

Ecocriticism: A New Perspective of Looking at the Relation Between Human and Nature Along with Collective Human Responsibilities

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

Looking at the present world, it becomes very clear that climate change is one of the most widely debated issues. With the rise of the planet's temperature causing the melting of ice caps, disasters of the natural world, and degradation of the environment, climate change has become a crisis for humans in the present world. Humans are concerned about what should be the proper human approach to nature, whether or not the current approach is responsible for the climate crisis, and lastly, how humans could deal with the anxiety about the uncertain future of the climate where every human attempt to solve the climate crisis can be a failure.

This study tries to address some of the aspects of climate change and the existential crisis humans are facing about those aspects. The core statement of the study is that the proper human approach to nature has to be non-dualist. It is the dualist approach of considering nature as an object that is creating an existential crisis for humans that their own approach to nature might turn against them by the revenge of nature. Lastly, humans should get away from any false hope as a solution and accept that, in the face of an uncertain future humans have no particular solution to the climate crisis. Only then humans could disrupt the current approach and explore every other approach to encounter the uncertain future of the climate. Both primary and secondary research methods have been followed in the study. The process of analysis of the study is qualitative using descriptive information. The study uses the theories of Bruno Latour, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Slavoj Zizek, to add a new perspective about the human approach to the climate along with the collective responsibilities.

Keywords: Climate change, approach, crisis, uncertainty, etc.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the martyrs of the 'July Mass-uprising' in 2024

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Table of Contents

Declaration	2
Approval.....	3
Abstract	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgement.....	6
Table of Contents	7
Chapter 1: From Climate Change to Climate Crisis	8
Introduction.....	8
1.1: Rationale	11
1.2: Methodology	12
Chapter 2: The evolution of ecocriticism as an academic discipline	15
2.1: The Romantic writers and their anxiety about the Industrial Revolution.....	16
2.2: The American nature writings following the limitations of Romanticism	18
2.3: The emergence of the Political ecology relating politics with nature.....	21
Chapter 3: The narratives of different cultures concerning human relation to nature throughout history	24
3.1: A brief history of dualist narratives about the human-nature relationship	25
3.2: How dualist philosophy becomes destructive to nature when converted into dualist approach	26
3.3: The negative implication of dualism with the rise of modernism	27
3.4: The rise of the Cornucopians and the environmentalists into the eco-critical discourses	27
3.5: The existential crisis of the twentieth century brought about by the dualist approach to nature	28
3.6: The non-dualist narratives along with approaches to nature throughout history	29
3.7: Cartesian dualism being challenged from within the West during modernist period.....	33
Chapter 4: The notion of Political ecology in the writings of Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty.....	36
4.1: Bruno Latour’s ‘Gaia Hypothesis’	36
4.2: Dipesh Chakrabarty on anthropogenic collapse and postcolonial ecocriticism	39
4.3: The reflection of Bruno Latour’s ‘Gaia hypothesis’ and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s postcolonial ecocriticism in popular culture	43
Chapter 5: A Zizekian analysis of the collective responsibilities for the climate crisis.....	46
Chapter 6: A new perspective of looking at the relationship between human and nature along with collective human responsibilities	55
6.1: The Proper human approach to nature is non-dualist.....	55
6.2: The existential crisis of humans being the victim of their own deeds.....	56
6.3: Relating existential crisis of uncertain future with collective human responsibilities.....	57
Chapter 7: Conclusion	59
Works Cited.....	61

Chapter 1: From Climate Change to Climate Crisis

Introduction

Since the beginning of human evolution, humans have never been able to survive without interacting with nature. With those interactions, different narratives about the relationship of humans with nature have emerged. These narratives have been the determining factors of how people have approached nature in different parts of the world since ancient times. These narratives have determined whether humans consider nature as an object separated from themselves or consider themselves as part of nature. Questions might arise on how different civilizations and their narratives on human-nature relationships are relevant with the modern world when human beings are faced with climate crises and their potential effects on not only any particular civilization but the human species in general. This might sound pretentious but the answer to that question lies within the question itself. Because the relationship between humans and their natural world has determined the way nature has been treated throughout history and it is the evolution of those interactions between human and nature which have become the reason for the emergence of climate crisis in the present world.

The increasing emission Carbon, Nitroxide, and Methane into the environment that has been the reason for the continuous increase of planet temperature for the last two centuries like never before, could easily be analyzed through the dualist lens with which modernist thinkers have treated nature. This objectification of nature has led to the rise of the Industrial Revolution and eventually, the situation has come to a state where the level of the sea has risen up to 15 to 20 centimeters from 1901 to 2018. This makes the point obvious that the evolution from climate change to climate

crisis, which has been a serious issue for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is largely a human-induced phenomenon (Klein 2015). This could also be claimed that just like the previous narratives have shaped humans' relation to nature in ancient times, the responsibilities of humans to deal with climate crisis are also connected to the fact on how humans relate to their surroundings in modern times.

More importantly, the existential crisis that humans are facing to deal with the threat of climate change and the possible extinction of human beings as a consequence is undeniable. The crisis comes from the fact that it is the choice of humans about human-nature relationships that has led to the alarming state of the climate within the last two centuries and it is the same choice that could be the reason for a climate catastrophe making humans a victim of their own deeds. Another factor that also plays a role in this crisis is the uncertainty about the implications of human choice. The crisis is about the uncertainty of the future, in the face of which every choice of humans has the potentiality to be failed.

The climate crisis and human existence within that have been reflected in popular culture through books, movies, paintings, and various other art forms. In ecocriticism, different artworks are analyzed to understand how differing notions of climate change affect the imagination of the people in the modern world. 'Eco' and 'Critic' both have their root in the Greek 'Oikos' and 'Kritis', which mean the judge of a house. In other words, a process of determining how the balance of the world should be kept. Therefore, according to William Howarth, an eco-critic is someone who analyzes the narratives about the relationship between nature and culture. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glotfelty 1996). Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism in the same way describing

ecocriticism as the relationship between literature and environment which is conducted with the commitment to the practical implications of the ecocritical thoughts (Buell 1996).

Considering the various definitions of ecocriticism, it becomes clear that one of the central discussions of ecocriticism is the human relation to nature. But, for that, nature has to be defined in the first place. Ecocriticism defines nature as a harmony that encompasses all the self-sustained individual living organisms that are part of the ecosystem of the planet. In this case, even bacteria, which cannot live individually but survive through dueling with other living organisms are considered part of nature because they eventually connect with the ecosystem (Asenath 2021). This might be a definition from the scientific perspective but in the discourse of ecocriticism, all the human-nature relations throughout history are also considered while debating about definitions of nature. That is why, when Plato defines nature as inferior to the formal realms, Descartes defines nature as an object to be controlled by human subjects and Eastern philosophy defines nature as an all-encompassing divine harmony including humans as part of it, all these narratives are discussed in eco-criticism while defining nature (Lenoble 1969). Karl Popper asserts that does not matter how much humans know about nature there are always new observations to challenge the previous form of knowledge. Humans can not define nature which is infinite and indefinite in the first place (Popper 1988). Therefore, as Lawrence Buell points out, nature is not just physical space but a phenomenon that is socially, culturally, and ideologically constructed (Buell 1996). Therefore, it is the narratives about nature and the implications of those narratives on the harmony of nature and human lives that are the prime concerns of ecocriticism.

In this paper, there is a brief overview of the previous thoughts on human-nature relationships in different parts of the world throughout history and how those thoughts have been reflected in the relevant literature. The situation of the present world is then depicted with the description of

different approaches to ecology. Various literary and cultural works are analyzed which reflect those different approaches to ecology. Lastly, the existential condition of humans in the face of a potential climate change catastrophe is explained in connection to relevant literature to reach a conclusion about the collective human responsibilities to deal with climate change in modern times.

1.1: Rationale

Going through the previous literature, it becomes very clear that there have been many works on the different approaches to the issue of climate crisis. Most of the works are based on certain literary and cultural works that are related to any certain approach to the environment. In the case of an existential crisis, a recurring feature that has been observed in most of the previous works is the emphasis on the potential threats of a climate catastrophe and the fear of human extinction which is undoubtedly an important aspect. However, two factors are missing in most of the previous papers. Firstly, the proper approach humans should have to nature with the implications of that approach. Secondly, the existential crisis of humans encountering both the fact that they are themselves responsible for the climate crisis where they could be the potential victim of their own deeds, and the reality that there is an uncertain future regarding the climate crisis where every step taken for solving the crisis could potentially be failed. There have been works addressing the individual responsibilities of humans but the part concerning the collective responsibility of mankind is still unaddressed. It is this addressing the issue of human anxiety about human-nature relationship and the collective responsibility of mankind to deal with the unpredictable future which makes this study significant. Another worth mentioning factor is that this study reaches into a certain position of the human-nature relation only after discussing the different concepts and relevant literature from both the East and West. Therefore, the study has tried not to be biased

towards the thinking tradition of any particular region; rather, the study tries to address the aspects of ecology from a global perspective.

1.2: Methodology

The methodology for analysis followed in this paper is qualitative. This means that the study uses descriptive information for the study. The paper uses both primary and secondary research methods for collecting information. The paper uses primary data about the literary tradition of Bengal from the medieval period to the nineteenth century. To do that, two interviews have been conducted with people who are well aware of Vaishnava literature in medieval Bengal and the contribution of Fakir Lalon in nineteenth-century Bengali literature about the philosophy of ecology. The first interviewee is Tanim Nowshad. He is a researcher at the University of Dhaka. He has written several books on the Bhakti tradition of Bengal for his interest in the philosophy of religion in the first place. Knowing the metaphysical assumption about the relation between nature and human being in the literary tradition of Bengal it has become necessary to take his interview. The second interviewee is Farhad Mazhar who is an activist working on ecology for the past four decades and well aware of the traditions of the Fakirs of Bengal and their ideas of ecology. He has been connected to the movement called Naya Krishi i.e., biodiversity-based agriculture since the late 1980s. As part of the secondary research method, the paper uses books, journals, reports, articles, movies and relevant websites as the sources of information. The study uses Bruno Latour's theory of 'Gaia Hypothesis' and Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of postcolonial ecocriticism. With a view to getting a new perspective on how to deal with the human existential uncertainty of an unknowable future connected to the ecological crisis, the paper follows the theory of 'change' given by Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek on the issue of climate change. The entire analysis of the paper is not based on any particular literary or cultural text. The paper tries to go through all

the previous theories in different traditions of the world about ecology and add a new perspective on the issue of collective human responsibility to face the climate crisis. This is why it is not possible to base multiple ideas on any single literary text. However, the paper relates its ideas with various literary and cultural texts from various traditions to describe how these ideas are separately depicted in many different traditions.

This paper asks three questions about the discourses of ecocriticism. What is the approach humans should have to nature to arrive at a solution to tackle the climate crisis? What are the existential crises humans are facing about climate change? What are the collective human responsibilities humans have to face the uncertainty related to the climate crisis? These three questions lead to the three objectives of the study. The first objective is to identify the proper approach to nature humans should have to solve the climate crisis. Secondly, the objective of this paper is to analyze the existential crisis of humans both in connection to the human-nature relationship and the fear of an uncertain future regarding climate change. Lastly, the objective of this paper is to relate the existential crisis of an unknowable future with collective human responsibilities.

The core claim of this paper is that the approach to nature by humans should be non-dualistic and the approach to nature has to connect the climate crisis with the politics relevant to it. Otherwise, humans will objectify nature like they have done before and the existential crisis of humans feeling themselves as the victims of their own works will continue. Humans have always observed nature to derive a theory only for that theory to be challenged later with new observations; therefore, humans are incapable of defining nature. This means that it is impossible for human beings to know certainly whether any particular approach is going to provide a solution to the issue of the climate crisis. It is the voluntary embracing of the uncertainty about the future and acting collectively for a solution to the climate crisis that is the collective responsibility of human beings

in the present world to face the uncertainty of climate change without relying on any particular private corporation or state.

As part of the limitation of the study, there are many websites and papers concerning the ecological crisis and its connection to literature that are not accessible to the masses for which the study has not been able to include that information in the analysis. For the purpose of collecting information for the study, no breach of privacy of any people or organization has occurred.

Chapter 2: The evolution of ecocriticism as an academic discipline

The term 'ecocriticism' was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his famous work *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* where he defines 'Ecocriticism' as the implication of ecology and ecological principles in the study of literature because of ecology having the most important relevance in the understanding of the past, present and future of the world we live in (Rueckert 1978).

Because the term 'ecocriticism' was coined in 1978, this could be said that 'ecocriticism' has emerged as an academic discipline in the 1970s. From that view, ecocriticism is very much of a product of western academia (Glotfelty 1996). However, the ecocritical thoughts could have not emerged without the relevant literatures which have been written throughout history. That is why, overlooking the literary texts only from the western tradition, texts relevant to ecocriticism date back to at least the time of Romanticism. Romantic poems of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge worked as a massive influence behind American nature writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Edward Abbey (Clark 2011). Because, both of these movements have rejected any sort of separation between mind and body, or rationality and emotion, and worked as a response against the industrial revolution that has destroyed the pastoral lives for the sake of mechanical production. Also, both of the movements have this limitation that these movements have failed to address the urban political reality as a consequence of capitalistic growth in the West from the eighteenth century onwards.

2.1: The Romantic writers and their anxiety about the Industrial Revolution

The most important philosopher from the seventeenth century who has been the key inspiration behind the writings and poems of Romanticism is Dutch philosopher Baruch De Spinoza. In his book *Ethics* published in 1677, Spinoza has come up with a pantheistic notion of god, where god dwells within nature not outside. According to Spinoza, there is a cosmological structure within nature and the ethical way to live for humans is to live by nature (Spinoza 1905). This is the same philosophy that permeates into the writings of the romantic thinkers where nature is considered sacred, the balance of which has been disrupted by the imposition of rationality by the modernist notion of mind-body dualism. The dualism that has been promoted by philosopher René Descartes (Descartes 1998). Until the 1880s, the term 'Romantic' has not been used to indicate a certain group of writers from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. This is why, it is not easy to find the first romantic writing. Discussion on Romanticism could be started even in 1770 when a young poet named Thomas Chatterton has been gaining popularity for his writings. The poet eventually commits suicide due to the lack of money and continuous pressure from his family to get a job (Clark 2011). The incident based on which Johann Wolfgang von Goethe has produced his work *The Sorrows of Young Werther* depicts the death of innocent love in the face of the rational requirement of society with the suicide of Young Werther (Goethe 2011). Both the real incident and fiction depict a romantic cry for the natural expression of human beings rather than the controlling nature of modernity where rationality is separated from emotions.

In the eighteenth century, with the rise of industrialization going along with the rise of modernity, nature has been treated as an object and as a means for the generation of wealth. Nature has been continuously being dissected by scientific minds to explore the hidden laws of nature. From that view, the rise of the romantics is a response to this objectification of nature. The objective of the

romantic righters could be explained by this quote of Rousseau, 'We should return either as God's good creation or, more controversially, as the physical aspect of the Godhead', eventually suggesting the return back to nature (Rousseau 2007).

Analyzing this quote from Rousseau, this is apparent that he also has taken a non-dualist approach to nature while using the word 'Godhead', which is a mystical concept of Meister Echart indicating God's inseparability from nature. Because, even at the early stage of industrialization, the romantic thinkers understood that the dualist approach to nature would take the climate in such a state where humans might be the victims of their desire to control nature. That existential crisis is reflected in the novel *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley which has been highly influenced by Romanticism, where scientist Victor Frankenstein's creation turns against himself because he wants to discover and control the secret mystery of life. Published in 1818, the book has almost foreseen the ultimate fate of the dualist approach to nature by the Industrial Revolution (Shelley 2003).

The same sense of rejection and at the same time, fear while encountering the Industrial Revolution has been present in William Wordsworth's famous work *Lines Written in Early Spring* in 1798. Wordsworth writes in his fifth stanza, 'The birds around me hopped and played, Their thoughts I couldn't measure.' But the least motion which they made, seemed a thrill of pleasure'. With that stanza, Wordsworth describes the agency of non-human beings and that the birds are taking pleasure in their own existence. Wordsworth is expressing his deep affection for his non-dualist view of nature but at the same time his helplessness to protect nature. This becomes apparent when Wordsworth further writes, 'The budding twigs spread out their fan, To catch the breezy air; And I must think; do all I can, That there was pleasure in there.' (Wordsworth, Coleridge 2007). With

this stanza, Wordsworth expresses that all that is left for him is to think about nature through his poems because he could not do anything else to stop the destruction of nature.

The romantic thinkers have become so desperate to challenge the modern dualist view of nature that they have even brought reforms to the anthropocentric view of Christianity. German theologian Friedreich Schleiermacher has brought a mystical view of Christianity into his reformed theology. In his book *On Religion* published in 1799, Schleiermacher writes that the universe exists as an uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to every individual thing in every moment. Thus, when every human and non-human object is considered as part of a whole and recognized as a representation of the infinite then that is called religion (Schleiermacher 1996). Very few lines could explain this philosophy more than this stanza from William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth, Coleridge 2007) mentioned below:

And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit, that impels All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

2.2: The American nature writings following the limitations of Romanticism

The American nature writers could be considered some of the early eco-critics. To understand American nature writings, there has to be a brief description of another spiritual movement that has been the building block behind the nature writers which is the American transcendentalist movement. Transcendentalism is a spiritual, philosophical, and literary movement that has developed in the 1820s and 30s in New England United States. The core belief of transcendentalism is that there is inherent goodness not only inside people but also inside nature. Transcendentalists believe that people are self-reliant only when they connect with their everyday

lives which means their surroundings. For this reason, transcendentalists have considered the interconnectivity of everything as the truly rational viewpoint (Gerrard 2014). In his book, *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson asserts that in the woods, humans return to reason and faith. He also elaborates that when he stands on a bare field and his hair is touched by the wind and vanishes into the infinite, all his ego disappears. He feels that the forces of the universe are passing through him and that he is part of God (Emerson 2003).

Transcendentalism has widely influenced nature writers because of both of their metaphysical presumptions that the divine is within nature not outside. This is why some of the American transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson have also been nature writers (Gerrard 2014). Another important name of American nature writings is philosopher Henry David Thoreau. Similar to Emerson, he has also been very much influenced by Indian philosophy. In his book, *Walden* in 1854, Thoreau writes that in the morning he bathes his rationality in the philosophy of *the Bhagavad Gita*, whose sublimity of conception is so deep that in comparison, the modern western philosophy and literature seem shallow (Thoreau 2004). The reason for American nature writers' fascination with Eastern philosophy is connected to their rejection of the anthropocentric approach of looking at nature by the modernist tradition. That is why, like their romantic predecessors, nature writers have also followed non-dualist views and eventually, glorified nature in a way that has led to a denial of the existing political reality of the capitalist system.

The fact that differentiates nature writings from the romantic movement is bringing a wide array of scientific thinkers into the nature writing movement. Because of the scientific works, there could be different interpretations of the various aspects of nature. This has made the intellectual ground of the nature writers strong for taking a non-dualist position about nature, rejecting human exceptionalism and rejecting objectification of nature. The peak time of scientific nature writings

has been the mid-nineteenth century when Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace came up with the theory of evolution through natural selection. The theory of evolution claims that human beings are a product of a gradual process of all the different species trying to adapt to natural selection making humans part of the natural world instead of being independent of the cycle of nature (Lyon 2001).

Therefore, the distinct feature of the romantic writers was that along with taking a non-dualist position about nature, they brought the existential crisis of humans being their victims into their writings. In the case of nature writers, the inclusion of scientific writing along with the rejection of Cartesian dualism has made them distinct. The common lacking of both of these movements is the failure to address the political changes in society brought about by capitalism which has been promoting industrialization and destruction of nature.

This is why, according to eco-critic Greg Garrard, both of the movements have rejected the reality of urbanization. These early or first-wave eco-critics have failed to address the economic and social changes connected to the objectification of nature. This is why, when people have witnessed the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century the political reality that is connected to the destruction of nature becomes apparent to the people. This has led to the decline of nature writing in the first half of the twentieth century. For example, rural novels like Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort* published in 1932 have not been taken seriously by the readers because of failing to address the reality of the world after the great depression and the Second World War. This has started to become clear to the masses that humans' deeds are responsible for the destruction of nature until the political system is questioned. That is the exact factor that has given birth to the second wave of ecocriticism (Garrard 2014).

2.3: The emergence of the Political ecology relating politics with nature

After the Second World War, there has been a rise in the second phase of nature writing which includes the writings of Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, M. Krishnan Leo Marx, and many others. The popularity of the second phase of nature writing has been because of the description of human-induced works that have become the reason for the climate crisis. Aldo Leopold, in his famous work, *A Sand Country Almanac* published in 1949 defines his land ethic by saying when a work becomes destructive to the symbiosis of the environment then that is wrong. Edward Abbey in his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* published in 1975 creates a new term called ‘ecotage’ meaning the sabotage of any work that may be damaging to the environment (Cole 2007). The book which has stood out from all these notable works is the 1962 book on environmental pollution named *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carlson. Rachel attacks the chemical industries for polluting the farmlands and the rivers for the sake of profit in a market economy (Carlson 2002). The book has singlehandedly inspired an environmental movement in the 1960s that has led to the foundation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1970. The key theme of nature writing after the Second World War is that there has been more emphasis on the political aspect that has become the reason behind the climate crisis (Paul 2013). That is why Cheryl Glotfelty in her book, *The Ecocriticism Reader* divides all the writings before the 1960s as the first wave of ecocriticism and the writings after the 1960s as part of the second wave of ecocriticism (Glotfelty 1996).

The second wave has given more focus to environmental justice than just the glorification of the pastoral past like the first wave. After the Second World War, the promises of the enlightenment about knowing the ultimate truth about the universe and also about human morality have started to seem meaningless to the masses. The old modernist binaries about culture over nature, rationality over emotion, transcendence over eminence, and metaphysics over multiplicities have

fallen apart. Similarly, the old division between theories and practical implications has been rejected. Arnest Naees has come up with the conception of 'deep ecology' because of considering the modernist view of nature as shallow ecology. The idea of 'deep ecology' holds an interconnected view of nature. Therefore, from a non-dualist perspective, Naees strictly rejects the modernist separation between subject and object. There have also emerged thinkers like Lynn White who has considered the Christian view of human exceptionalism has become an epistemological grounding for the modernist mind-body dualism (Buell 2005). Cultural critic Raymond Williams could also not be forgotten for criticizing the American nature writers for rejecting the reality of urbanization and blindly romanticizing the pre-industrial America in his notable work *The Country and the City* published in 1975 (Williams 1975).

These writings after the 1960s have made this possible for the emergence of Political ecology connecting socio-political issues like race, culture, gender, religions, and economics with the discussion of the human relation to nature as Lawrence Buell has put it in his work, *Ecocriticism: Some emerging trends* in 2011. According to Buell, the feature that differentiates political ecologists from the previous thinkers is bringing the issue of environmental justice into the discourse of ecology which has increased the implication of eco-criticism in real life. Therefore, when Ecofeminism identifies the supremacy of rationality over nature as the signifier of patriarchy in western intellectual tradition that is part of Political ecology. Eco-marxism is also another aspect of Political ecology as Marxism relates the factor of class struggle with the issue of environmental destruction blaming the capitalist establishment for the climate crisis. But Political ecology goes beyond these metanarratives and incorporates other concepts that challenge the whole modernist way of looking at nature reaching beyond the binary thinking of feminism and the ideology of Marxism (Buell 2011). In the later part of Political ecology in the 1990s, there comes post-colonial

thinkers like Dipesh Chakrabarty who in his book, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thoughts and Historical Difference* has brought other ways of connecting to nature other than the western tradition (Chakrabarty 2007). Bruno Latour has explained in his book *Politics of Nature* published in 1999, how there could be changes in the existing political structure and how technology could be used to create a different relationship with nature other than the one created by the western tradition (Hiltner 2014).

Overviewing the development of ecocriticism as an academic discipline, it becomes very clear that from the romantic period to the period of the political ecologists, both the first and second wave of ecocriticism have maintained a very strong position against the objectification of nature. Specifically, the foreseeing of the future of mechanization of life by romantic writer Mary Shelly is worth mentioning as her story *Frankenstein* almost predicts the current existential crisis of humans being the sufferers of his approach to nature. But this is also to be mentioned: ecocriticism has started to have an impact on the popular mind only when the political discourses are connected to the concepts of ecocriticism during the second wave. Based on this fact, a further claim could be made that the factor that differentiates the non-dualist approach from philosophy is that the non-dualist approach to nature is always concerned with the practical implication of ecocritical concepts in the socio-political realm. Because to have a practical solution to the climate crisis the ecocritical discussion has to go hand in hand with the socio-political reality that is outside the academic discourse.

Chapter 3: The narratives of different cultures concerning human relation to nature throughout history

Looking back at the ecocritical ideas in the myths and religions of different civilizations throughout history one might get perplexed about finding any specific patterns in all those stories. But forming a pattern becomes easier when this question is asked about the role those stories have played in the case of those previous civilizations. The answer is that these concepts have determined the human relationship with nature in different parts of the world.

When observed more closely, there are two key patterns in the case of human relationship with nature in different civilizations. One is the dualist concept of nature where there is a difference between the human as a subject and nature as an object. The other one is the non-dualist view of nature where the division between subject and object is rejected. This is worth mentioning that in many cases any particular civilization could not be essentialized by any particular narratives about the nature-nurture relationship. In most cases, certain civilizations have multiple narratives containing both the dualist and non-dualist views of nature. Because there has always been relativity depending on how humans interpret and live their lives according to certain metaphysics (Brown 2003). With that premise, it could be established that how humans approach nature and whether that approach is being the cause of the destruction of nature is more important than whether any group of people of any particular region has dualistic metaphysics like following Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because the practical implication of any worldview of nature is more important than the metaphysics behind that.

3.1: A brief history of dualist narratives about the human-nature relationship

Observing the current world scenario, with the rise of globalization, there is hardly any country left where there is not any massive environmental pollution. This makes it hard to believe that the dualist narrative about nature and the violent implication of that to nature is very much a modernist phenomenon that has disseminated across the world through the forces of colonization (Brown 2003).

The earliest source of the dualist narrative is found in the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato. In his book, *Republic*, he describes two modes of reality consisting of the realm of the material world which is observed empirically, and the realm of forms which could not be observed and could be known only through rationality. Plato rejects the material reality and asserts that only the forms are real. Humans can achieve knowledge about the realm of forms when they control the emotional and physical drive with their pursuit of rationality (Plato 2011).

This dualism has also been present in the Judeo-Christian narrative where in Genesis 1:28, God says that man is made in God's image and God has let man have dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air (Garner 1956). The same dualism has continued into the tradition of Islam where there is a similar division between the creator and the creation. According to the Quran, Allah says in *Sura-AL-Araf* verse number 54, 'Surely your Lord is none other than Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days' (Pickthall 2023).

3.2: How dualist philosophy becomes destructive to nature when converted into dualist approach

There is an ample difference between dualist philosophy and approaches. Because, even if any certain outlook of nature could be dualist the implication might still avoid the objectification of nature. There could be different interpretations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which can reject the dualist approach to nature treating nature as a source of consumption. For example, there is another interpretation of Genesis 1:28, which uses the word stewardship instead of dominion because only God could have dominion over nature, not humans. There have also been Christian ideas that could be derived from the *Bible* as put in Leviticus where God says that only God can have ownership of the land and humans are just the occupiers of the land for a certain period (Garner 1956). In Jewish law, there have been many concepts that talk about the conservation of nature like protecting the fruit trees as mentioned in the *Bible*, the *Talmudic* law where making noise and smoking is prohibited, and many others (Gerstenfeld 2001). There is a very powerful concept in the Islamic tradition which is the idea of humans as the Khalifah of God on earth. In *Sura Al Baqarah* verse 30, this has been mentioned that while God told the angels that he is going to create his representative or 'Khalifah' on earth. In this verse, God does not mention Khalifah as anyone holding any political post but all the human beings who should act as a protector of the world representing God almighty (Milani 2023).

Analyzing these interpretations, this becomes apparent that it is the interpretation of any metaphysics that determines whether the approach to nature becomes dualist or non-dualist and whether nature might be subsumed to human will or not.

3.3: The negative implication of dualism with the rise of modernism

The fact that any particular approach to nature becomes destructive depending on how certain metaphysics are interpreted or philosophized is prevalent in the concept of mind-body dualism by René Descartes. The concept of 'soul' in Christianity has also been concerned with human emotion along with a mind that has been philosophized in a distorted way in his book, *Discourse on Method*. Descartes claims that everything can be challenged by skepticism by questioning whether the thing exists or not. The only reality that can never be questioned is the existence of the mind because someone cannot question the existence of anything if his mind does not exist. There goes his famous proclamation, 'I think, therefore, I am', with which he claims the supremacy of mind over nature (Descartes 1998). This claim has led to the modernist treatment of nature as an object for human consumption. With the help of James Watt, the steam engine gets introduced into the manufacturing system in 1794 that has led to the rapid growth of industrial production (Landes 1969).

3.4: The rise of the Cornucopians and the environmentalists into the eco-critical discourses

The environment has started getting polluted like never before by industrial waste with the rapid growth of industrialization. Jumping into the reality of the twentieth century, it becomes apparent that the modernist outlook on nature has given birth to the Cornucopian view of the environment where it is believed that capitalist development has a solution to the climate crisis. The Cornucopians claim that the diminishing of one natural resource initially increases prices for certain products but in the long run, with capitalist development, more alternative resources are discovered and then the price falls again in the market in comparison to the wages. Economist Julian Simon has boasted about the fact that he has won a bet with the ecologist Paul Ehrlich on

the fact that the scarcity of natural resources has not increased in the 1980s in a certain region as measured by the statistics of price during that period. The only problem is that one decade is not enough time to measure any scarcity of natural resources by any stretch of the imagination (Gerrard 2012).

The whole claim is based on the premise that replacing one resource with another will not create any natural imbalance or, even if it does, the technological development of capitalism is capable of controlling that. Another important point is that every time the Cornucopians speak of the environment they speak as if human well-being can be ensured ignoring the welfare of nature as a whole.

There is another form of dualist thinkers who call themselves ‘environmentalists’ who are concerned about the environment but not willing to change the social status quo by bringing a radical change. They promote technological solutions including recycling bottles or extracting carbon from the environment with the use of technology among many others. A new term for this form of capitalism could be ‘green consumerism’. These steps are not enough to hinder the dangerous consequence of rapid environmental destruction (Gerrard 2012).

3.5: The existential crisis of the twentieth century brought about by the dualist approach to nature

These controlling approaches to nature have brought this situation to the climate where, according to the European Union Climate Monitor Copernicus, the year 2023 is the warmest year so far and the climate has been 1.48 Celsius warmer than the nineteenth century (Nicolas 2023). The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that people living in Australia, South Asia, Africa, North America, and Europe are at severe health risk due to the rising temperature of the climate. So, it becomes clear that the confidence of the Cornucopians that

technology will be the savior in the face of climate crisis is baseless (Ackerly 2022). This existential crisis is still not affecting the owners of the capitalist enterprises with this distorted mindset that even if there is a climate catastrophe it might affect countries of the southern regions of the planet like Bangladesh and not the West. But when there is this estimation by the US Global Change Program Research that the temperature of this planet might rise from 2 degrees Celsius to 5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century then even that selfish argument would not hold water (Arnell 2014).

3.6: The non-dualist narratives along with approaches to nature throughout history

The description of the history of the non-dualist narrative about the human-nature relationship becomes a difficult task because the history is almost as ancient as the history of agriculture for humans. In the Neolithic period, with the hunter-gatherers forming communities, agriculture first emerged in ancient Mesopotamia. That is exactly why agricultural reality has been reflected in the Mesopotamian myths. In Mesopotamian myths, Innana is considered the goddess of fertility whose journey to the underworld and returning back to the normal world indicate the cycle of nature which is also important in agrarian society where the relation between human and nature is non-dualist. The same goes for Anu, the god of the sky, or Shamash, the Sun God (Ions 2000). Similar non-dualism is present in the *Egyptian epic of Gilgamesh* where Gilgamesh tries to achieve immortality, in other words, dominance over nature, and fails to do it when a snake steals his plant for immortality while he is in sleep. The story portrays the mortal nature of humans and the dependence of humans on nature (Campbell 1949). This is why both Egyptians and Mesopotamians have been very careful about the natural cycle to live their lives according to the natural balance.

In ancient China, the core text of Daoism, *Dao de Zing*, has been written by Laozi during the time 500 to 450 B.C. when ancient China has been going through a vast bureaucratic transformation. The core philosophy of Daoism is that there exists an ultimate reality or a way that emanates through the natural world. Daoism has challenged the official doctrine of Confucianism on this ground that a balanced life could not be achieved by any kind of parental worshipping or strict discipline but by living in accordance with nature. Because of the way or Dao is reflected in the balance of nature. In his book, *Dao de Zing*, Laozi writes that humans follow the earth, the earth follows heaven and the heaven follows the way. With this claim, Laozi does not only indicate a non-dualist metaphysics but also a non-dualist approach to nature (Norden 2011).

Non-dualism has been discussed in the Indian religions and philosophies more broadly than any other previous civilization. The concept has been present in all four religions in the Indian Subcontinent including Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In the four *Vedas* of Hinduism named Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda, there has been mention of a form of pantheism or worshipping of nature. In the *Vedic* tradition, the world has been considered a manifestation of the 'Brahman' or 'the essence of all being' rejecting the dualism between nature and the divine. Earth is considered according to the *Vedas*, as the 'Mother', and water, air, fire, and sky are worshipped as gods and goddesses. (Campbell 1968). Looking into the Indus Valley civilization, the formation of the balance between the urban and agrarian lifestyles and the way nature has been considered in everyday life clearly indicate a relation to nature where humans consider themselves part of nature and not separated.

A similar position has been taken by Buddhism and Jainism, two other important religions of the Asian subcontinent. According to the teachings of Buddha, all interconnected conditioned things are interdependent, and happiness can only be achieved through the renunciation of human desire

with a life of contentment. Enlightenment can truly be achieved when getting away from desire becomes possible by following ethics of love and kindness to all other beings. Jainism, founded by Mahavira, contemporary to Buddhism, takes a similar view on the reality that humans and nature are in harmony. That is why both the temples of Jains and Buddhists are mostly situated in the forest which allows the practitioners to enjoy the peace and tranquility of uniting themselves with nature. (Chatterjee 2012). Looking at the implication of these concepts in ancient times, the period of Emperor Ashoka might be a good example. Ashoka has been deeply influenced by Buddhism. The philosophy has been reflected in his introduction of forest protection laws as the first emperor of the world to take such a step (L. Allen 2012).

With the influence of Buddhism, a tradition named 'Vaishnava' has emerged in medieval Bengal. To collect information as part of the primary research of the thesis, the interview of Tanim Nowshad has been taken. With the question about the approach to nature by the Vaishnava tradition, he replies that the Vaishnava approach to nature is non-dualist. He elaborates that the Vaishnava tradition has been largely influenced by the Buddhist monks of Bengal who has expressed their philosophy about nature in the ancient Bengali text *Charyapada* written during the eighth century. The founder of the Vaishnava tradition is Sri Chaitanya. Nowshad refers to a conversation between Chaitanya and his disciple Ramanand as mentioned in *Chaitanya Charitamritam* an important text for the followers of Vaishnava tradition. In that philosophical conversation, Ramanand has been asking Chaitanya about how the ultimate purpose of life could be fulfilled. Ramanand asks whether it could be fulfilled by abiding by the social norms. Chaitanya answers that it could not be. Then Ramanand asks whether the purpose could be understood by rationality. Chaitanya answers, 'No'. Ramanand asks again whether that could be achieved through surrendering rationality to nature. Chaitanya tells Ramanand to go further. At last, Ramanand asks

whether the purpose could be fulfilled by forming a loving relationship with God who is existent everywhere. Chaitanya asserts that should be the ultimate purpose of life. By referring to this conversation Nowshad establishes that the Vaishnava tradition has followed a non-dualist approach to nature. Nowshad further says that the Vaishnava tradition has understood the limitation of rationality and considered nature as unknowable. Which makes humans dependent on nature (Nowshad 2023). When asked about the existential crisis of modern humans, Nowshad replies that considering humans as capable of knowing nature is the core reason for this existential crisis.

In general, the religious texts are included in the first wave, and the literary works are considered the product of the second wave of ecocriticism in the Indian tradition. The second wave begins in the nineteenth century with works on ecology written by the poets Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarojini Naidu, and many others. And, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the ecocritical concepts have been further represented in many other writings. For example, Bibhutibhushan Banerjee's *Pather Panchali* (1929), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi* (1943), Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), Amitabh Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and many others (Vavaiya 2021). These concepts have been able to influence the middle class of India to take sides with the marginalized and indigenous people in different parts of India when their lifestyle has been disrupted by government projects. For example, the Chipko movement in 1973 against the destabilization of the hill areas in Uttarakhand or the Silent Valley movement in 1978 against the government dam project into the Kerala hill tracts area. In all these movements, the Indian middle class has participated hand in hand with the indigenous people in India (Shiva 2016).

The western tradition is also not free from the influence of non-dualism. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, a more mystical view of Christianity is more popular than the dualist narrative in Western Christianity. They reject the division between God and his creation. That is why many of the followers of Eastern Orthodox Christianity are also exceedingly caring of animals and other plants. This is no wonder why Christianity has not been philosophized into a Cartesian dualism in eastern Europe like the West (Ware 1993). In the Kabbalah tradition of Judaism, God exists in two ways. Firstly, as an infinite, transcendent being which is called 'Aynsof', and secondly, as a manifestation of the infinite existence in the material realm. In Islamic Sufism, the concept of 'Wihdat-al-Wujud' or unity of being has been given by Islamic philosopher Ibn Arabi. He uses the term to define God as the unity of all forms of being. According to Arabi, God is light and God emanates into every living being within nature. (Eliade 1988).

3.7: Cartesian dualism being challenged from within the West during modernist period

After Descartes's announcement of the supremacy of mind over body, culture over nature, and lastly, rationality over emotion, the first challenge has come from Baruch Spinoza by asking a simple question. How does one become sure of the fact that his or her thought is surely his or her distinct thought without any kind of emotional influence or any kind of influence of the surroundings of that particular individual? With this question, Spinoza challenges not only the philosophy of Descartes but also the epistemological foundation behind the modernist supremacy of reason over nature (Russel 1967). Looking back at the rise of modernism in the West, questions might arise whether or not Descartes's dualism has ever been challenged after Spinoza. The first name that comes into the list of western philosophy is German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. In his work, *The World as Will and Representation*, he describes reality with universal will and

personal will. He defines the ultimate reality as the will of God and that universal will gets reflected in the personal will of everything in nature. With that premise, he rejects the existence of human will independent of nature. The most dangerous attack on Cartesian dualism has been carried on by another German philosopher named Martin Heidegger. In his book *Being and Time*, he rejects the distinction of mind and body with his concept of 'Nothingness'. He explains that when anything is defined, it can never be defined without presuming in the first place what that thing is not. In that manner, nothing can be explained without the relation of that thing with other things. As it is not possible for humans to define anything without referring to other things, humans have no rationality distinct from nature (Kenny 2012).

This philosophy of Martin Heidegger has later influenced Arnst Naees to come up with his notion of 'Deep Ecology' where the anthropocentric view of humans is considered the prime reason behind the climate crisis. The non-dualist philosophy has also been present in Ecofeminism, where mind-body dualism is considered a patriarchal narrative about nature that eventually assimilates woman with nature, and thus, modernism objectifies woman in the same way as it objectifies nature. Lastly, non-dualism has also inspired political ecologists like Bruno Latour, Dipesh Chatterjee, Rob Nixon, and many others to consider the social reality connected to the treatment of the environment following the premise that everything is interconnected (Hiltner 2014).

With the descriptions of non-dualist narratives throughout history along with their implications for nature, it becomes very hard to deny that for the current condition of the climate, the modern dualist approach to nature is mostly responsible. The global sea level rise in the last century has been more than that has been for the last three thousand years and it has been rising 2.3 millimetres per year from the 1970s (Ackerly 2022). Only the aspect of sea level is enough to establish the role of modernism behind the destruction of the climate. Another point to be derived from the

above discussion is that the interpretation of any particular view of nature is more important than the view itself. Therefore, the Judeo-Christian narratives themselves are not responsible for the climate crisis. The philosophizing of Judeo-Christian tradition into modernism has bred the dualist approach to nature which has caused the destruction of the climate. Therefore, whether people are following a non-dualist approach to nature is more important than people from different religions or cultures agreeing with the philosophy of non-dualism.

Chapter 4: The notion of Political ecology in the writings of Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty

Before entering into the writings of Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty, the notion of Political ecology has to be taken into consideration. When any ecological issue is analyzed by relating the relevant political perspectives with it, including economics, culture, religion, class, race, gender, etc., then that way of analysis is regarded as political ecology. Political ecology differs from other modes of thinking like ‘deep ecology’ that are apolitical (Hiltner 2014).

4.1: Bruno Latour’s ‘Gaia Hypothesis’

The interesting factor about Bruno Latour’s philosophy is that he rejects the modernist distinction of subject and object but rejecting modernism does not make Latour a postmodernist thinker. Latour calls himself a non-modern. This means that Latour does not reject modernism but he actually denies the existence of modernism in the first place. In his book, *We have never been modern* published in 1993, Latour claims that modernism rejects the previous traditions of God, spirit, forms, and many other concepts but actually functions within those traditions that modernism claims to reject in the first place. He traces the root of modernism to the division between nature and society and subject and object that has been present in the philosophy of Plato, Christianity, and Judaism. Just like in Platonism, Christianity, and Judaism, nature is considered knowable, modernism, with objectifying nature, approaches nature as knowable and controllable. Latour asserts that until the division between nature and culture is solved in the western tradition and, the other parts of the world following the West, the existential crisis of humans being the victim of their own deeds in the face of climate crisis could never be encountered. He challenges

the scientific tradition by showing how science defines objectivity. Objectivity, by Latour, means defining anything in a way that will enable that thing to refute any kind of objection against it (Latour 1993). Having been influenced by Martin Heidegger, Latour argues that nothing could be defined without describing the relation of that thing with every other thing surrounding it. Nature, according to Heidegger, can only be defined by presuming 'nothingness' in the background. Latour claims that the scientific method always defines nature by making decisions based on observation and thinks of nature as something decided. But nature always debunks that decision with new observations and, therefore, remains unknowable to humans (Heidegger 2010). This means that the scientific definition of objectivity has never worked in a philosophical sense and nature has always remained unknowable. Latour further adds that this is not only the case that humans could not define nature distinctively, but humans could not define themselves without forming a relation between humans and nature. Thus, humans are not separated from nature (Latour 1993).

From the premise of nature being unknowable, Latour defines nature by calling it 'Gaia' in his later work *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures of the New Climate Regime*. Latour derives the word 'Gaia' from Greek myths, where Gaia is regarded as the force that has always been in nature with the combination of two Gods, 'Eros' suggesting the drive to live and 'Thanatos' suggesting the drive to death. In other words, the combination between 'order' and 'chaos'. Therefore, 'Gaia' or nature is the harmony that has emerged through the chaos of the contingent or interdependent organisms within nature. According to Latour, organism means every living and nonliving thing of nature. Because living things would not survive without the interactions with the non-living things. This means that everything within nature has its own agency. It is through the interactions within countless agents within nature that Gaia or nature with its harmony or balance has evolved and has

still been evolving. Therefore, the only way to deal with the climate crisis is to approach nature taking into account the agencies of both living and non-living beings (Latour 2017).

With the premise that both living and non-living beings have the same agency to exercise in the formation of nature, Latour claims that everything within nature eventually determines the fate of humans. This changes the gaze of humans to nature the other way around. Latour, then proposes a new method of diplomacy that takes into account the agency of both humans and non-humans. Thus, Latour supports the conservation of biodiversity in the case of agriculture and afforestation as a natural solution to the climate crisis (Latour 2017). However, there are limitations in the natural solutions to the climate crisis. For example, there are debates among scientists regarding how effective planting trees could be in reducing the heat from the climate by trapping CO₂ gas. Because the ecosystem of the earth might support nine hundred million acres of forest more than the amount of forest the earth has now. Covering that much land area through natural plantations would cost a few trillion dollars every year to be spent which makes the project cost-effective (Krauss 2021). In that case, Latour would like to turn to other possible solutions given by science to extract carbon from the air until that process does not disrupt the balance within nature.

Latour does not reject science. He considers the fundamental method of science which is making decisions based on observation as a natural human tendency in relation to nature. However, the problem arises when science is used to control nature for human purposes. Latour supports any non-dualist approach to nature that takes into account the natural harmony and does not consider nature as an object to be controlled. There is another recent debate in the scientific community about Carbon Capture Storage (CCS), the method through which CO₂ is trapped and stored before that is emitted into nature during the production of any goods (Krauss 2021). In this case, Latour would be sceptic on whether there would be any possibility for the leak of carbon storage because

that would create instability within nature. Provided that there is no risk of leakage Latour would accept that approach of science.

When asked about the way to challenge the current modernist system Latour turns to the concept of politics given by German political philosopher Carl Schmitt. Schmitt defines politics as the struggle to distinguish between friends and enemies. Distinguishing between friends and enemies is done through the process of war. Because, before a war, this becomes clear what a group of people are willing to die for. Therefore, only through war or chaos does a political community emerge (Schmitt 2007). Latour uses Schmitt's concept of politics in the field of Political ecology asserting that only through chaos to destabilize the current political system, a proper system for having a new relation to nature be achieved. That is why Latour criticizes the environmentalists who want to have mild changes within the current structure. Latour also criticizes the deep ecologist who could not connect politics with ecology. Because, according to Latour, there is a deep relation between political ecology and the non-dualist approach. Approaching nature in a non-dualist way could only be possible when this duality between idea and action is solved which persists in the thinking of both environmentalists and deep ecologists (Latour 2017).

4.2: Dipesh Chakrabarty on anthropogenic collapse and postcolonial ecocriticism

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty describes the reason for the current climate crisis for the anthropocentric approach of humans to nature that has been taken during the modernist tradition of the last two hundred years. In his book, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thoughts and Historical Difference*, he explains that when human is defined through the narrative of historicism then human becomes an abstract concept that denies the diversity of human experience in different parts of the world into different cultures. Dipesh challenges historicism because there is a

developmental narrative in historicism which considers human history as separated from natural history; therefore, the specific human action during the modernist period in the West followed by the other cultures of the world that is more responsible for the current climate crisis than any other period of the past gets ignored. By challenging the distinction between human and natural history, Dipesh brings the past experiences of the postcolonial nations of the world into the present political reality. Therefore, Dipesh suggests the proper human relation to nature by bringing the different human experiences about human-nature relationships from all over the world (Chakrabarty 2007).

In his later writing, *The Climate of History: Four Theses*, at first, Dipesh brings the notion of anthropogenic action which means any certain situation for which humans are specifically responsible. At first, Dipesh regards the distinguishable human actions for the last two hundred years as an anthropogenic collapse (Chakrabarty 2009). Getting into the writings of French historian Fernand Braudel, Dipesh shows how Braudel criticizes the modernist narratives of history for treating nature as something passive. According to Braudel, nature has been treated by the modernist narrative of history in a way that nature is an aspect to be mentioned in the introduction of the book only to be forgotten later. Braudel describes the modernist approach to nature as the rejection of the natural cycle by humans with which humans deny that nature could have an agency (Braudel 1996). The consequence of modernist division between human history and natural history becomes clear when in 1988, the then director of the Goddard Institute of Space Studies of NASA, James Hansen tells the senate committee of the US that it is time to stop denial and admit that the greenhouse effect is trapping the CO₂ in our climate becoming the reason for the climate crisis. Dipesh also mentions the work of Naomi Oreskes, a historian of science of the University of California, who has gone through nine hundred and twenty-eight papers on global warming from peer-reviewed journals and has found not a single paper that rejects the scientific

consensus that the current climate crisis is man-made. According to Will Steffen, director of the Centre for Resource and Environmental History of Australian National University, the intensity of the loss of biodiversity for the human-induced climate crisis is almost equivalent to the loss of biodiversity for the event around 65 million years ago that destroyed the dinosaurs (Chakrabarty 2009). Therefore, it becomes hard for Dipesh to deny the conclusion that humans are a major geological force within the climate and there is no distinction between human and natural history.

Secondly, Dipesh observes another philosophy that has been an important drive behind human objectification of nature which is humanism. According to Indian economist Amartya Sen, 'freedom' is the word that has been used in western history during the last three hundred years more than any other period in human history. With the supremacy of rationality, this has become very important for the West to define human will as independent from the natural forces (Sen 2000). With the assertion of his first thesis that humans are nothing more than another geological force, Dipesh rejects the humanism of the West. Dipesh further asserts that the humanism of the West is nothing more than a product of modernism that has made humans objectify nature which has been the reason for the current existential crisis humans are facing for the climate crisis that has been created by themselves. Dipesh agrees with Bruno Latour on this point that the scientific promises of controlling nature have appeared as a myth. Similar to Latour, Dipesh also accepts science as long as science is not taking any approach that exceeds the temperature zone of the planet which Dipesh wants to be considered as a boundary line for scientific approach. Because science only becomes destructive to the climate when it announces its superiority over nature (Chakrabarty 2009).

Thirdly, Dipesh argues that when human history is separated from natural history and that lens of looking at history becomes widespread through globalization, there emerges further narrative of

recorded history referring to the written history of the last four thousand years. The history of humans that goes beyond these written documents is neglected. The diversified human experiences from different cultures which go beyond these written experiences are neglected. For this reason, it becomes easier to make this claim that the reason for the current climate crisis is the mismanagement within capitalism. When natural human experience is detached from written history the different human-nature relationships that have been in different cultures throughout history are avoided. Therefore, the cartesian dualism of modern humans that has driven the capitalist system of using nature as a source of human consumption could also be denied. Dipesh suggests that to solve the climate crisis the diversity of human experience which is found in the deep human history where experiences outside the written history are also heard. By rejecting the modernist dualism of subject and object, Dipesh dismisses any abstract concept of humans. Thus, humans could only be defined by their experience while having their relations to nature in different cultures of the world (Chakrabarty 2009).

Lastly, based on the premise that there is no human essence independent of natural experiences, Dipesh dismisses any kind of universal history based on the abstract notion of humans. According to Dipesh, the solution to the climate crisis could only be possible when the diverse experiences of different cultures in their connection to western modernity through colonialism could be brought into the discussion. This is how, challenging the western abstraction of humans Dipesh moves to post-colonial ecocritical thinking where the experiences of previously colonized nations in relation to modernity are brought into the discourse of ecocriticism (Chakrabarty 2009). With this process, events like the revolt of the Munda tribe against the colonial land-grabbing practices could emerge into the discourse of ecology where the Munda people have fought against colonial oppression to save their own reciprocal relationship with nature as an indigenous tribe (Singh 2002). By

analyzing these events a new perspective regarding how to form a new relationship to nature other than western dualism could arise.

4:3: The reflection of Bruno Latour’s ‘Gaia hypothesis’ and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s postcolonial ecocriticism in popular culture

When the reflection of political ecology in popular media is concerned, currently, blockbuster films are more popular than any other art form. From that view, the two films where the concepts of both Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty have been reflected most are Denis Villeneuve’s *Dune: Part one* (2021) & *Dune: Part Two* (2024) and James Cameron’s *Avatar: Part One* (2009’.

The film ‘Dune’ is an adaptation of Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel *Dune* within two parts. The story of *Dune* starts in the future when Emperor Shaddam replaces Baron Harkonnen, the former property holder of the planet Arrakis with Duke Leto Atriedes. Arrakis is a desert planet that is harsh but filled with valuable spice which is very useful for interstellar travelling into space. This spice or *mélange* is at the core of the story of *Dune*. Because the desert people called Fremen are not willing to give away the spices produced by the sandworms of the desert because spices are important for the balance of the climate of Arrakis. The Fremen want to turn the desert land of Arrakis called Dune into a green and fertile land. This conflict based on the spices expresses the core ecological philosophy of *Dune* asking the viewers whether the resources of nature are to be used in such a way that does not disrupt the balance of the climate or not. This also inclines with Latour’s philosophy that the harmony within nature formed through order and chaos is not to be disrupted. The Fremen people living in the desert share a non-dualist relation to nature which is reflected in the words of the ecologist working in the desert of Arrakis when she says in *Dune: Part One* that there is an internally recognized beauty of motion in every planet which is essential to all life. The same non-dualism is prevalent in the description of Shai Holud, a giant desert worm,

by the Fremen as a form of God. This demonstrates their belief that the eternal is inside the nature (Kennedy 2021).

Like *Dune*, James Cameron's *Avatar: Part One* (2009) also starts in the future in 2154, when the earth is suffering from a lack of resources and an administration for the development of resource lands on Pandora. An orbiting moon where there are living beings called 'Navi'. They live there maintaining the harmony of nature. But the administration has to interrupt because there are valuable minerals called 'unobtainium' under the home tree of Pandora. The Navi people are unwilling to give away unobtainium because that requires the uprooting of the home tree which will disrupt the harmony of the planet. With this conflict at the core of the story, *Avatar* reflects the postcolonial notion of ecology of Dipesh Chakrabarty, where, the indigenous or local people of planet Pandora have their own relation with nature which is completely different from the will of the administration to use the planet as a source of human consumption which resembles the modernist approach to nature. When the scientist of the administration, Dr. Grace Augustine tells the other members that uprooting the home tree of Pandora will disrupt the biological network of the entire planet that sequence clearly indicates the notion of 'Gaia' by Bruno Latour defining nature as a harmony. In the climax of the film, the protagonist of the story Jake Sully becomes the leader of the Navi humanoid people to lead them to the battle against the forces of the administration to secure their planet Pandora from them. The whole war sequence reflects the notion of 'chaos' by Latour that only through disrupting the current modernist political system with chaos a new approach to nature emerges. Lastly, while Jake stops being an avatar working within the humanoids and permanently becomes one of the Navi people, he depicts the kind of new human Latour proposes in his 'Gaia hypothesis'. The human who makes his rational faculty humble and totally immerse in the harmony of nature (Adamson 2012).

Analyzing the concept of 'Gaia' by Bruno Latour and the postcolonial ecocriticism of Dipesh Chakrabarty, it becomes very clear that both of them suggest a non-dualist approach to nature. Dipesh supports bringing diversified human experience in relation to nature to create an assemblage against the modernist way of treating nature. Thus, it becomes clear to the world that the destruction of the environment during modernism is more severe than in any other period of human history. On that note, Dipesh's approach is more of an intellectual battle. On the other hand, Latour's approach is more practical where he directly suggests the necessity of chaos to destabilize the current political situation. Lastly, in both of their writings, the division between politics and ecocritical thought is rejected.

Chapter 5: A Zizekian analysis of the collective responsibilities for the climate crisis

The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek enters into the discussion of ecocriticism by criticizing the environmentalists, deep ecologists, and all other ecocritical thoughts that differentiate politics from ecology. According to Zizek, their concepts are incapable of bringing any radical changes into the existing structure to tackle the climate crisis because of their passive acceptance of the existing global capitalist structure in the first place (Zizek 2018). Before getting into the reason behind this assertion, Zizek's definition of the human self is to be discussed.

Zizek uses the theory of psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan to define the human self. According to Lacan, when a human is born, he sees his face in the mirror. While seeing his image, the child naturally has a notion of himself which Lacan defines as imaginary. When the child encounters the social order through interacting with his surroundings the limitation that is imposed on him is called a symbol. When the child learns to speak, he develops an idea of himself and his surroundings through his communication with others through language. Therefore, the child defines not only nature but also himself through the language which he is born into. The ultimate realm of nature outside language always remains unknown to humans. The realm that is outside the human language is regarded as 'real' by Jacques Lacan (Lacan 2007). Zizek derives a few points from that definition. In his book *How to read Lacan* Zizek states that as the human self or ego is a combination of imaginary and symbolic structures, therefore, humans cannot construct a self without having an interaction with nature and other humans who are also living within nature. This means that humans do not have a self that is independent of nature. With this claim, Zizek

subscribes to the non-dualist human relation to nature. Zizek claims further in his book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that if nature beyond human language is unknowable to humans, then the concept of time as an abstraction from nature including past present, and future is also accessible to humans in a limited manner. From that premise, Zizek elaborates that every kind of ideology is actually a human attempt to reach the Lacanian real along with a certain metanarrative about that real. For example, Socialism or Capitalism. This is why every ideology presupposes a particular future whereas the future is unknowable in the first place. Another important point to be mentioned is that Zizek makes the distinction between 'ideology' and 'ideal'. To Zizek, when any certain idea has any political metanarrative connected with it only then idea becomes ideology. Therefore, according to Zizek, when George Wilhelm Hegel is defining the concept of 'Absolute' in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the dialectic thinking of human mind to reach that 'Absolute' where a new contradiction no longer emerges, that is an 'ideal' state. But when Karl Marx brings the concept of class struggle into the philosophy of Hegel, that is an 'ideology' because 'ideology' is an evolution of any idea into the political relations of everyday lives. Zizek does not reject ideology, rather, claims that ideology is the political relation with which any idea gets constructed or actualized into the reality (Zizek 2009).

In his book, *Living in the End Times*, Zizek asserts that the current ecocritical thoughts which are not willing to take any radical actions and suggest to solve the climate crisis within capitalism, eventually, serve the purpose of an ideology which restricts the possibility of all other future ideologies or political relations to emerge. Just like an ideology presupposes an idea along with a political metanarrative (Zizek 2018), the current capitalist or cornucopian ecologists like Terry Anderson and environmentalists like Paul Elrich and Martin Lewis also have the narrative that the

present climate crisis could be solved dueling within the system of capitalist structure (Gerrard 2012).

With the amount of evidence given by the US Global Research Change Program, this is clear that the Cornucopians or the eco-capitalist approaches to the climate change like imposing Carbon taxes or the approach to the climate by the environmentalists including protections acts and recycling materials have failed to have a solution to the climate crisis. Carbon Dioxide has increased more than twenty percent of the total Carbon increase in the history of the planet in the last forty-four years. The concentration of Carbon Dioxide in the planet is fifty percent higher than it has been in the preindustrial time. This means that the concentration of Greenhouse gas in the last two hundred and fifty years is more than it has been in the last two million years. The Glaciers from all around the world has shrunked on average one meter in each year from 2011 to 2020 and the rise of sea level has been at a rate of 4.5mm per year within this period (Lindsay 2024). Another important point to be mentioned is that it is the last forty to fifty years that there has been this rise of eco-capitalists and environmentalists who has tried to bring a solution to the climate staying within the rubric of capitalist system (Gerrard 2012). Unfortunately, the current situation is like this that only ten percent materials of the total productions in the global economy is recycled every year whereas fifty percent of the total materials are not recycled because of them being used as a source of energy. The situation has come to a state where the emission of Greenhouse gas has to be dropped by forty-three percent by 2030 to limit the temperature of the planet within 1.5 Celsius which is impossible to be done within the current political and economic system of the free market. The rise of temperature might be the reason for various diseases, climate disasters, drought and climate migration that are ultimately posing an existential threat to human species in general (Abramowitz 2021). This indicates a very uncertain and alarming future of the climate. Observing

this scenario, this becomes very clear that the capitalism as an extension of modernism has failed to solve the climate crisis. Even biologist E.O Wilson, who has been an environmentalist throughout his life, has asserted in his book, *Half Earth* that with the serious fate of the climate, there is a crying need for a radical action to be taken to preserve half of the planet for environment. With this desperate claim he admits that the capitalist system has been proven false regarding this claim that nature could be controlled by humans. But when it is about proposing a solution to the crisis, he gets back to the environmentalist discourses of recycling materials and all other capitalist measure to encounter climate change (Wilson 2017).

It is this dilemma of the current ecologists like Paul Elrich and E.O. Wilson who are functioning within the present dominant structure, that Zizek is pointing out in his book *Living in the End Times*. To Zizek, nature is unknowable to humans because humans come to know their surrounding through language and the reality beyond language is unknowable to humans. Therefore, by Zizek, nature is also known to humans only what they are capable of knowing with language. As nature is not known to humans beyond language in the first place, humans could not impose control over anything of which is not accessible to human in its totality. Therefore, the self-contradictory premise of the environmentalists like E.O. Wilson and Paul Ehrlich that nature could not be controlled but the capitalist structure is somehow capable of maintaining the balance of the nature is baseless. The second objection of Zizek is not only to the environmentalist but also all other ecologists who are afraid of disrupting the current global capitalist structure. The objection is about the concept of natural balance. In this case, Zizek defines natural balance as the balance of nature that is still not letting the humans along with the remaining species of the world to get extinct and preventing the rise of temperature, climate disasters and many other calamities. The eco-capitalists or Cornucopians and the environmentalists argue that if the current system is destabilized then the

situation could reach into a state where the natural balance might get disrupted. In his book, *Life on a Modern Planet: A Manifesto For Progress* environmentalist Richard North describes the capitalist system as a progressive system with this claim that if humans stop abiding by the attempts taken by global capitalism to encounter climate and turn to radical actions then with that destabilization the natural harmony the climate catastrophe might become inevitable (North 1995). But the argument presupposes that nature has not already been disrupted. Zizek criticizes this naive optimism by pointing out that when any certain ideology has a particular narration about the future it always suggests a particular political action to be followed in the present and avoids other options. Zizek explains further in *Living in the End Times* that if nature is unknown to humans, then the future is also unknown to humans and a source of every kind of positive or negative possibility. Following that premise, every action has the possibility or impossibility to affect the future of the climate. According to Zizek, the internal contradiction of the ecologists seeking solutions within global capitalism like Paul Ehrlich, E.O Wilson, Richard North, Stephen Schneider and many others is that on one hand, they claim that nature is unknowable and uncontrollable but, on the other hand, they claim that the future climate catastrophe could be avoided if the current status quo is maintained and the natural balance has not already been disrupted. In the end, these thoughts serve the purpose of global capitalism which is a product of the modernist narrative that humans could rule over nature (Zizek 2018).

From this criticism of the ecocritical thoughts outside political ecology, Zizek moves forward to address the existential crisis of humans about the uncertainty of the future regarding the climate crisis. In his work, *Nature and its Discontents* in 2008, Zizek asserts that when these presuppositions are not rejected that the balance of nature has not been disrupted and there is a particular solution to the climate crisis, every possible action to face the climate crisis shall not be

tried or implemented. Because, with these narratives, people always hope for a savior and become passive in case of taking any radical action. Zizek suggests that the only way to encounter this uncertainty is to embrace the uncertainty of the future and to accept that no particular kind of action could save us from climate catastrophe. Therefore, humans are already doomed. Zizek calls this process pessimism in theory and optimism in execution. In religious terms, Zizek compares it with the rejection of any messiah coming to save humanity from any apocalypse. Only then, do humans take action themselves and try every possible option in their hands when people reject any certain kind of ideology as a solution for the uncertain and undecided future. The future reveals itself through actions. With welcoming all kinds of human endeavors, every possibility of the unexplored future of the climate could be explored. Through that chaos to destabilize the current system a new order might emerge (Zizek 2008).

In that case, Zizek wants every kind of chaotic action to be implemented for the destabilization of the current political situation. Zizek suggests riots, public protests, whistle-blowing of the information that is not being made public by the government or public organization regarding climate, and, lastly, violence. By suggesting violence, Zizek does not mean any kind of terrorism that has been suggested by Ted Kaczynski in his *Unabomber Manifesto* in the 1960s supporting ecological terrorism. However, Zizek suggests any kind of violence that becomes unavoidable for bringing any kind of revolutionary change (Zizek 2008). Zizek welcomes more protests against the current political establishment like the protest against the industrial agricultural land-grabbing practices by the Dutch farmers from 2019 to 2020 (Tullis 2023). Similar ecological movements have happened all over India against commercial land-grabbing practices in different times from the nineteenth century to the present period. For example, the Jungle Bachao Andolon that was launched in the Singhbhum district of Bihar in 1982 against the commercial plantation in the Sal

Forest. The Appiko movement, where mass people protested against the privatization of natural forest and disrupted the ancient livelihood of indigenous people in Uttar Kannada in 1983 is also a movement worthy of mention (Shiva 2016).

Considering the reflection of the concept of embracing the uncertainty of the future and acting according to that given by Slavoj Zizek, there is a surprising similarity that could be found about dealing with the issue of the human self and the incapability of humans to understand nature into the philosophy of the poems of nineteenth-century Bengali poet and philosopher Fakir Lalon. The surprising factor is the difference of time and place between these two thinkers. As part of the primary research for the thesis, a second interview has been taken for the purpose of understanding the relation to nature as suggested by the Fakiri tradition of Bengal. The interviewee is Farhad Mazhar. A well-known political activist of Bangladesh who has been working into the field of ecology for so many years. When he has been asked about the human-nature relationship suggested by Lalon Fakir, he replies by mentioning a stanza from a poem of Lalon named *Arshinagar near my home* (Salomon 2017).

Near my house there is Arshinagar
 where lives my neighbor
 I have not seen her even once-
 my neighbor
 who lives in the city of mirrors
 near my house.

Mazhar points out that in this poem Lalon is metaphorically explaining the human self as Arshinagar. In the human self, there are other people. That is similar to the concept of 'self' given by Jacques Lacan where he says that humans define themselves by defining others. According to Mazhar, Fakir Lalon defines the human self as an entity that is connected to all other entities.

Therefore, Mazhar concludes there is no independent human self. When asked about nature in a more detailed manner with the question of whether humans are capable of knowing nature, Mazhar answers that nature has been defined in the philosophy of Lalon as infinite which humans are incapable of knowing. Humans could only have ideas about nature with their particular experiences. He refers to another stanza from Lalon's poem named *Will you find him with the universal* (Salomon 2017).

Will you find him with the universal?
 No signs of him are there in the Vedas
 He becomes the infinite Brahman
 Roams around into the realms of unknown
 No friends he has in there
 He roams alone, as he is alone
 Will you find him with the universal?

Mazhar explains that in this poem, the 'universal' means the claims to ultimate truth about nature that have been made in different cultures throughout history. But, Lalon points out that these attempts to achieve the ultimate truth are futile as no one could achieve that truth. As nature is like Brahman who is infinite and remains outside human intellect for which Brahman has been mentioned as alone in the poem. The infinite nature could not be known through Vedas or any religious scripture. Therefore, Mazhar asserts that there is an anti-ideological spirit in this poem (Mazhar 2008).

With this analysis of the philosophy of Lalon by Farhad Mazhar, it becomes clear that Lalon never mentions anything directly about ecology. However, the concepts of the non-dualist relation of humans with nature and the uncertainty of humans about nature are very much present in his philosophy. Both in the philosophy of Slavoj Zizek and in the poems of Fakir Lalon, nature appears

as an entity that is infinite and unknowable. Therefore, in the philosophy of both Žižek and Lalon, there is no way humans could get away from the state of undecidedness while encountering nature. Only through embracing that undecidedness could humans face the existential crisis of an uncertain future.

Chapter 6: A new perspective of looking at the relationship between human and nature along with collective human responsibilities

Overviewing the different narratives about human relation to nature throughout history and the concepts of Bruno Latour, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Slavoj Zizek, three conclusions could be derived from their writings with which there emerges a new perspective of looking at human-nature relationship. Analyzing that perspective, the existential crisis of humans at present could also be understood. Lastly, identifying the existential crisis of humans would pave the way to identify the collective human responsibilities.

6.1: The Proper human approach to nature is non-dualist

The first conclusion that is prevalent in the writings of Bruno Latour, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Slavoj Zizek is the rejection of any abstract concept of humans. This means all three of them support a contingent human self that is not independent from nature. From that premise, it could be concluded that the proper human approach to nature has to be non-dualist refusing any distinction between subject and object. There is an important distinction to be made between non-dualist philosophy and approach. The approach is more focused on how humans relate to nature. Whether humans are relating to nature in a way that disrupts the natural balance or not is very important in the non-dualist approach in a practical sense. Therefore, the relationship between philosophy and politics is very important in the non-dualist approach. That is why, Political ecology is at the core of the concept of the non-dualist approach. This is also why; the political ecologist Bruno Latour has always criticized the thinkers of the first wave of ecocriticism for failing to relate thinking with outside political reality. Another important aspect of the concept of

Political ecology is that the reciprocal practical relation between humans and nature is more important than someone having a non-dualist metaphysics in his mind. Looking back at the previous religious and philosophical traditions it has always been prevalent that the interpretation and implementation of a philosophy is more important to determine human relation to nature. For example, there is a division between creator and creation in Islam but that does not make nature a source of human consumption in Islam. Because there is also the concept of Khalifah in Islam where people are representatives of God almighty to protect his creation on earth. This is why having a dualist metaphysics has not bred a modernist objectification of nature in Islamic civilization (Ansary 2010). Therefore, an approach to nature maintaining harmony is more important than any metaphysical worldview. Lastly, the non-dualist approach is not against science. When science is used to protect the balance of nature that is supported by non-dualism. For example, the technology of Direct Air Capture (DAC) for extracting CO₂ from the environment could be supported by non-dualism. But when famous oil-producing companies like ExxonMobil or Chevron are interested in DAC because eighty percent of the currently captured CO₂ gets injected into the oil fields thus more fossil fuels could be burnt then that is not supported by a non-dualist approach because ultimately that is indicating the modern dualist approach of treating nature as an object for consumption (Romm 2023).

6.2: The existential crisis of humans being the victim of their own deeds

The dualist approach to nature which has been a product of modernism is singlehandedly responsible for the current existential crisis where the human being is feeling that he is the victim of his own deeds. Because the cartesian dualism of modernism has given this promise that humans could establish their supremacy over nature. This mindset has bred the industrial revolution. The consequence of that is prevalent in the fact that the increasing rate of temperature of the climate

during the last three hundred years is more than the changing rate of temperature of the climate in the last three thousand years. The existential crisis comes from the feeling that the gaze of humans on nature is turning the other way around. The climate crisis is making humans feel like nature is taking revenge against them. Only by changing this dualist approach to nature could modern humans get away from this existential crisis.

6.3: Relating existential crisis of uncertain future with collective human responsibilities

The most crucial form of existential crisis that humans are facing at present is the uncertainty of the future. When the future is uncertain and undecided, then every human attempt to solve the climate crisis has the potential to be a failure. The solution to this crisis according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, is to bring diversified human relations to nature from different cultures of the world to challenge the anthropocentric modernist relation to nature both politically and intellectually. Bruno Latour would suggest the disruption of the current modernist political system through chaos thus a new form of political system where the agency of living and nonliving beings would be taken into account to maintain the harmony of nature. But the possibility of these actions turning into failure and getting worse than the current situation still haunts people about the uncertain future. Slavoj Zizek agrees with Latour that the current system is to be disrupted through chaos. But disagrees on that note, that the harmony of nature has not already been disrupted. With the degradation of the climate, people have come to this understanding that nature is not under human control and nature is unknowable. The unknowable nature contains the unknowable future within it. While nature is unknowable then how could people believe that the balance of nature has not already been disrupted and that climate catastrophe is not a certainty? Zizek argues that people have to get away from this false hope of that the balance of nature has not been disrupted and that

climate catastrophe is still avoidable. Žižek insists people admit that humans are doomed and no option is left to humans except to try every possible action to stop the climate catastrophe, which Žižek calls ‘optimism in action and pessimism in theory’. Only then could the current system be disrupted and every possible political system could be explored. That is how humans should encounter the existential crisis for the uncertain future regarding the climate crisis.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Climate change is one of the burning issues of today's world. Any event becomes important to the people when that matters to them. The changing of the climate matters to people in a way that people are aware of climate change not out of curiosity but out of fear. People are afraid that nature will take revenge on humans for the destruction of the climate that has happened for the last three hundred years more than any previous period in human history. People are worried because they do not know what should be the proper relation to the nature that humans should have. Lastly, people are afraid to encounter the uncertain future of the climate. This research tries to address these fears in an attempt to bring a new perspective on the relationship between humans and nature. Then the research tries to identify the collective human responsibility to deal with the uncertain future of the climate.

The conclusion that the thesis reaches is that the relationship between humans and nature has to be non-dualist. Going through different narratives concerning the relationship between humans and nature throughout history and the concepts of the previous thinkers of ecocriticism, it becomes apparent that the reason behind the current crisis of the climate is the dualist approach to nature thinking of nature as an object to the human subject. Only by getting away from this dualist approach could humans get away from this existential crisis of being a victim of their own deeds. In the case of politics, to follow a non-dualist approach to nature is not possible working within the current modern capitalist system. The current system has to be disrupted through chaos for a new order to emerge. Lastly, any kind of false hope has to be rejected to encounter the uncertainty of climate change. With the acceptance of hopelessness, people would explore all the possible actions to encounter the climate catastrophe. Otherwise, the illusion of global capitalism will

continue to make people believe that the balance of nature has not been disrupted and that climate catastrophe is not a certainty.

The purpose of the thesis would be fulfilled if the thesis generated further discussion regarding the relationship of humans with nature and the existential crisis of humans while encountering climate change for a better understanding of people about their place in the climate.

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