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Of Roots and Alienation: Human-Nature Dualism in Hayao Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke
and Andy Serkis' Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle

Abstract

The research paper analyses Hayao Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke and Andy Serkis' Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle under the purview of Human-nature dualism. The introductory paragraphs offer a groundwork keeping in mind the said binaries; the concept that man and nature exists separately and in isolation. There is also an exploration of anthropocentrism; the belief that the non-human exists as an instrument for the human. This is followed by the analysis of the two narratives for which Val Plumwood's Environmental Ethics (2007) acts as a lens. Where Princess Mononoke offers a view of the annihilation of the respective man-

nature environments followed by a hope of rehabilitation of the two spaces in integration, Mowgli presents a deeply philosophical question about belongingness, the subsequent disillusionment and climatic acceptance of Nature in Man and Man in Nature.

Keywords: human-nature dualism, anthropocentrism, ecophilosophy, human-nature hyper-separation, ecocriticism

Mitti ki hai jo khushboo, tu kaise bhulaega,

Tu chahe kahin jaaye, tu laut ke aaega

(The fragrance of the sand, how will you forget it

No matter where you go, you will come back) -Javed Akhtar, Yeh jo des hai tera (song), Swades (2004)

The natural surrounding for a civilized man is not the untamed land but the human-built environment. Although our roots lie in the same soil as every living being that thrives on this planet, we can't help but feel alienated. Man feels like an out of tune instrument; he runs his rat race but put him amidst the green of trees and near the blues of the oceans and he attains mindfulness, a Blue state of mind, a renewed connection with the calls of "nature". One hears the sound of their footsteps resonating with the gentle humming of the forest, the babble of the river, and at once one is touched by a sense of belongingness. There is a (re)discovery of affinity and kinship to a world one was always a part of.

Our ancestors floundered and learned to thrive amidst the wild raging forces of the non-human environment. They gathered food and hunted with whatever imperfect tools they managed to make for themselves. The forest cover reduced and agriculture flourished. The taming of elements began as Man interacted with the non-human environment more powerfully in the act of becoming civilized.

The age of Enlightenment became a harbinger of scientific ideas. Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*, suggested with full conviction that with method and technology, humans can become the possessors of Nature and that they no longer have to remain enslaved by it (pt. 6). The idea of the once harmonious and balanced interaction of all living things with the non-living became distorted as Man basked in the glory of being the highest in the hierarchy of this whole system. The dualism of Man and Nature was hence created.

The U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964 defined the wild as the following: "A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Today, in this world of labels and distinctions we have created yet another illusion. The non-human environment: "nature", "wilderness" is seen as an entity apart from humans. Interaction with the natural world has become an act of recreation. There exist special areas in the cityscape to "experience" the realms of "nature". All of this leads to the growing feeling in us that maybe Human is an alien to the Environment, after all. Or rather, the non-human beings and spaces are at the service of Man. Whatever is conquered by Man is his and what lies beyond, into the unknown, untouched by human hands, but is at his behest nonetheless, is what is considered Nature. The man-nature dualism hence becomes the root cause of all the anthropocentrism. According to M.H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham:

It is claimed that the reigning religions and philosophies of Western civilization are deeply anthropocentric; that is, they are oriented to the interests of human beings, who are viewed as opposed to and superior to nature, and as free to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purposes [...] Prominent in ecocriticism is a critique of binaries such as man/nature or culture/nature, viewed as manually exclusive oppositions. It is pointed out,

instead, that these entities are interconnected and also mutually constitutive. [...] Or as Gerald Manly Hopkins wrote...in "Inversnaid":

What would the world be, once bereft

Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,

O let them be left, wildness and wet;

Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet. (p. 99-100)

The void between Nature and man also persists because of his ambiguous origins. We fail to realize that everything around us, within and beyond, germinated from the same seed many years ago. It is not a surprise that the same "Enlightened" man turned into a Romantic. The conquest of nature turned into the humble ideology of accepting nature "as a teacher" (Wordsworth). But the divide persisted and still remains. Val Plumwood in her essay *Environmental Ethics* is of the view that human beings think of themselves as part of a higher order, cogent and with an individual mind, and consciousness while non-human spaces or nature is seen as a non-conscious, non-communicative, physical sphere that exists to aid higher human sphere which justifies commodification and exploitation (p.251). She further says,

Anthropocentric culture thus leads to a view of the human as outside of and apart from a plastic, passive, "dead" nature which is conceived in reductionist and mechanical terms as completely lacking in qualities such as mind and agency that are seen as exclusive to the humans. (p.257)

In these advanced times, humans are seen as hardworking beings putting together an artificial reality. But one can't help but think that maybe we too are becoming a cancerous growth on the face of this planet. The change in the physical and chemical composition of our surrounding acts as a boomerang. The human race may be the most intelligent we know of but due to our complex organization, even a small change in the spheres affects us adversely.

The ambiguity in the relationship of man with nature only adds fuel to the global problem we face today. In this research paper, I analyze this duality of Human-Nature in Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* (2000) and a 2018 adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* by Andy Serkis, entitled *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle*.

Studio Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke* is a tale set in Muromachi, Japan, of Prince Ashitaka, the last of the Emishi tribe; seeking a cure for the curse he contracts on unwillingly killing a demon to protect his village. The demon is, in fact, a Boar God who was consumed by the demons of fury and hatred after his slaughter with an 'iron ball' like bullet. Ashitaka must trace the origins of this iron ball in the far west of Japan, in hopes of finding a way to lift his curse. Throughout his journey, we get glimpses of how deeply in resonance with the environment he is. He encounters massacres, poverty, humans with ill-intent and the ways of the world. He fortuitously ends up at Iron Town whose head is Lady Eboshi. The men of Iron Town travel back and forth for supplies while the women of the town, who share their past as brothel-workers, are employed by Eboshi to work in the iron factories. Eboshi has also employed lepers to produce firearms and regularly takes care of their needs. However, her intent is to eradicate the forest, in which various spirits and Gods live, for the mining of iron sand. To meet this end, it was she who killed the Boar God.

On the other hand, Ashitaka also encounters a girl with a wolf clan who is called *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke* is the Japanese word for Spirits or Monster) by the people of Iron Town. She is called San by Moro, the Wolf goddess who raises her after she (San) is abandoned in the forest by her parents. In the forest, besides the wolf clan is The Forest Spirit: a deer with a human face during the day and a Nightwalker by night. This spirit is the soul of the forest. Not only does it have the power to grant life but also to take it away. It grants a wounded Ashitaka his life by healing him while it euthanizes a wounded Moro (the

Wolf goddess) and Okkoto (the old Boar God). The Forest Spirit hence does not discriminate between the life of a human or non-human.

It is this Forest Spirit's head that Lady Eboshi and Jigo (a Buddhist Monk) are after to satiate the desire of immortality of the Emperor of Japan. While Jigo wants monetary treasure, Eboshi will have in her hands an unguarded forest fit for her use the way she wishes. The Deer God's head is decapitated, as it is transforming into the Nightwalker, bleeding out ooze that kills everything it touches. It is imperative to note that Ashitaka had pleaded Eboshi to not commit the deed as it will kill the forest and he had also tried to reason with San, requesting her to be merciful towards humans. All is resolved as Ashitaka and San offer the Forest Spirit its head back. As the sun rises, the Spirit dies but washes over and heals everything and everyone. Ashitaka's curse is lifted. He decides to stay with humans to build a better town with Eboshi and promises to visit San and the wolves in the forest.

The entire tale presents rigid binaries and then breaks them. The anthropocentrism in the movie flowers and fades. The determined Lady Eboshi is the token of humankind: inventive, with the fervour to alleviate the status of the human race, even if it means moulding the non-human environment in alliance with one's own wants. Jigo, the Buddhist monk is a token of the greedy wants of the human race. There is no end to how much one can fill their bellies with delicacies; the hunger of luxuries is such. The insatiable and the inventive nature of human furrows deeper the divide between man and his environment even further. Plumwood further says,

The instrumental worldview sees nothing over and above resources and casts the universe into reductive categories of use, implicitly reducing the other to little more than products or items for consumption (p. 253)

Although Eboshi is kind and concerned for the marginalized of the society, she, in turn, marginalizes the non-human to uplift the known marginalized of her society. Jigo, on the

other hand, is an androcentric, anthropocentric man who only works towards the fulfilment of personal gains. He possesses knowledge of nature, myths, spirits, and he willfully brings everyone and everything to a state of loss in order to achieve his gains. His response when he is questioned by Ashitaka of his agenda is: “Everyone wants everything that is the way the world works” (Princess Mononoke)

Miyazaki, hence, presents two points of view of the invasive human race in a single tale. Lady Eboshi is inherently a good human and in the end, understands her power and the responsibility that comes with it of maintaining harmony with the non-human beings and environment. Jigo is the manifestation of the over-consumptive egocentric nature of man. But there is a third human in the story that fiercely fights for the protection of her homeland. San, however, brought up with the wolves, lives a life of rebellion against human invasion. Although she claims to be a wolf, in her being her humanity shows; just like Eboshi works and fights to protect her turf and also guide it towards growth, San battles against the human forces to protect what she calls her Home. This idea can also be subverted in the sense that rebellion, the instinct of protection and guarding off intruders is not just limited to one species, it extends to species that are not exclusively human. The wolves, the boars, the apes suffer and unite to ward off the human enemy. This is the initial thought that can prevent the growing duality between Human and Non-Human: the idea that what is considered human extends beyond our realms and manifests in species unlike us.

Ashitaka is the sole conscious protagonist who crosses this boundary of human apartness. He sees “with eyes unclouded with hate” (Princess Mononoke) the need for a peaceful union between Man and Nature. It was the forces of men that drove his tribe to near extinction, it was the environment that gave the Emishi the opportunity to thrive and grow. Prince Ashitaka holds no grudges against the human race and embodies kindness towards all. His tribe lives in harmony, accepting what is offered from the environment and spirits, be it

unfortunate or otherwise. There is a sense that what resides in him is an extension of what is outside. When he encounters Eboshi and her weapons, his contracted corruption (which is a demon of hate and fury) tempts him to kill Eboshi, who like the Emperor is marginalizing the Other (nature, the Emishi tribe) to empower the Self.

The decision of Ashitaka to stay with civilization after the climax is important. Nature and Man attain equality. Where Eboshi and her people lose their home Iron Town, the beings of the forest lose their guardian, The Forest Spirit. Ashitaka's choice to stay with the people to build a civilization in synchronization with nature, while also visiting San in the forest every now and then, speaks volumes of the realization that the human species has willfully ignored- The Home of a Man is not distinct from Nature, we all thrive ultimately under the same blue sky. Ashitaka's maturity also finds a quintessence in Mowgli in *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle*.

Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle (2018) or *Mowgli* by Andy Serkis is an adaptation, of Kipling's *All the Mowgli Stories*. It is an adaptation that stays faithful to the dark tonality of the latter, making it more than mere Children's Fiction. It is a tale of Mowgli, a man-cub that is raised by the wolves of the Jungle (just like San from *Princess Mononoke*). The child Mowgli grows up with the feeling that although different, his identity rests as a wolf in the Jungle amongst the Wolf Clan, with a stern teacher like Baloo and a concerned "brother", Bagheera. Shere Khan, the primary antagonist of the story, is a limping tiger who killed Mowgli's parents. Because the man-cub is adopted and protected by the Jungle, Shere Khan grows furious on being devoid of his kill, promising Akela and his Wolf Clan that he will return the day he (Akela) misses his prey. The unfortunate day comes and Shere Khan threatens to snatch the hunting territory of the wolves, inciting a ritual amidst the wolves for a new leader when Mowgli resorts to bringing a lighted branch from the village to scare the enemies away from his family. He is, nevertheless, exiled for using the tools of man.

Mowgli trapped in a cage in a human village acts like an animal and feels extremely alienated although he recognizes the similarity between his self and the villagers. Bagheera visits and recounts his story of how he was once dominated and abused for entertainment by humans in a similar cage that the man-cub finds himself in and Mowgli takes his advice of surrender. Mowgli finds companionship in the Hunter. He is bathed, combed, his hair tied and his feet clad with jootis. Mowgli, again, is showered with the sense of belongingness as he immerses himself in the festivities and glee of humans. But it is short-lived as he finds the cruel but proud mementoes of the Hunter's hunts. Mowgli vows to kill Shere Khan and end the reign of terror from the Jungle as he realizes that he is neither man nor wolf. The climax scene is a battle between Khan and Mowgli, as an old elephant takes his revenge from the Hunter by killing him. Shere Khan dies and "with the hunter and tiger now gone, the future shimmered from darkness into light." (Mowgli) A martyred Akela hands the torch of leadership to Mowgli who, the voice of Kaa observes: "Man and Wolf, both and neither, had given the jungle a voice and as long as he stood watch, it would call a lasting peace." (Mowgli)

Mowgli has always been a significant, memorable character for the profundity of the dilemma that he embodies. It is also because of the absolute calm with which he nonchalantly accepts his ambiguous identity. And the reason why Mowgli's universe is so great is that the duality of human-nature ceases to exist, even if it is in fiction. Human is just another animal in the jungle. Although the village and the forest have its own peculiarities, Mowgli by being a part of both the worlds illustrates that the two opposite worlds are not so antonymous after all. In the words of Plumwood,

Human hyper-separation from nature establishes a discontinuity based on denying both the human-like aspects of nature and the nature like aspects of human (p. 261-62)

Mowgli breaks such hyper-separation, for instance: it is not just the killing of the tiger that brings about a wave of peace but also the murder of the ruthless hunter. The man-nature polarity dissolves and paves way to a more natural binary, that of good and evil. The Jungle is not a savage chaotic lawless wildland; it has laws that bind even the wild. The clans and the packs have rituals and rules they bow to. The movie depicts how killing of another beast for revenge is against the laws of the Jungle. It is also a ritual to look your prey in the eye as it dies so that the soul does not depart alone. The Wild respects the sentiment of the man-village for their sacred cows and makes it a rule to not hunt it down. The Jungle and the human civilization hence rest on either side of a balancing scale waiting for a Mowgli or a wise Bagheera to conjoin the two together. Although the tale is anthropomorphized, it also delivers how societies inherently, regardless of it being human or non-human, are similar and how primary instincts and needs binds us all.

There is an interesting set of analogies and contrast between Mowgli and Princess Mononoke. Mowgli and San are both brought up by wolf surrogates. But while San grows up with a deep-seated hatred for the race that abandoned her, Mowgli undergoes an evolution. Although Mowgli's story of origin is analogous to San's, in his being he resembles Ashitaka. While Miyazaki vests different polarities in separate characters, Mowgli has an amalgamation of all binaries seemingly flowing into one another in all its characters lending a sense of equality in all beings human or non-human. While Princess Mononoke comes closest to reality in the sense that no character is either good or bad, Mowgli has characters that are cast in the moulds of apparent goodness or evil.

Kaa and The Forest Spirit are important characters that offer great insight on how Man perceives nature in its most pure revered form. While Kaa is a timeless Janus like being -- peeping both into the future and the past, The Forest Spirit is a mysterious other-worldly creature that is both human and non human at the same time. These characters instill

astonishment and reverence because of their mystical qualities. While they serve as links and are perpetrators of peace between nature and man, both the worlds inherently fear them in their own way – the non-human bows in servitude and the human reflexively tries to conquer what he can't understand.

Both the films, however, hold the two loose threads of the two shores- Human and Nature- and tie them together. They demonstrate why Wildness must not be seen as an idea that exists outside of the realm of humans but as a significant part of it. It is we who took the Forest Spirit's head, it is our prerogative to give it back with due respect because the lawns ahead of our houses and the untouched forests are a part of a single Home.

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