villager: We tried the whole lagoon, they just gone (Moana, Minute : 00:13:55-00:14:13)

As the ecologist Buell stated that, mankind is on the verge of collapse due to widespread human greed-related exploitation of natural resources. It is undeniable that rainforests are being destroyed, fossil fuel supplies have declined quickly, the seasonal cycle is out of balance, ecological disasters are happening more frequently than ever before, and our environment is in danger. All these incidents are faced by the people of Motunui. The island on which the Motunui people reside is essential to their way of life, providing them with a home, a means of support, and food. They cultivate coconuts and other crops that they can collect while fishing in the lagoon. The relationship that exists between the characters and their environment as it is depicted in Moana is the cornerstone of ecocriticism. But despite their best efforts to conserve their natural resources, they eventually ran out of options. The island of Motunui, home of Moana, began to die as soon as Te Fiti's stone was not returned to its proper location. It says,

Moana: What if we fish beyond the reef?

Chief: No one goes beyond the reef..

Moana : If there is no fish in the lagoon and there is a whole ocean!!!

Chief: We have only one rule and can't break it

Moana: An old rule, when there was fish... (Moana, Minute : 00:14:28-00:00:14:42)

This refers to the reduced availability of fish in aquatic ecosystems as a direct result of the alterations in the environment caused by climate change. These changes can include rising water temperatures, ocean acidification, and disruptions to marine food chains, all of which impact the fish populations and their habitats. And later on the movie, it's said that the lava from Te ka poisons the aquatic ecosystem causing a threat to the ecosphere.

Moana's father was upset with her because of her idea of travelling across the reef. This is when her mother explains the past life of her father. When Chief Tui was young, he along with his best friend travelled beyond the reef, breaking the rule of the island. The waves were more like mountains and his best friend died in the storm. This is what made him decide that no one should travel beyond the reef to keep the people of Motunui safe. Throughout the scene, the dark side of nature is seen when it's exploited by humans.

But Moana still feels like she gets the call from the ocean. Thus with the help of her grandmother she decides to sail beyond the reef. Her grandmother takes her to a cave with many cave paintings and drawings engraved on the walls. This is where she learns about her ancestors who were voyagers, who crossed the reef and went for adventures. The people stopped voyaging because of Maui who stole the heart of Te Fiti. Te Ka, the lava monster was awakened and the boats that went for adventures never came back, making the rule to not cross the reef. According to Moana's grandmother, a hero from the next generation will one day seek down Maui, make him cross the ocean, and put Te Fiti's heart back where it belongs. Moana will never forget her grandmother's words. She summoned the strength to sail through the reef in silence in search of Maui in order to achieve her grandmother's dream.

Her grandmother asks her to follow the fishhook constellation that can lead her to Maui, in order to restore the heart. This shows the relationship humans had with the sea, how they used to navigate by following the stars. "Our lives and the life of the sea are braided together... here we are islanders, we live because the sea lives." (Living Sea 1995). The land, the sea, and everything else are intertwined and connected in all of life's activities according to many ancient faiths. The Pacific Islands and its inhabitants are an excellent representation of an interdependent existence because they coexist with the land in a reciprocal manner. It becomes a way of living

as well as a way of thinking to regard nature as sacred. This is evident in their stories, customs, rituals, speech, and reverence for nature as the source of all life and the movie explains this.

When Moana meets Maui, the demigod of wind and the sea, he explains that, he did it for the humans as they asked him so that they will have the power of creation on their own. It is the thought of relationship between humans and nature is typically dichotomous, meaning that people are distinct and separate from nature, or hierarchically they are superior. Human beings have the uniqueness that distinguishes them from other species. The cognitive, psychological, and social capabilities are made human beings superior. Moreover, humans are moral agents and are able to understand and formulate principles and apply them to different situations and conditions (Sandler 105-111)

Moana convinces Maui to retrieve the heart and to save the world, so that he will be praised and accepted by the people. Maui was born as a normal human being, until the gods found him after his parents abandoned Maui. Thus he was given a magical fishhook which helps him to shape shift. The gods shows the nurturing side of mother earth. Both of them face many challenges throughout their journey. Maui teaches her to sail and the basics of 'way finding' in other words, to sail with the help of stars. They reach the barren island of Te Fiti and try to restore the heart. But the lava monster, Te Ka appears and started attacking Moana and Maui. Moana, puts the stone in Te Ka, and Te Ka turns into its true self, Te Fiti. This shows how nature reacts when humans exploits it, the way nature responds to all that is done to it. Te Fiti restores nature and the islands to its lush green stage.

Ecocriticism not only means the representation of nature in literature or giving importance to the habitats as portrayed in the works, it also connects the characters with nature.

It is the social thought of connecting woman and nature as they both face challenges. Like woman who can give birth to the next generation, Te Fiti is able to bring life to earth. Te Fiti is symbolises the earth as a source of life. This is represented by the use of green color, which is the colour of life, resurrection, fertility and growth. But Te ka represents earth's anger when it is exploited for their greedy needs. This is represented with the use of color red which indicates anger and danger. The birth and rise of Te Ka shows the natural disasters and like droughts, floods, earthquake, the depletion of natural resources etc. When Maui stole the heart, the balance of the world was lost and lead to environmental destruction. "We have created lifestyles based on greed and wanting more, causing us to abuse and diminish natural resources". (Dickie 8). This is what Maui did. Considering the fight Moana has put up with in order to restore the world, nature responds favourably by reviving life. The goddess has totally restored everything that has been destroyed highlighting the fact that humans are essential to the preservation of nature since their behavior towards it has a significant impact on whether it can survive. In the context of areas untouched by human influence, there is no pure "nature" remaining on Earth, but rather, we can find diverse "environments," with varying degrees of natural purity.

The movie delves into themes that belong to environmental degradation, human arrogance, as well as the consequences that belong to exploiting nature that is for personal gain. The movie underscores the remarkable ability of nature to recover and restore itself even in the face of numerous crises. The term "healing in nature" describes the organic procedures and methods by which ecosystems, habitats, or living things recover and mend from harm, disruption, or crisis. It entails the restoration of harmony, health, and functionality within the natural world, which is frequently fueled by the environment's and ecosystems' intrinsic

resilience and regeneration abilities. It explores our moral need to save our own habitat and all of its residents, including plants, animals, and other natural resources.



## Chapter Four

. "Nature as Healer: Insights from *The Mistress of Spices*

"The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely, or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature, and God." (Frank,27)

*The Mistress of Spices* is the debut work written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indian American writer and activist which was adapted into a movie in 2005 directed by Paul Berges. Tilo, the protagonist is a specialist of secret of spices who reserved her life to helping those in need within the South Asian community in California. Tilo the mistress of spices is trained by the first mother amongst the nature to use spices as rehab power. Nature is a divine bestowal upon humanity, perceived with all-knowing and fulfilling roles as a creator, preserver, guardian, and even a force of destruction. It occupies an unparalleled significance in our existence. The lives of human beings are intricately interconnected with the surroundings they inhabit, and literature, while delving into the human experience, has consistently highlighted the significance of nature within it. Ecocriticism acts as a connection linking literature, the natural world, and humanity. Literature and the natural world have maintained a deep and complex connection throughout history and around the world. On occasion, they have provided poets and authors with inspiration through their beauty, inherent serenity, and overwhelming presence. Conversely, they have also acted as a mirror, reflecting humanity's inner conflicts and desires.

The thread of comprehension regarding our profound bond with nature and the healing influence it possesses can be followed back to the era of shamans during the Reindeer Age, which commenced approximately 40,000 years ago. Exemplified by the symbolism of the medicine wheel, nature was harnessed as a remedy for restoring equilibrium and synchronization

with the innate patterns and rhythms of the natural world. Nature not only brings healing to others but also undergoes its own process of healing despite the harm inflicted upon it.

Tilo, as a young girl, experiences neglect from her family. In her early years, when her mother is unable to provide nourishment due to illness, nature steps in as a surrogate mother and cares for her. Nature's ability to assist people during times of hardship becomes evident. As a result, Tilo forms a deep connection with nature and incorporates various natural elements into her life from an early age. She is regarded as an extraordinary child due to her inherent ability to foresee the future, which she employs to assist the villagers with their issues. Her life takes a dramatic turn when nature intervenes. Her renown spreads far and wide, attracting the attention of pirates who, upon kidnapping her, crown her as their pirate queen and name her "Bhagyavathi," believing she brings good fortune into their lives. Being a pirate queen was not her preference. To escape from the pirates, she projects her thoughts across the water, summoning a typhoon that aids her.

Water and fire become essential aspects of her existence, instigating a transformation and leading her into an unfamiliar realm filled with exotic spices. On an island, she receives instruction from Mother in the art of harnessing spices for their healing properties. The First Mother chooses her as the spice girl, bestowing upon her the name Tilo, derived from sesame, a spice symbolizing nourishment, vitality, and the restoration of well-being and optimism. Tilo's life is intricately intertwined with nature due to her extraordinary ability to comprehend the secrets of spices. She identifies herself as a master of spices and follows the guidance provided by the spices in her vicinity. Eventually, she establishes a renowned spice bazaar in California, where all the spices under her care willingly yield their magical properties. Every Indian spice in her store can communicate with her, acting as her companion with the authority to both warn and

discipline her when needed. She uses natural spices to cure individuals. One day, she disregarded all the rules to satisfy her own desires, and as a result, the connection between her and the natural spices was severed. They began to defy, causing harm to the very people she had previously assisted. This mirrors how nature responds when we exploit it selfishly but as the movie concludes it beautifully illustrates the nurturing and forgiving essence of nature, showcasing its ability to mend the lives of those impacted by Tilo's transgressions.

According to Peter Barry in his canonical work, *Beginning theory*, he states that, The ecocritics re read major literary works from an ecocentric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world. They extend the applicability of a range of ecocentric concepts, such as growth, energy, mutuality, interdependence and the different characteristics of nature (Barry 270). In the movie *Mistress of Spices*, the director portrays nature's therapeutic qualities, the art of healing and how it connects humans with nature.

In the beginning of the movie, Tilo introduces herself as, “I am a Mistress of Spices. I can work the others too. Mineral, metal, earth and sand and stone...The liquids that burn their hues till you see nothing else. I learned them all on the island. But the spices are my love... They are the ones I work with” ( *Mistress of Spices*, Minute 00:04:59-00:05:10) . In these quoted lines, Tilo probably presents her interests and expertise with nature wherein, “the heat of sun, light, air, and water, and mineral, vegetable, and animal substances (unprocessed if possible) are employed in therapy and as remedies” (Heyn 16). Tilo, one of these mistresses, selects her name inspired by the sesame seed. She decides to call herself "Tilottama," signifying the essence of sesame, a healer of heart and liver ailments through sandalwood paste. With this name and purpose in mind, she relocates to Oakland, California.

As Divakaruni explains, the movie's central character is Tilo, the mistress of spices, who has harnessed the magic of herbs and spices. She has chosen to settle in Oakland to aid her community, distributing spices from her shop, attempting to resolve their issues, fulfill their desires, and bring happiness into their lives. Christopher Patridge defines healer as a channel passively, yet, paradoxically, with discernment permitting the cosmic energy to flow unobstructedly through his or her own energy fields into those of the client. The healer must be aware of the disturbances in the client's wholeness at high levels...like an electrical transformer, the healer transforms the cosmic energy into a form that can be used by the client's body-mind-spirit system. (33)

In the novel, each chapter is named on different spices. And in the movie, Tilo explains the use of each spice to the audience. Turmeric, Cinnamon, Fenugreek, Asafoetida, Fennel, Ginger, Kalo Jire, Neem, Red Chilly, sesame are some of them. Different spices may help us with different troubles,' the Old One told us after she had taught us the common cures... 'for each person there is one special spice' No, not for you- the Mistresses must never use the spice for their own ends". This phrase by the Mother also signifies how nature shouldn't be used for personal gains. Before departing for California, Mother instructs her to bring ginger root, the very spice she last savored on the island. Ginger root, also recognized as adrak, is sourced from the earth and boasts a distinctive, spiraled form with a light brown exterior. It is reputed to bestow bravery and vigor, and Mother provides it as a means to confront challenges with fortitude.

Tilo begins with saying about the love she has for the spices. "I know their origins, what their colours signify, and their smells. I can read each by the true- name it was given at the first, when ground split like skin and offered it up to the sky. Their heat runs in my blood. From

amchur to zafran, they bow to my command. At a canard they yield up to me their hidden lots, their magical power. Every spice has a purpose and for each person there is a special spice (Mistress of spices 00.04.49- 00.05.49). The initial spice and herb introduced in the movie is 'Turmeric', alternatively known as 'halud,' signifying the bright yellow hue reminiscent of dawn. A rejuvenating balm symbolizing the cycle of life, it adorns the foreheads of newborns to bestow fortune, is ceremonially sprinkled upon coconuts during pujas, and delicately applied to the borders of fresh sarees, including those worn for weddings. When gently massaged onto the skin, it effaces imperfections and signs of aging, diminishes years and excess weight, leaving the complexion with a radiant, golden luminescence. Tilo says that, for a thousand years, the bride and those who long to be brides done the same.

The narrative centers on her encounters with various customers and her ability to use the power of nature to mend both their emotional well-being and physical ailments. In California, she encounters Haroun, who originally sought the American dream but now finds himself trapped in an Indian nightmare. They share a strong sibling-like connection. Haroun bears a painful history he'd rather forget, having tragically lost his family in communal riots. Tilo assists in his healing journey using 'Chandan', a remedy that aids in erasing those haunting memories. One of her clients is an American-settled Punjabi woman with a son named Jagjit. Jagjit faces difficulties at school due to his ethnicity, as he knows only Punjabi and becomes the subject of ridicule when he is asked to remove his turban, leading to laughter directed at his uncut hair. Tilo offers him cinnamon, commonly referred to as 'dal chini', which is derived from the dried and rolled bark of a tree native to southern Asia. This bark is ground into a powder to enhance the flavor of sweets and desserts. Cinnamon is not only considered the spice of companionship but

also reputed for its potential to ward off adversaries. It even gives strength in legs arms and mouth.

Haroun left his previous job and transitioned into a taxi driver role. He urged her to leave the store, but she hesitated because her mother had established a strict rule against leaving the shop. Tilo, who could foresee that Haroun would suffer a severe accident, took measures to protect him from the evil eye by using 'kala jeera'. Geeta's grandfather shares with Tilo about his granddaughter, describing her modern mindset and her connection with a Chicano boy. Tilo harnessed the power of 'champak' to restore harmony within their family. Spices serve as both bringers of luck and aids to many individuals. This highlights the intimate connection between humanity and the natural world.

Her life takes a different turn when she meets Doug, an American architect. He gets into an accident and she tries to cure him with the help of spices. Throughout their encounter Tilo, is warned by the chillies. Chillies symbolising destruction.

Tilo: Everyone has a spice

Doug: Then what is mine?

Tilo: If you wait here for a minute, then I will find yours...

Spices... Speak to me... Is it 'methi' seed for strength? 'Fennel' for perseverance.. Why can't I see?

First Mother: When your desires and vision are mixed. Your ability is taken from you and you will be confused and the spices won't obey you!

Tilo: 'Asafoetida'... antidote for Love? You can't be his spices. (Mistress of Spices 00.29.36-00.30.45)

Asafoetida, commonly referred to as "hing," is a viscous substance produced within the stem of a plant primarily located in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This resin transforms into a dark brown, adhesive consistency and is distinguished by its potent, pungent aroma, frequently employed as a seasoning in soups. Tilo claims that it serves as a deterrent to love and imparts fortitude during conflicts. But she gives him Tulsi or the holy basil to mix with tea. It's for remembrance and to make him visit her store again. Tilo gradually finds herself developing feelings for him, defying the rules established by the first mistress.

As a mistress of spices, one should refrain from physical contact with others, yet Tilo repeatedly disregarded this guideline. She attempted to comfort Jagjit's mother, who was distressed by Jagjit's disobedience. Subsequently, her finger was inadvertently grazed by Joug while she was cutting 'kala jire' for Haroun. Tilo made numerous unsuccessful attempts to provide 'kala jire' for Haroun. Despite the obligation to empathize with others' suffering and set aside personal desires, she defied these principles for Doug. Throughout these events, she breached another rule by leaving the store and using the spices for her own purposes.

Tilo and Doug have physical relationship. Despite her seeking forgiveness from nature, it becomes evident that her actions, driven by ignorance of the forces at play, will result in the destruction of everything around her. Upon her return to the store, she gathered all the remaining items, creating a pyre in the room's center. She decides to sacrifice herself for nature. She sprinkled sesame seeds around for protection during her journey and uttered incantations. Tilo,

even though she had desires, also had empathy. She tries to cure people with the help of nature. Thus nature forgives her for all the good deeds.

Ecocriticism reflects how nature is explored in texts and talks about environmental issues. According to Divakaruni, she attributes a healing quality to nature, endowing it with characteristics of a healer. She recognizes the capacity of the natural world to provide physical, mental, or emotional relief and restoration to individuals. This perspective sees nature as a therapeutic force that can promote well-being and healing in various aspects of human life. According to Indian philosophy, nature has magical powers. They provide remedies for physical maladies as well as cures for spiritual ills.

In the movie, spices went through various processes. They are ground into a fine powder for human use in the same way how nature is crushed for human needs. Nature is connected to mother. Tilo, seeks the help of nature throughout her life. But when she breaks the rules, it shows the innate superiority within her. Nature abounds with a vibrant array of colors, each holding its own special meaning. Chitra Banerjee skillfully uses these colors to symbolize various concepts: yellow representing the arrival of the New Year, green symbolizing the bountiful harvest, and red embodying the fortune of a bride. The narrative seamlessly weaves together the five elemental forces of nature—air, water, earth, space, and fire. In this tale, nature assumes a pivotal role, acting as the ultimate arbiter.

The cycle of nature weaves itself throughout the entire story, from its inception to its conclusion. Starting with Tilo's birth as a foreseer, nature remains a constant presence and ultimately finds restoration by the end of the movie. The extraordinary abilities bestowed upon Tilo are revoked, shattering her existence when she crosses the boundaries of emotional and



physical attachment with Doug. In the story's culmination, a profound earthquake serves as a symbol of Indian philosophy, representing the phases of creation, preservation, and destruction, thus completing nature's cycle. This earthquake becomes the decisive factor in Tilo's precarious situation, reducing everything to rubble, except her unwavering faith. Tilo, the main character, serves as a healer, a catalyst for change, and a link between two separate cultures, illustrating her journey of self-healing from her past and embracing new beginnings. The film explores the way in which nature has the power to mend both the mental and physical well-being of individuals while also healing itself. Nature emerges as the ultimate healer of life, capable of both protection and devastation, yet always possessing the power to rejuvenate life from the ashes of destruction. The analysis thus illustrates the central role of nature's healing power from an ecocritical perspective.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

The movies *Moana* and *Mistress of Spices* have effectively depicted the representation of nature as a healer through an ecocritical perspective. The connection between humans and their surroundings has been both passionate and with many challenges too. While ecocriticism originally emerged in the realm of literature, it has been appropriated and redefined across various disciplines, with film studies serving as a notable example. Factors such as the increasing prominence of ecology as an academic discourse and the contemporary emphasis on environmentalism in cinema have contributed to the proliferation of ecocritical analyses in both mainstream and niche films. Typically, an ecocritical approach does not aim to provide definitive solutions to the ecological dilemmas depicted in a film. Instead, it encourages fresh perspectives and interpretations that viewers may not have previously considered. Therefore, the role of the ecocritic primarily involves identifying, challenging, informing, and possibly inspiring and provoking the reader or viewer.

Once a viewer has developed an ecocritical perspective, the significance they assign to a film can impact its appeal and credibility. Moreover, this newfound awareness opens up opportunities for alternative interpretations beyond the realm of cinema. In other words, an environmentally conscious individual who is capable of conducting ecocritical analyses may criticize political campaigns for lacking environmental considerations or for posing a threat to environmental issues. Ecocriticism's influence and impacts can extend beyond mere examination of popular feature films. It holds practical value and contributes to raising awareness.

Ecocriticism, broadly speaking, involves the examination of the connection between cultural works and the natural world. The focal point of the dissertation is the healing aspect of nature. In the project's introduction, it provides a glimpse into the theoretical and analytical framework that will be further explored in the following chapters. It clarified the intrinsic role of nature as a healer in the preservation of the natural environment and in promoting sustainable living. The chapter also provides a concise overview of influential theorists and their contributions in the fields of ecocriticism and ecology. The second chapter, titled "Ecocriticism in Literature," offers a comprehensive exploration of the methodology used, blending concepts from environment and ecology. This chapter thoroughly examines the convergence of these theories and sets the stage for analyzing the texts *Moana* and *Mistress of Spices* from an ecocritical perspective. In this chapter, the theoretical concepts put forth by renowned scholars such as Peter Barry, William Rueckert, Harold Fromm and Cheryll Glotfelty is presented. Additionally, it delves into the perspectives and interpretations of other notable figures in the field of ecocriticism.

Third chapter, titled *Moana's Quest: Nature's Healing Journey* explores the concept of nature healing itself from the impact of human actions. It delves into the significance of the village of Motunui and its dependence on various natural resources, as well as the transformation of Motunui's landscape and how the restoration of Te Fiti's power leads to the rejuvenation of the entire island. Moana's journey to restore the heart serves not only as a quest but also as a powerful reminder to viewers of nature's ability to heal.

Chapter Four, titled *Nature as Healer: Insights from The Mistress of Spices*

Illustrates how nature can have both mental and physical healing effects on individuals. Additionally, it delves into the concept of nature's rejuvenation through the passage of time. The notion of "Nature as a Healer" encompasses the belief that both in literature and reality, nature possesses the ability to bestow physical, emotional, and spiritual healing upon individuals. This curative potential of nature frequently finds expression in literature, manifesting in diverse ways, including characters finding solace amidst natural landscapes, the revitalizing influence of natural environments, or the symbolism of nature signifying renewal and personal transformation. It underscores the therapeutic and rejuvenating attributes of nature, which can be a source of solace and inner tranquility for individuals during challenging times or when in search of inner peace.

The genre of animated films, specifically those with environmental themes, has gained prominence in Hollywood. During the period from 2005 to 2012, movies falling into this category garnered significant attention and received generally favorable reviews. In the movie *Moana*, there is a clear exploration of the themes of nature exploitation and restoration. The film illustrates how the exploitation of nature has had detrimental effects on both Moana's island and neighboring islands. Moana, in her role as a reconciler and leader, embodies ecocentric values and attitudes, emphasizing the importance of a harmonious relationship with nature. Together with Maui, she takes actions aimed at restoring the natural balance. Symbolically, the movie portrays nature exploitation through Te Fiti, who represents Mother Nature with her innate power to create and sustain life. Ultimately, their efforts succeed, symbolized by the revitalization of the mother island, signifying the restoration of the natural balance. This is evident as the once-dying islands and oceans spring back to life, demonstrating the positive impact of their actions on nature.

India is abundantly blessed with natural beauty, and the reverence for nature has been an integral part of life for countless generations. However, as times change, there has been a growing disconnect and disregard for nature. Conclusively, it can be asserted that through the utilization of spices, Tilo's journey parallels with nature, as she not only heals others but also herself. Throughout history, nature has consistently demonstrated its supremacy over humanity. It has frequently exhibited its might by exerting control over human affairs through natural disasters such as famine, drought, floods, and earthquakes. The lives of human beings and the forces of nature are intricately intertwined, making it impossible for people to separate themselves from its influence. Consequently, individuals have no alternative but to embrace both the blessings and challenges that nature bestows upon them. This relationship can be described as reciprocal, as nature, in turn, experiences the consequences of human actions. Our irresponsible behaviors have led to irreversible harm to the natural world. This interconnectedness is how the ecosystem functions, with all elements intertwined and impacting one another.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed as a period of natural healing due to reduced human intervention. The global lockdown, there appeared to be a respite for nature. Dolphins were spotted in the Hudson River, the notorious smog of Los Angeles cleared, and there were reports of wildlife reclaiming urban areas. "The pandemic has brought about significant challenges for humanity. However, it has also provided us with an opportunity to study the influence of human activities on the Earth, the environment, and climate change" stated Phil Yang, a geospatial scientist and professor of geographic information science at George Mason University.

Nature is important for survival. Neglecting to act for the improvement of the environment will reveal our negligence toward Earth's species, potentially resulting in their eventual extinction. Anthropocentrism cannot be immediately discarded but consumption and intervention on nature based on our essential survival needs can be adjusted. Making ethical choices concerning nature can be challenging, but opting for options that cause minimal harm to our surroundings is a responsible approach. Recognizing intrinsic value in trees, mountains, and birds is the initial stride towards creating an eco-centric world and a healthier planet.

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