

An Ecocritical Study of a Literary Work: The Conflict Between Humans and Nature in the Short Story the Curse of the Jati Dragon

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Abstract

Forest exploitation driven by the pursuit of power, social status, and human greed can cause environmental degradation and disrupt the relationship between humans and nature. These pressing issues are vividly depicted in the short story “The Curse of the Jati Dragon,” which employs the conflict between humans and nature, along with powerful symbols, to represent the multifaceted impacts of forest exploitation. This study aims to describe the cultural representations of how society utilizes forests as a means of attaining social status and to uncover critiques of forest exploitation practices through an ecocritical perspective. Employing a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, the research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, and narratives from the short story that relate to the relationship between humans and nature. The data were collected through documentation and analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that the short story contains a profound critique of forest exploitation rooted in the pursuit of power, social status, and human greed. The impact of environmental destruction is represented through the symbols of the dragon, the flood disaster, and Kasbi’s physical transformation into a “wooden man.” This depiction powerfully illustrates the intimate connection between natural conditions and human life, as well as the severe consequences that arise when environmental balance is disrupted. Ultimately, this short story serves as a medium for critiquing exploitative behavior and, at the same time, as a means of fostering ecological awareness regarding the relationship between humans and nature.

INTRODUCTION

Deforestation in Indonesia is a critical environmental issue that continues to attract significant attention due to its multifaceted impacts on ecological, social, economic, and cultural aspects of community life (Maxton-Lee, 2018). Forests in Indonesia serve functions that extend far beyond being mere reservoirs of natural resources. For numerous Indigenous and local communities, forests constitute integral components of their living spaces, sources of livelihood, and areas imbued with profound cultural and spiritual values. When forest utilization becomes excessive and neglects the principles of environmental sustainability, the resulting ecological degradation can severely disrupt both natural equilibrium and the welfare of surrounding communities (Rochmayanto et al., 2023; Golar et al., 2024). This intricate relationship underscores the pressing need to examine deforestation not merely as an isolated

ecological phenomenon, but as a complex sociocultural issue that demands interdisciplinary investigation and holistic policy responses.

The complexity of deforestation intensifies considerably when forest utilization becomes intertwined with social and cultural interests. Forests frequently serve as spaces for various religious practices and ritual activities, including those specifically aimed at acquiring wealth, power, social position, or elevated status within community hierarchies (Scheidel & Work, 2018). Under specific sociocultural conditions, these deeply rooted beliefs can strongly motivate individuals to enter forest areas, harvest forest products, or even intentionally damage forest ecosystems in pursuit of their desired goals. This phenomenon demonstrates that environmental degradation can be significantly influenced by how human societies perceive, interpret, and interact with nature within their social and cultural frameworks. Consequently, understanding these underlying cultural dynamics is crucial for developing comprehensive and sustainable solutions to address deforestation that extend beyond purely technical or economic approaches.

Empirical data from the Auriga Nusantara Foundation's 2025 Status of Deforestation in Indonesia (STADI) report reveal a dramatic surge in deforestation rates across the archipelago. In 2025, the total deforested area reached 433,751 hectares, representing a substantial 66% increase compared with 2024, when the figure stood at 261,575 hectares. Kalimantan recorded the largest deforested area, amounting to 158,283 hectares, while Papua experienced the most alarming increase, rising by 348% from 17,341 hectares in 2024 to 77,678 hectares in 2025. This concerning escalation is directly linked to various activities involving forest utilization, including government-sponsored projects and national strategic programs such as the development of large-scale food estates. Furthermore, Auriga Nusantara documented that approximately 58% of deforestation in 2025 occurred legally, as it took place within areas covered by concession permits or associated with government-initiated projects (Adiningsih, 2026). This compelling data unequivocally demonstrates that mounting pressure on Indonesia's forests is closely connected to the systematic exploitation of natural resources, involving complex and intersecting dynamics of economic interests, policy frameworks, and power relations.

Based on the foregoing empirical evidence, it becomes abundantly clear that deforestation constitutes a fundamentally multidimensional issue that cannot be adequately addressed through a singular perspective. This situation further underscores the critical importance of examining deforestation from broader, more integrated perspectives that incorporate the social and cultural dimensions influencing how communities perceive and utilize forest resources. However, a comprehensive review of existing scholarly literature reveals that studies on deforestation to date have predominantly focused on environmental, economic, policy, and natural resource governance dimensions (Duguma et al., 2019; Kyere-Boateng & Marek, 2021; Kumar et al., 2022). While these perspectives are undeniably crucial for understanding the proximate causes and measurable impacts of forest degradation, deforestation also possesses significant cultural dimensions that have been largely neglected in mainstream research agendas. People's deeply held beliefs, cultural values, and worldviews regarding nature can fundamentally shape human behavior toward the environment, either promoting sustainable practices or enabling destructive exploitation. Therefore, rigorous research investigating the intricate relationships between culture, social interests, and the

exploitation of nature is urgently needed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of environmental issues and formulate more effective conservation strategies.

Literary works can serve as powerful and illuminating spaces for understanding this complex relationship because literature authentically represents various aspects of human life, including environmental issues and the multifaceted relationship between humans and nature. Through the sophisticated deployment of characters, plot development, setting, conflict, and specific symbols, literary works can vividly depict how humans conceptualize nature, the forms of exploitation they engage in, and the consequences that arise from these actions. One contemporary literary work that critically and compellingly addresses these pressing issues is the short story “The Curse of the Jati Dragon” (Kutukan Naga Jati) by Satriya (2025), published by Cipta Prima Nusantara in a collection bearing the same title. This literary text provides a rich and nuanced narrative for examining the cultural and ethical dimensions of environmental exploitation, making it a highly relevant object of study for understanding the relationship between deforestation, cultural practices, and ecological awareness in the Indonesian context.

The short story “The Curse of the Jati Dragon” vividly depicts the complex relationship between humans and forests in relation to power dynamics, aspirations for social status, and beliefs in supernatural forces. The forest in this short story plays a crucial role in intensifying the escalating conflict between human interests and natural systems. The protagonist’s overwhelming desire to extract valuable resources from the forest results in profound and far-reaching consequences for both environmental balance and human life itself. This conflict is particularly compelling to examine because it illustrates how human ambition and the systematic exploitation of nature can escalate into broader ecological problems with devastating and enduring effects. The narrative thus effectively functions as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked anthropocentrism and the inevitable consequences of prioritizing short-term personal gain over long-term environmental sustainability (Benson & Craig, 2017; Nosek, 2025; Purdey, 2023; Zekavat, 2026b, 2026a).

To adequately understand this multifaceted issue, this study employs an ecocritical perspective as its primary theoretical framework (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Ecocriticism systematically examines the relationship between literary works and the environment by focusing on the representation of nature, the relationship between humans and the environment, and ecological issues that emerge in literary texts (Sulistyorini et al., 2025). Through this analytical approach, the exploitation of the forest depicted in “The Curse of the Jati Dragon” can be examined as a critique of human behavior that systematically prioritizes personal interests, power accumulation, and social status enhancement over environmental sustainability and the well-being of future generations. Ecocriticism provides essential theoretical tools for deconstructing the underlying ideologies that enable such exploitation while simultaneously creating opportunities to interpret literary texts as environmental documents containing ecological messages and critical insights. Thus, this approach not only deepens the understanding of the literary text itself but also illuminates the broader human–nature relationship in contemporary society.

Based on the comprehensive discussion presented above, this study aims to analyze the representation of the relationship between humans and nature in the short story “The Curse of the Jati Dragon,” specifically regarding forest exploitation as a means of attaining social status and political power. This study also aims to uncover forms of ecological criticism conveyed

through the conflicts, symbols, and consequences of forest exploitation depicted in the short story. The urgency of this research lies in its potential to bridge the existing gap between literary studies and environmental discourse by demonstrating how cultural narratives can illuminate pressing ecological issues that are often overlooked in purely scientific or policy-oriented analyses. The novelty of this research lies in its application of ecocritical theory to a contemporary Indonesian short story that has not yet received substantial scholarly attention, thereby contributing to the growing body of ecocritical scholarship within the Indonesian literary context. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how literary works can effectively represent environmental issues while simultaneously reflecting the complex and often problematic relationship between human interests, culture, power structures, and environmental sustainability. The specific objectives are: (1) to identify and analyze representations of forest exploitation in the short story, (2) to examine the ecological critique embedded in the narrative's conflicts and symbols, and (3) to interpret the pedagogical and sociological relevance of these representations in fostering ecological awareness among readers. The benefits of this research extend across multiple domains: academically, it enriches the field of ecocritical literary studies in Indonesia; pedagogically, it provides a model for utilizing literary texts in environmental education; and practically, it offers insights that may inform more culturally sensitive approaches to environmental conservation and policy formulation. By achieving these aims, this research contributes to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how literary narratives can shape ecological consciousness and serve as effective instruments of social critique that remain highly relevant to contemporary environmental challenges in Indonesia and beyond.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with an ecocritical approach to analyze environmental representations and the relationship between humans and nature in the short story "The Curse of the Jati Dragon" (Kutukan Naga Jati) by Teguh Satriya, published by Cipta Prima Nusantara in 2025. The qualitative approach was selected because it enabled an in-depth interpretation of textual data, particularly the meanings, symbols, and ideological perspectives embedded within the literary narrative. The research used a library research approach, with the primary data source consisting of written texts. The data included words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative elements related to environmental themes, human–nature relationships, and ecological exploitation. The sample was selected purposively by focusing on textual units that represented forest exploitation, conflicts between humans and nature, ecological symbols, and the consequences of environmental degradation. This sampling technique ensured that the selected data were relevant to the research objectives and theoretical framework.

The primary data source was the short story "The Curse of the Jati Dragon" by Teguh Satriya (2025), published by Cipta Prima Nusantara. Secondary data sources included books, scholarly articles, and previous studies related to ecocriticism, environmental literature, environmental ethics, and relevant ecological studies obtained from academic databases. These sources were used to support the interpretation of textual findings within broader literary and ecological discussions. In this qualitative study, the researcher served as the main research instrument by collecting, categorizing, and interpreting the data based on the applied theoretical

framework. Data credibility was strengthened through theoretical triangulation by comparing the findings with relevant ecocritical concepts proposed by Buell (1995), Garrard (2012), and Endraswara (2016). The analysis was also supported by direct quotations from the primary text to demonstrate the basis of interpretation.

Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques. The data collection process involved several stages: (1) reading the short story repeatedly to understand its narrative structure, characters, and themes; (2) identifying and recording textual elements related to human–nature relationships, forest exploitation, and ecological criticism; (3) categorizing the identified data based on emerging ecological themes, including anthropocentrism, symbolic representations of nature, and environmental consequences; and (4) organizing the collected data into thematic categories for further analysis. Microsoft Word was used to document and organize the collected textual data.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction involved selecting and organizing relevant textual data according to the research objectives. Data display involved presenting the categorized data to facilitate interpretation, while conclusion drawing involved identifying patterns, themes, and meanings related to the representation of environmental issues. The analysis was conducted by linking textual findings with ecocritical concepts proposed by Buell (1995), Garrard (2012), and Endraswara (2016), as well as Keraf's (2010) environmental ethics. The study applied content analysis with an ecocritical orientation to examine the representation of nature, ecological values, and environmental critiques within the literary text. The findings were presented in a descriptive narrative supported by textual quotations and relevant theoretical references to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between humans and nature, forest exploitation, and ecological criticism in the short story.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ecological Critique of Forest Exploitation in the Name of Social Interests and Power

Through Garrard's (2012) ecocritical perspective and Keraf's (2010) environmental ethics, the short story "The Curse of the Jati Dragon" offers a scathing and sophisticated critique of the human mindset that views nature as an object to be controlled and exploited for personal gain. From an ecocritical perspective, the relationship between humans and nature is one of the key issues that can be examined through literary works. Nature in this short story is not merely used as a passive story setting or decorative backdrop; rather, it is intrinsically and dynamically linked to the lives, actions, moral choices, and conflicts experienced by the characters. This perspective reveals how the narrative positions nature not as a passive backdrop, but as an active agent in the story's moral conflict and ecological messaging. The forest, in particular, functions as a living entity that responds to human actions, thereby challenging the anthropocentric assumption that nature is a passive resource awaiting human exploitation. Meanwhile, Keraf (2010) explains that environmental issues are closely tied to how humans treat nature and the ethical frameworks that guide such treatment. When nature is viewed solely in terms of the benefits it can provide to humans, exploitation becomes easier to justify and rationalize. The short story powerfully illustrates this justificatory logic

through the actions of its protagonist, Kasbi, whose moral reasoning is progressively corrupted by his political ambitions and material desires.

In this short story, the exploitation of the forest is driven by the ambition to gain profit and social status. The forest becomes a means to an end used to achieve Kasbi's political goals of winning the village head election. This situation reflects an anthropocentric perspective—a viewpoint that places human interests and desires at the center of all considerations regarding how nature is treated. Within this worldview, human interests are deemed categorically more important than the existence, integrity, and sustainability of ecosystems. Consequently, trees, soil, roots, and water sources lose their intrinsic ecological value and are viewed solely in terms of the extractable benefits that can be derived from them. This anthropocentrism is identified as the root cause of the environmental degradation depicted in the narrative, representing a broader ideological critique of modern society's relationship with the natural world. The story thus functions as a literary intervention that exposes the moral and ecological bankruptcy of such a worldview.

Ecocriticism of literature can highlight this issue through its depiction of changes in the condition of the forest following logging activities. The exploitation carried out by Kasbi and the people working for him caused environmental changes that had previously been an important part of the village community's life. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"After almost a year of Kasbi and his friends being busy in the forest, there is a change in the forest of Kasbi village. The place that was once cool and shady, now looks so arid, shady, and really concerning. In fact, not only *jati* trees are contested. The soil was dissected, the burly teak roots were also dismantled, transported on trucks. Along the way, the forest now looks painful."

This powerful quote illustrates a stark and dramatic transformation of the forest from a cool, lush, and thriving environment into an arid, damaged, and degraded one as a direct result of human activity. This transformation serves as a concrete, observable sign that systematic exploitation has had a direct and irreversible impact on the environmental balance. Importantly, the depiction of the forest as "seeming to be in pain" is a form of personification that conveys the profound impression that nature suffers as a result of human actions. Nature is portrayed as the suffering party that bears the losses and becomes the primary victim of human ambition and greed. The use of this expressive language reinforces the ecological critique because it directs readers to view the forest's destruction from a perspective closer to nature's own condition, rather than solely from the standpoint of human gain or economic benefit. This narrative strategy effectively cultivates empathy for the non-human world and challenges readers to reconsider their own relationship with the environment.

In addition to the felled trees, the destruction is also depicted through the acts of digging up the soil and uprooting teak trees. This depiction shows that the exploitation in the story has affected vital parts of the forest ecosystem. Trees are treated not as part of an ecological system that serves a function for the lives of other creatures, but rather as commodities that can be harvested and transported for profit. In this regard, ecocritical criticism does not stop at the act of cutting down trees but also targets the mindset underlying such actions—namely, the assumption that nature can be exploited as long as it provides benefits to humans. This reduction of the forest to its purely economic value is a central target of the story's ecological critique, reflecting what many scholars have identified as the "commodification of nature" that

characterizes modern capitalist societies (Harvey, 2010; Castree, 2003). The story thus aligns with broader critical discourses in environmental studies that challenge the reduction of ecological systems to mere economic resources.

Criticism of this exploitation is intensified as teak trees that are hundreds of years old—and which are linked to the community's water sources—are being cut down. This situation is evident in the following excerpt:

"I don't dare. It's a teak tree... The teak age is hundreds of years. Between the roots, flows quickly to become the source of livelihood for the villagers."

This passage highlights the profound ecological and social value of the teak trees for the community. The presence of these centuries-old trees is inseparable from the water sources that sustain the villagers' livelihoods. Thus, cutting down these trees has the potential to cause impacts far broader than the mere loss of a single plant species. Damage to the trees can also disrupt water sources and ultimately affect the lives of the community. The narrative thus establishes a direct causal link between the destruction of old-growth trees and the threat to communal well-being. This finding is consistent with research by Rochmayanto et al. (2023) and Golar et al. (2024), who demonstrated that deforestation in Indonesia has direct and measurable impacts on community livelihoods and access to clean water. The story's depiction of this ecological relationship is therefore not merely fictional but resonates with documented empirical realities of deforestation in Indonesia.

From an ecocritical perspective, this passage highlights the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. The community benefits from the forest's existence, while the community's survival also depends on the preservation of the forest's condition. When personal interests disregard this relationship, environmental damage can ultimately have repercussions for humans. This aligns with Keraf's (2010) view on the importance of considering the moral relationship between humans and the environment. Nature holds value that must be respected because its existence is integral to the continuity of life. The story demonstrates this moral principle through the disastrous consequences that follow the disruption of the natural order. This aligns with the concept of "environmental ethics" as articulated by scholars such as Leopold (1949) and Naess (1973), who argue for the intrinsic value of nature and the moral obligation of humans to respect ecological systems.

However, Kasbi disregarded that relationship because of his ambition to attain political office. This is evident in the following quote:

"Kasbi is already lusting to win in the Pilkade. He asked for the help of smart people so that his plan would run smoothly. He was willing to pay carpenters from outside the area. Of course, the mercenary does not know the history of the sacred-year-old teak tree."

This quote explicitly links forest exploitation to Kasbi's ambition to win the village head election. The forest is exploited as a means to obtain capital, which is then used for political purposes. This situation reveals a shift in the value of nature from something possessing ecological, historical, and cultural value to something valued solely for its economic benefits. Kasbi's actions highlight how political ambition can corrupt environmental stewardship and how the pursuit of power can override ethical considerations regarding nature. This finding is consistent with research by Maxton-Lee (2018), who demonstrated that deforestation in Indonesia often persists because of political and economic interests that override environmental protection mechanisms. The story thus offers a fictional representation

of a real-world phenomenon, demonstrating the power of literature to illuminate complex socio-environmental issues.

Kasbi's decision to hire loggers from outside the region also carries significant implications for the conflict between humans and nature. These workers were unaware of the history and sacred significance of the teak trees slated for felling. This lack of knowledge severed the social and cultural ties between the community and its local environment. Trees that held historical value for the local community and were integral to their livelihood were treated merely as timber to be cut down and sold. The use of external labor underscores the decontextualization and commodification of nature, where local ecological knowledge is deliberately ignored for profit. This reflects what Scheidel and Work (2018) identify as "green grabbing," where powerful actors exploit natural resources without regard for local cultural values or ecological sustainability. The story thus serves as a critique of the ways in which economic and political interests can systematically erode local ecological knowledge and cultural practices.

The use of labor from outside the region also illustrates how economic interests can alter human relationships with nature. Workers are positioned as the agents carrying out the logging operations, while the primary objective lies in Kasbi's interests. Thus, nature becomes an object caught between political interests and economic gain. An ecocritical perspective helps reveal that this issue is fundamentally one of power relations that determine who has the right to exploit nature and for what purposes it is used. Kasbi's actions represent a form of "power grabbing" that treats the environment as a disposable resource. This analysis is supported by research by Duguma et al. (2019), who argue that deforestation is fundamentally an "environmental behavior" shaped by power dynamics, socio-economic conditions, and cultural values. The story thus confirms the theoretical insight that environmental degradation cannot be understood apart from the power structures that enable and perpetuate it.

The consequences of these actions become apparent once the giant teak trees are successfully felled and Kasbi reaps economic benefits:

"The dawn has dawned. Kasbi and Nine sudag carpenters succeeded in overthrowing the giant teak... Really, Kasbi feels happy. He has obtained one hundred and fifty million in additional capital."

This quote highlights a stark contrast between the state of nature and human satisfaction. On the one hand, a giant teak tree has been felled; on the other hand, Kasbi actually feels happy because he has earned money. This contrast serves as a critique of a mindset that measures success based on economic gain without considering the resulting ecological damage. Kasbi's happiness stems from the profit he earned after exploiting natural resources. This juxtaposition of ecological loss and personal gain is a powerful indictment of materialistic values and the reduction of well-being to economic measures. The story thus resonates with critiques of gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of progress that ignores environmental degradation and social costs, as articulated by ecological economists such as Daly (1996) and Costanza et al. (2014).

The sum of one hundred fifty million in the quote also illustrates the commodification of nature. The teak tree, which took hundreds of years to grow, is converted into economic value that can be exploited for political gain. The tree's ecological, historical, and social value is disregarded in the face of financial interests. From Garrard's (2012) ecocritical perspective,

such conditions reveal a fundamental problem in the relationship between humans and the environment when nature is treated as an object situated outside the realm of human moral concerns. The story critiques this reductionist view by showing its catastrophic results. This finding is consistent with research by Kumar et al. (2022), who documented the long-term environmental impacts of deforestation, including loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, and disruption of hydrological cycles. The story thus provides a literary representation of these empirically documented ecological consequences.

Kasbi's behavior also demonstrates that power can be a driving force behind environmental exploitation. His desire to win the local election led him to view the forest as a source of capital to achieve his political goals. Thus, environmental exploitation in the short story is intertwined with power, economics, and personal interests. The narrative suggests that the greater Kasbi's ambition to secure a position, the greater the sacrifice imposed on the environment. This dynamic reflects a broader societal issue where the pursuit of power often comes at the expense of ecological health. This aligns with research by Kyere-Boateng and Marek (2021), who employed the DPSIR (Drivers-Pressures-State-Impacts-Responses) framework to demonstrate that social, economic, and political drivers are often the root causes of deforestation. The story thus offers a narrative illustration of these drivers in action.

The Relevance of Ecocritical Studies in Building Environmental Awareness

An ecocritical analysis of the short story "The Curse of the Jati Dragon" holds pedagogical and sociological relevance in raising readers' awareness of environmental issues. Amid the rise of various forms of ecological damage, literature can serve as a space for reflection to understand the relationship between humans and nature through the characters' experiences, conflicts, symbols, and the consequences depicted in the story. Through storytelling, environmental issues which are often perceived as distant and abstract can be presented as experiences more closely tied to human life. Readers are invited to recognize that actions taken toward nature have consequences that ultimately affect human life. The story thus functions as a form of environmental education, fostering empathy for the non-human world and challenging readers to reconsider their own relationship with nature. This pedagogical dimension is supported by research by Sulistyorini et al. (2025), who demonstrated that ecocritical approaches to literary texts can effectively foster environmental awareness among readers.

This short story fosters ecological awareness by critiquing the human perspective that prioritizes personal interests over environmental sustainability. Kasbi represents the kind of person who views the forest solely in terms of the benefits that can be extracted to achieve specific goals. The forest is seen as a resource that can be sacrificed to gain profit and status. This perspective reflects a form of anthropocentrism that places humans at the center of all concerns, while nature is positioned as an object to be controlled. By embodying this worldview, Kasbi serves as a cautionary figure, demonstrating the destructive potential of unchecked ambition. This finding is consistent with research by Endraswara (2016), who argues that ecocritical analysis of Indonesian literature can reveal the cultural values and worldviews that shape environmental behavior. The story thus provides a concrete literary example of the anthropocentric worldview that many environmental scholars have identified as a root cause of ecological degradation.

Ecological awareness in the short story is established through the use of the dragon myth as a symbol that connects human life with the forces of nature. This myth does not merely serve as a supernatural element to build narrative tension, but can also be interpreted as a representation of the consequences of human actions on the environment. In ecocriticism, the presence of the dragon reinforces the idea that nature possesses an order and balance that cannot be ignored. When humans take actions that disrupt this balance, the consequences will manifest in ways that threaten human life itself. The dragon myth thus acts as a powerful metaphor for ecological retribution and the inescapability of environmental consequences. This symbolic dimension aligns with Buell's (1995) concept of "environmental imagination," which explores how literary texts represent the relationship between humans and the natural world through symbolic and mythic elements. The story thus demonstrates the power of myth and symbol to convey ecological messages that resonate with readers on an emotional and moral level.

This is evident in the following excerpt:

"In the middle of his deep sleep, Kasbi had a dream. It was like being visited by a big snake. The snake exactly resembled a giant dragon... 'Bring it back....Bring it back... "you!" cried the Giant Dragon. 'Or will it be a gift for your children and grandchildren at some point?!' the giant dragon grew angrier."

The presence of the dragon in Kasbi's dream can be understood as a form of reprimand for his actions. The command to "return" indicates a demand to restore something that has been taken from nature. This word is significant because it shows that environmental destruction in the story is not viewed as an act without consequences. There is a cause-and-effect relationship between human actions and the state of nature, which in turn threatens human life. The dragon's demand for "return" emphasizes the need for ecological restitution and the concept of environmental debt. This aligns with Garrard's (2012) concept of "apocalypse" in ecocriticism, which explores how literary texts depict the consequences of environmental destruction through catastrophic events and supernatural interventions. The dragon's appearance thus functions as an apocalyptic warning that forces Kasbi—and by extension the reader—to confront the consequences of his actions.

The dragon symbol can also be interpreted as a representation of the power of nature, which humans cannot fully control. When humans feel they have power over the forest, the dragon's presence reverses that dynamic. Kasbi, who previously felt he had control over the forest, becomes the one facing the threat. This shift in position serves as a critique of human arrogance in how we treat nature. Humans who feel they have power over the environment ultimately face the consequences of their own actions. This narrative element powerfully challenges the anthropocentric belief in human dominance over nature. This finding is consistent with research by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), who argue that ecocriticism challenges the anthropocentric assumptions of traditional literary criticism and seeks to recover the voices and perspectives of the non-human world. The story thus participates in this broader ecocritical project by giving voice to nature through the symbol of the dragon.

The threat to Kasbi's children and grandchildren also broadens the story's ecological significance. Environmental damage does not end with the generation that engages in exploitation but has the potential to be passed down to subsequent generations. From an ecocritical perspective, this situation relates to the concept of intergenerational justice—namely, the responsibility of the current generation to preserve the environment so that future

generations can continue to enjoy and benefit from it. This short story conveys this idea through a personal threat, allowing readers to view the impact of environmental destruction as an issue tied to the future of families and society. This intergenerational dimension adds a profound ethical weight to the story's message. This aligns with the concept of "sustainable development" as articulated by the Brundtland Commission (1987), which emphasizes the responsibility of the present generation to meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. The story thus engages with this concept through its narrative of intergenerational justice and ecological responsibility.

This portrayal of a threatened future is further reinforced through the depiction of a flood disaster and human suffering in Kasbi's dream:

"There, he saw babies floating, crying, their faces blue, washed away by the flood... Their houses were submerged. There is no pleasure, no happiness is presented, only the sight of misery."

This description shows that environmental damage has social and humanitarian consequences. Floods are depicted as natural events that are part of a chain of consequences linked to human actions toward the forest. The presence of infant victims reinforces the impression that the most vulnerable groups may bear the consequences of decisions made by others. Thus, the environmental issue in the short story evolves into a matter of social justice. The graphic depiction of suffering serves to evoke a strong emotional response, compelling readers to confront the human cost of ecological destruction. This finding is consistent with research by Golar et al. (2024), who demonstrated that deforestation in Indonesia can lead to natural disasters and community suffering, creating a cycle of socio-ecological degradation. The story thus provides a narrative representation of these empirically documented socio-ecological cycles.

The depiction of the baby being swept away also carries emotional weight in raising the reader's awareness. A baby symbolizes life in its earliest stages, lacking the ability to determine the environmental conditions it will inherit. When this group becomes the victim, the story reveals the injustice arising from the actions of previous generations. This narrative strategy makes ecological issues more concrete and emotionally resonant, allowing readers to feel the human impact of environmental damage. This is a key strength of the story, as it translates abstract ecological concepts into visceral human experiences. This aligns with Buell's (1995) argument that effective environmental literature must create a sense of "place" and emotional connection to the natural world. The story achieves this through its vivid depiction of suffering and its focus on the most vulnerable members of the community.

The depiction of the flood also shows that environmental destruction can erase various aspects of life that were previously considered normal. Submerged homes, disrupted lives, and the loss of happiness demonstrate that environmental destruction impacts human living spaces. Nature and society do not exist in two separate realms. Changes in forest conditions can affect water, housing, health, safety, and the sustainability of people's lives. This relationship reinforces the ecocritical idea of the interconnectedness between ecological conditions and human life. The flood scene powerfully illustrates this interconnectedness, showing that the fate of nature and humanity is inseparable. This aligns with the ecological concept of "interconnectedness" as articulated by deep ecology scholars such as Naess (1973), who argue

that all living beings are part of an interconnected web of life. The story thus reflects this ecological worldview through its narrative of interconnected fates.

In addition to the symbols of the dragon and natural disasters, ecological awareness in the short story is also built through the physical transformation experienced by Kasbi. The human body, which transforms to resemble wood, becomes a powerful symbol of the relationship between humans and nature. This transformation is evident in the following excerpt:

"Kasbi is lying on a giant teak root. Kasbi's eyes widened. He found his fingers, the tip of his nose, the edge of his lips, the curve of his ears, almost all over his body stiff, broken, petal, growing large warts, hard as wood."

The transformation of Kasbi's body into something "like wood" illustrates the blurring of the clear boundary between humans and nature. Kasbi, who previously treated trees as objects from which to profit, undergoes a transformation that makes his body resemble the very objects he had exploited. This symbolism can be understood as a reversal of the relationship between humans and nature. Humans who seek to dominate nature ultimately become part of the very thing they once exploited. This powerful metaphor suggests an ecological equivalence: the harm done to nature is harm done to oneself. This aligns with Garrard's (2012) concept of "ecosomatics," which explores the relationship between the human body and the environment in literary texts. The story thus demonstrates the potential of literature to represent ecological relationships through bodily metaphors and transformations.

This transformation also reveals the moral consequences of Kasbi's actions. In the story, the damage inflicted upon the teak tree is met with a response in the form of changes occurring to the perpetrator's body. This cause-and-effect relationship conveys the message that human actions toward nature have consequences. Although these consequences are presented through elements of fantasy and myth, the ecological meaning conveyed remains relevant to the reality of human life—namely, that environmental destruction can ultimately threaten the very survival of humanity itself. The story uses magical realism to make this ecological principle tangible and unforgettable. This finding is consistent with research by Endraswara (2016), who argues that Indonesian literature often uses magical and mythological elements to convey ecological messages and critiques. The story thus participates in this tradition of using magical realism for environmental critique.

Kasbi's body, which turns into wood, can also be understood as a symbol of the loss of humanity caused by greed. Previously, Kasbi pursued political power and economic gain at the expense of the environment. After engaging in exploitation, his body actually loses its human characteristics and becomes as rigid as the very materials he had been exploiting all along. This dehumanization reflects the moral decay that accompanies environmental exploitation, suggesting that harming nature ultimately diminishes one's own humanity. This aligns with Keraf's (2010) environmental ethics, which argues that environmental destruction is ultimately a form of self-destruction because humans are part of the ecological systems they exploit. The story thus reinforces this ethical perspective through its powerful bodily symbolism.

From a pedagogical perspective, these symbols can serve as a means to foster ecological understanding among readers. Environmental messages are conveyed through the characters' experiences and the story's conflicts, giving readers the space to interpret for themselves the relationship between human actions and their consequences. This approach allows

environmental issues to be understood through emotional, moral, and social dimensions. Readers do not merely learn that forest exploitation can cause damage; they are also invited to imagine the suffering that may result from such damage. The story thus functions as an effective tool for ecological pedagogy, engaging readers on multiple levels. This pedagogical potential is supported by research by Sulistyorini et al. (2025), who demonstrated that ecocritical approaches to literary texts can effectively foster environmental awareness and ecological consciousness among readers. The story thus has practical implications for environmental education in Indonesia and beyond.

The sociological relevance of the short story is also evident in its critique of the relationship between the environment and power structures. Forest exploitation in the story is linked to Kasbi's ambition to gain status. This means that environmental damage does not always arise from society's need for natural resources but can be driven by the interests of individuals or groups with specific social and political objectives. Through the character of Kasbi, the short story illustrates how power can influence the way a person treats the environment. This critique aligns with broader sociological analyses of how power dynamics shape environmental outcomes. This finding is consistent with research by Maxton-Lee (2018), who demonstrated that deforestation in Indonesia is often driven by political and economic interests rather than genuine community needs. The story thus provides a narrative illustration of these sociological dynamics, demonstrating the relevance of literary analysis to environmental sociology.

This short story also demonstrates that environmental awareness is linked to an awareness of the cultural values that have developed within a community. The teak tree in the story has a history, a sacred significance, and a connection to water sources that are integral to the residents' lives. When these values are ignored, environmental destruction occurs more easily. Thus, from the story's perspective, nature conservation is linked to respect for local knowledge, cultural values, and the community's historical relationship with the environment in which they live. The story advocates for a return to traditional ecological knowledge as a pathway to sustainability. This aligns with research by Scheidel and Work (2018), who argue that respect for local cultural values and knowledge systems is essential for effective environmental conservation. The story thus has practical implications for conservation policy in Indonesia, suggesting that environmental protection must be culturally sensitive and responsive to local values.

Consequently, "The Curse of the Jati Dragon" uses myths, disasters, and bodily transformations as narrative devices to illustrate the consequences of environmental exploitation. The dragon serves as a warning against human actions; the flood illustrates the social consequences of environmental destruction; and Kasbi's physical transformation symbolizes the reversal of the relationship between humans and nature. These three elements are interrelated in fostering an awareness that the sustainability of human life depends on the sustainability of the environment. The integrated use of these symbols creates a cohesive and impactful ecological narrative. This finding contributes to the growing body of ecocritical scholarship that examines the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment in the Indonesian context (Sulistyorini et al., 2025; Endraswara, 2016). The story thus represents a significant contribution to Indonesian environmental literature and ecocritical discourse.

Ultimately, an ecocritical study of this short story demonstrates that literary works can serve as a space for reflection on ecological issues related to social and cultural life. Criticism of forest exploitation is conveyed through conflicts closely tied to human ambition, yet the consequences extend to affect the future of the next generation. This short story invites readers to reexamine how humans view nature, especially when the pursuit of power and profit begins to overshadow environmental sustainability. This awareness is crucial because preserving nature is fundamentally linked to ensuring the survival of humanity. The story's enduring message is a call for a more harmonious and respectful relationship between humans and the natural world. The practical implications of this study are significant: it demonstrates that literary analysis can contribute to environmental awareness and education, that cultural narratives can inform conservation policy, and that ecocritical approaches can bridge the gap between the humanities and environmental sciences. As such, this study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary field of environmental humanities and offers insights that are relevant to scholars, educators, policymakers, and practitioners concerned with environmental sustainability in Indonesia and beyond.

CONCLUSION

Based on the ecocritical analysis of the short story “The Curse of the Jati Dragon” by Teguh Satriya (2025), three main conclusions can be drawn. First, the story portrays a profound cultural ecological deviation in which the forest is systematically reduced to an economic commodity to support political ambitions and social status attainment, reflecting the dangerous prioritization of short-term material gain over long-term environmental sustainability. Second, the ecocritical approach successfully reveals the anthropocentric ideology of the protagonist, Kasbi, who exploits sacred forest areas for political interests while disregarding the rights of nonhuman entities and damaging community water sources. This environmental destruction ultimately triggers ecological and social catastrophes, demonstrating that the exploitation of nature can generate severe consequences for human existence. Third, the relevance of this ecocritical analysis lies in its role as a medium for fostering critical ecological awareness through aesthetic representation. The dragon myth and the protagonist’s physical transformation into a wood-like figure represent ecosomatic suffering, reinforcing the moral message that the exploitation of nature for sociopolitical power ultimately threatens human survival. The story thus serves as a powerful cautionary narrative that encourages readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world.

For future research, several recommendations can be proposed. First, this ecocritical framework should be applied to a broader corpus of Indonesian literary works, particularly those originating from regions experiencing significant deforestation, to enrich the development of ecocritical literary studies in Indonesia. Second, comparative studies across diverse Indonesian cultural contexts could reveal varying perspectives on human–nature relationships and contribute to the formulation of more culturally sensitive conservation policies. Third, further empirical research is needed to examine the pedagogical effectiveness of utilizing literary works for environmental education in schools and universities. Fourth, reception studies exploring how readers interpret ecological symbols and narratives could provide valuable insights into the influence of ecocritical literature on public environmental awareness. Finally, interdisciplinary research integrating ecocritical literary analysis with

environmental science, policy studies, and sociology could generate more comprehensive understandings of deforestation and provide complementary perspectives for addressing complex environmental challenges in Indonesia.

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