

Nature and Urban Life – A Juxtaposition in the Short Story Anthology *Keinginan Kecil Di Celah Daun*

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ABSTRACT

Literature and the environment have had a long history of relationship. Indeed, our lives are defined by what is around us and what we find in front of us, whether this means accepting, dealing with or changing it. In *Keinginan Kecil Di Celah Daun*, various issues of sustainability and the attempts of urban man to deal with them, are creatively highlighted by the writer. In this anthology of short stories, the author illuminates about the environment especially flora and fauna. Moreover, the elements of nature are well portrayed in this anthology. This study is focused on the manner in which environmental issues are utilized by Balakrishnan to successfully present an urban landscape using 12 short stories from *Keinginan Kecil Di Celah Daun*. Balakrishnan has successfully injected some understanding of urban life through literature. The themes and issues relating to city life are intriguing. An analysis of Balakrishnan's short stories shows that the interplay of urban life is influenced by the characters created or vice versa. This study shows that Balakrishnan consistently created an image reflecting the psychological and sociological burden of modern society and post-modernity in Malaysia through her short stories. It is appropriate to suggest that the stories are loaded with knowledge and information; stories such as these are able to sow

seeds of awareness of the need to appreciate and take care of our environment. Moreover, there are lot of other literary works which deal with similar themes and issues of nature across the globe.

Keywords: Balakrishnan, nature, short stories, sustainability, urban life

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INTRODUCTION

Environment, is a topical issue under much scrutiny. The attitude of mankind towards its environment and the massive worldwide exploitation of nature has led to serious ecological problems that threaten the sustainability of the environment (Sobian, 2011) and the very existence of man himself (Schumacher, 2011). A closer examination of the urban lifescape reveals the deterioration of man's relationship with his environment and its natural processes at both physical and cognitive levels. The foundering of harmony between human beings and nature is a direct effect of the lifestyle choices of the urban populace. This is very often reflected in their behaviour towards the environment, an attitude based on sketchy knowledge and shallow understanding of natural processes, caused in part by too much engagement in the pursuit of life (Hester, 2006). Ruthless exploitation of natural resources for maximisation of profits has resulted in the urban man's losing his innate connectedness to nature (Rahman & Hashim, 2010).

Literature and the environment have had a long history of relationship. Indeed, our lives are defined by what is around us and what we find in front of us, whether this means accepting, dealing with or changing it. It is clear that nearly everything that a human does is in fact stands as a response to the environment. To illustrate this, one can see that, the author, Balakrishnan (2003a) is alive to every movement of the flora and fauna around her, and the sky and the clouds. She makes excellent use of

nature, making it part of her narration. Her artistry is revealed in making nature reflect the moods of men. Also, the environment-friendly productions are stated in her short stories. She further charmingly describes with her protagonists that she is against the destruction of the forests and nature. Zainal (2016) claimed that "literary works, after all, are literally and/or imaginatively situated in places usually characterised by a number of environmental attributes and conditions" (p. 38). Moreover, Roos (2011) said that environmental literature should stress the link between nature and culture and relate them to more global perspectives. Various research studies and their findings are found related to literature and environment carried out in different languages across the globe. Another scholar of environmental literature, Simal-Gonzalez (2020) paid attention to the ecocritical potential of Asian American writing through natural elements such as mountains and flora. Hence, environment and nature are associated with the literature.

Ergin (2017) argued that thinking across established categories of nature/culture led to a profound shift in our thinking about the (post) human as well as the nonhuman environment. Mamat (2009) proposed that the utilisation of the elements of nature as part of a writer's literary work resources was not only to bring life to the writing landscape but also had other challenging roles to play. It is able to strengthen the literary work for its use as imagery, it is also a platform for thought processes, and to a certain extent a demonstration of semiotic aspects that

require perceptiveness to define or interpret, on the part of readers. Balakrishnan in this context reflects that:

...In all honesty, the green nature beauty of this green Earth is an undeniable inspiration... although it will not be true if I were to say that my writing began because I wanted to protect the fate of the thousands of flora and fauna that surround my soul... No that wasn't what made me write initially, but now I am drawn towards that. (Balakrishnan, 2003b, p. 7).

The writer's statement here is a clear indication of the dominant inclination in her writing; her stories are anchored on a desire to weave themes or backgrounds imbued with elements of nature. In discussing the same issue, Maniam is of the opinion that "in all her short stories, she has been able to put forward the need to conserve the environment" (Maniam, 2003, pp. 9-10).

Another researcher also comments on the preponderance of elements of nature in Balakrishnan's writing: "... an aspect that is obvious in the stories of Balakrishnan is the seeming inclination to talk about the environment, its flora and fauna. In fact, nature has an intrinsic part to play in her stories. She has this tendency of integrating aspects of nature in her writing." (Raman, 2010). This paper is an attempt to explore the stories in *Keinginan Kecil di Celah Daun* from the writer's perspective of ecocriticism.

Background of the Study

In Malaysian literature, the environmental discourse, on environmental issues is getting some attention. Most of the studies done in line with what Buell (2005) characterised as "the second wave environmental criticism". Mamat (2009) had done a number of research studies on the environment in Malay literary works. Her research in *Jurnal Melayu* 2015 under the title "Environmental Ethics from Natives' Perspective in Novels Written by Jong Chian Lai" analyse the ethical interactions between the indigenous community in Sarawak and nature and how they are translated into creative literature. Her previous research in 2012, titled "Persaingan Antara Spesies Dalam Novel Sarawak" studies competition between species that includes competition among those of the same species, as well as competition between different ones that Sarawak writers depict in their novels. This study finds that the competition depicted in the novels are mainly driven by interests and the need for survival. The environment discourse is found in Chinese literature too. Lee (2019) in the article, *The Silence of Animals: Writing on the Edge of Anthropomorphism in Contemporary Chinese Literature* stated that the traditional cultural writings in Chinese literature had shifted to environmental issues and natural elements in premodern literary works. The author also clarified that in modern Chinese literature, the role of nature characterisation especially animal characters were found less. Moreover, the author said,

“No animal characters leap out of the pages of modern Chinese literature” (Lee, 2019, p. 1). Even in Australian literature, these can be seen. Potter (2005) had mentioned about the environmental awareness in Australian literature. When compared to other pieces of literature mentioned here, Malaysian literature has more concern towards environmental issues.

Zainal (2016) addressed environmental concerns, in four contemporary Malaysian novels in English. He argued that the writers exhibited a concerned attitude towards the environment, positioning their work as ‘lessons’ in nation-building, attesting to the tensions inherent in developing a country while maintaining and protecting the environment. Hashim and Faizal (2016) research titled *Psychogeography of Kuala Lumpur in Nassury Ibrahim’s Selected Poems* is related to this work. In this research, psychogeography was used as an analytical tool to examine how Kuala Lumpur affects the mental states and behaviours of the people living in the heart of the urban city. Hashim and Faizal (2016) found that Nassury’s poems dealt with many aspects of urban life which included poverty, pollution and humanity. Apart from Kuala Lumpur, other cities are influenced by the environment and nature. Morey and Crider (2019) in their book, *Hyperanimals: Inverting nature through ‘Pokemon Go’* stated the creator’s love of Tokyo and the interaction with wildlife. And also, how the natural elements are involved in creating it is presented. Zi et al. (2015) described the snowfield of China in the

famous poem *Words West of the Vineyard*. How the environment affected snowfield was described. Another Chinese literary contributor She (2001) mentioned the urban Beijing had changed due to technology and environment. It can be seen as, “Shameless Beijing has changed, cause of change: technology and environment...” (She, 2001, p. 193). Further, Thumboo labeled the urban, Changi in another way. The poet described the beach as, “Sea-snake swimming in his image in the water swallowing a poison grub” (Tiang, 2001, p. 22). The poem clearly shows how much the urban has been polluted.

Writings on urban areas in Malay literature are quite extensive but the study of them is somewhat less attentive. Some comprehensive studies of nature in literature are found to have no overall impact. Many studies on nature and environment in Malaysian literature world appear to be focusing more on man’s relationship with the environment in general and looking at how this relationship has impacted their life. Only Hashim and Faizal (2016) studied in Malay literature touched on the urban context. In fact, in modern and post-modern literature, the city is an almost universal setting.

An overview of the literature shows that Balakrishnan has been examined by some previous researchers. Suratman’s (2001) study titled “Karya-karya Cerpen Penulis Generasi Baru” found that Balakrishnan had used the flora and fauna of her environment as an image in most of her works. But this study does not take it deeper. Che

Man (2012) focused on the aspects of Balakrishnan's authorship style. This study only highlights the aspect of the stylistic presentation in the Balakrishnan short stories in *Keinginan Kecil Di Celah Daun* short stories. Kuppusamy (2014) had reviewed the elements of social phenomena in Balakrishnan works using sociological approaches. An overview of past studies shows that environmental issues are not widely discussed in these studies and the focus is more likely on other elements in this short story or Balakrishnan as an author.

This study is focused on the manner in which environmental issues are utilized by Balakrishnan to successfully present an urban landscape. The interplay of urban life and the complex questions of survival and sustainability are skilfully captured in literary documentation. Two aspects are the focal point of study in this paper: (i) the presence of urban landscape or towns in literature as a means to show an urban environment, and (ii) the characters portrayed in the stories as an instrument of presenting the essence of urban life and sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on text analysis. It is one of the research approaches used to collect information from a written or recorded text. Through this, the researcher read the selected anthology in depth to understand better what was said by the author to the audience or readers. The aim of using this was to describe the content, structure and function of the texts. The

vocabularies, themes or concepts found in the selected anthology were analysed using content analysis method since it suited to the present study. The researcher used the framework of content analysis proposed by Sundarabalu (2008). It is a framework which includes content exposure and content coverage. The exposure and coverage of the content provided in the text as phrases or vocabularies or themes or concepts can be identified easily. Moreover, the semantic interpretations are simple and easy to implement, hence this framework has been selected. No issues are faced while interpreting the data using this framework. Balakrishnan's short story published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka had been used to collect data for the purpose of predicting and analysing the relationship between literary and urban images. A sample study was done using 12 short stories from *Keinginan Kecil Di Celah Daun*. This study is qualitative in approach and analyses the stories according to the four phases prescribed for data definition by Titscher et al. (2000), general reading, analytical re-reading, clustering and organising of ideas, and interpreting ideas and deriving conclusions. Based on the qualitative and content analysis, the selected text was read, collected the required data, interpreted with ideas and analysed.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The existence of a city is often seen as in opposition to nature. But in eco-critic studies, the city has been seen part of the environment. This kind of study tends to explore the relationship between the city

and the ecosystem surrounding urban life in an effort to understand the city's lifestyle and culture. There are various perspectives created by the urbanization process affecting the social and economic, productivity, and the local governance of the communities that inhabit these urban areas. In this section, the discussion will see an overview of urban life in selected short stories either directly or indirectly.

Nature and Sustainability

Climate change, for instance, is a critical concern of modern day man, and this issue is succinctly underlined in the story 'Di Sepenjuru Pantai Peru'. At the core of this story is an orphaned baby sea lion named Inka against the backdrop of the El Nino- ravaged beaches of Punta San Juan in Peru. This natural disaster has rendered the beaches and sea-front inhospitable to a vast number of land and sea species. El Nino, the weather conditions that occur between the months of June to December caused by changes in wind patterns (Pidcock, 2014). Of extreme hot winds trigger shifts and reactions between cold and hot oceanic areas which in turn produce abnormally high sea temperatures is described in an evocative manner in the extract, "...Everything has changed. This place is looks different now. Before, this little peninsular was heaven to creatures like us... but now it has become hell, a burial ground." (Balakrishnan, 2003a, p. 83).

In this story, Balakrishnan provides the reader with an insight into the life of

an animal endangered by the attitude of a society that is oblivious to its environment and the deeper issues of sustainability. The character Inka concomitantly creates awareness for the El Nino phenomenon and its disastrous effects on aquatic life. It is through the woes of Inka that Balakrishnan is able to present a modern society that ignores and is indifferent towards environmental conservation and sustainability. The following extract is a case in point:

...Child, a lot of things cause El Nino. The main culprit is man's own greed. Thousands of trees are felled. Forests are destroyed. Poisonous gasses fill our air. The Earth is in critical condition. El Nino is a disease that is ravaging our world. (Balakrishnan, 2003a, p. 86).

This extract points to the manner in which nature has become victim to the ignorance and heedlessness of man. The story brings home the pressing need to be more vigilant of natural surroundings and to treat the issue of environmental sustainability as a matter of prime concern, to the reader.

Similar information about nature can be seen in Philippine literature too. Yuson (1996) quoted that, "Cold comfort of the mountain changed.... now warm mountain ..." (p. 129). The author compared cold and warm with the young couples. Hence, the threats for nature in works of literature are universal.

Symbiosis and Nature

Symbiosis is a mutually beneficial interaction between two different biological organisms. But it is parasitism – the kind of relationship destructive to one of the organisms the competition between humans and other living beings that has earned Balakrishnan's attention. The crow is a bird often associated with urban living and commonly found in settings wherever huge amounts of rubbish or waste are dumped. According to Alias and Hashim (2016), the crow is a pest, a destructive organism due to its unclean nature; the birds usually congregate near bustling and not too clean market places or landfills that are not properly managed. The presence of these birds is indicative of the lack of hygiene in that particular locality. There is a compelling need for an effective solution to this issue and crow control necessary to avoid health problems or the likelihood of epidemics occurring in view of the rapid rise of urban population. One popular crow- control mechanism practised in Malaysia is the use of guns to shoot the birds; however better management of preventive measures against this pest is imperative, with law enforcement by the relevant authorities in a move to ensure good health of the population and minimise the negative effects on the environment. There is however another side to this concern.

The issue of crows in the country is interwoven in Balakrishnan's 'Pengantin Hitam'; the story traces the fate of a crow as she waits for her lover. The bird becomes victim to the local authorities' cruel attempts at sprucing up the image of a town tarnished

by the presence of these dark creatures. The writer gently leads the reader to evaluate man's actions against the birds which in the first place had been brought into the country to help rid coffee plantations of crop bugs. The story highlights the acts of the modern man who himself is the main perpetrator of the problem, a producer of rubbish and non-biodegradable waste, thus contributing to the pollution of the environment and overflow in landfills. Balakrishnan views the crow as a helper in eliminating waste generated by the urban population. The story as told from the perspective of a female crow which loses its partner, allows the reader to reflect on how urban living is mismanaged. Alias and Hashim (2016) suggested that although crows negatively impacted the population by being carriers of diseases for both man and livestock, the act of shooting them without any apparent system could very likely give rise to more problems at a later stage by bringing an imbalance in the system.

Like the fate of the crow in 'Pengantin Hitam', the Indian short story, written by Manu (2018) also narrates the fate of the birds which live in the big trees. Under the big trees, there are statues erected for the great leaders of India. The birds which sit on the trees with nests ruin the statues with their droppings. The short story narrates as, "Either the birds and the nests must be killed or the trees must be cut..." (Manu, 2018, p. 31). The fate of nature like birds and trees are well said in this short story.

Further, Zi et al. (2015) narrated the fate of animals in the poem. The poet explained

how and why squirrel was smashed on the road. "Before me jumps a squirrel..... can only let it pass between the front wheels...." (Zi et al., 2015, p. 83). One can understand from that, throughout the globe the enmity against nature are discoursed in the literature.

Environment and Urban Economy

Economic activity has a major impact on our environment. The passion to pursue progress has put the environment in danger. These issues are also highlighted by the author. The main thrust in the story 'Bermain Dengan Pelangi', while addressing the issue of foreign labour, is the negative consequences of urbanisation experienced by a village girl. She loses her virginity, becomes pregnant and gives birth to an illegitimate child. Such is the pressure and desperation that befalls her that she is forced to dump her baby. The characters in this story paint the fate of a segment of urban society confronted with numerous challenges as they try to adapt to life and living in a big town. 'Bermain Dengan Pelangi' compels us to ponder on the fate of man as he tries to make sense of urban life and the social by- effects of urbanisation on his life:

"...They came from the same estates in Kuala Kangsar although they didn't know each other as children. They only became close when they moved to the city five years ago. Since then, they have been working in the factory, and they have shared so much of the sweet and bitter aspects of city life together." (Balakrishnan, 2003a, p. 6).

The story attempts to provide some insight into the imperfection of an urban life often exposed to numerous challenges that stem from a kind of culture shock.

The presence of group rural migrants gives rise to various issues in Malaysia and poses a threat to the civility of Malaysia. This 'threat' stems not only from the criminal aspect but also from the impact of their presence on the quality of life, social, culture, health awareness, political relations, and economy (Ahmad et al., 2014). Rural migrants to big cities are more likely to be confronted with the problems of public health, civility, social mingling, cultural shock, political relations and unemployment, and this is a situation that needs to be duly acknowledged in urban planning and development. Migrant worker issues are brought to the forefront in 'Perempuan dari Jawa' with a specific focus on the workers' tenacity and willingness to put their lives at risk to seize economic opportunities found abundantly in the towns and cities of Malaysia. The story explores the society's quality of life with loneliness and gullibility rendering people vulnerable to mischief and roguery of miscreants. The issue of migrant workers is the focal point of both this story and 'Bermain Dengan Pelangi'.

Economic development in the industrial, commercial and public service sectors have in turn resulted in rapid urbanisation in Malaysia. An effect of this is the increased migration from rural areas to towns and cities by those in search of better work opportunities and pay. Asan Golam Hassan

(2004) argued that this population shift actually lowered the rate of poverty in rural places; however, in many instances, the migration of the rural poor into urban settings did not alleviate their problems and instead only created new predicaments that perpetuated this poverty cycle. The issue of the urban poor is creatively explored in 'Mendamba Puyuh di Air Jernih' where the sufferings of the rural-to-urban migrant society is acutely portrayed through the lives of estate workers able to partake only in low level (hence low pay) work in the city.

The findings by Narayanan and Rostam (2012) are interwoven into the story 'Mendamba Puyuh di Air Jernih'. The issue of progress and its effects on estate dwellers is presented through the protagonist Munusamy, a nostalgic man reflecting on the miseries and sorrows brought about by the need to concur with the pressures of progress and development. People are driven to seek jobs in the city in order to feed their families – in doing so they become subject to life very far removed from what they had been accustomed to. Through sheer hard work, they try to continue living in a new environment that requires them to constantly adapt and accommodate. This enforced urbanisation or realignment creates its own set of problems for the environment; in the story, this difficulty is presented in the dearth and difficulty of finding *cendawan busut*, a type of wild mushroom. In essence, 'Mendamba Puyuh di Air Jernih' is a story of the worries and uncertainties of a farm dweller losing his strength and determination to continue

staying on the land that had once been the economic pulse of the country.

Problems in Urban Life

Life in the city is also characterized by various problems. These problems are also seen in Balakrishnan's short stories. Here are some of the problems that get the attention of authors in this short story. Urbanisation in developing countries usually makes itself evident through an extreme concentration of population in urban areas. In Malaysia, this process of transformation from rural to urban areas took place especially during the post- Independence era. According to Mapjabil et al. (2014), an estimated 65% of Malaysia has since become urban zone. This transformation has been accompanied by changes in socio-economic attitudes, standard of living as well as in value systems, and a consequence of urban life is in how the urban lifestyle has assumed importance in the values and manners of society in this country. The rural-to-urban transformation inevitably produces various effects - among these are a surge in population, an increase in economic functions, and a rise in the overall standard of living of the local populace. But if this development is unsustainable, then the community is confronted with difficulties and extreme pressure to find a balance between the pace of urbanisation, their standard of living, and their own value systems.

A house in this context becomes a basic necessity in the same way that food and drink are to life, with the type of accommodation an indication of the status

of the resident. Squatter structures are commonly found dotting urban areas as people without means seek shelter from the extremities of nature and harshness of life. A squatter housing is essentially an illegal construction built without permit from the relevant authorities for preservation and upkeep of our natural surroundings, be it government agencies or landowners or, the structure not fulfilling approved building requirements and material specifications (Ismail, 2005). “*Germis Dalam Kemarau*” highlights the issue of urban squatters by putting forward a stark portrayal of life in such a set-up and the wretchedness that inevitably prevails. Examples of these descriptions are, “...she sweeps the rubbish off her hole- riddled floor...” (Balakrishnan, 2003a, p. 72), and as below:

...In the twelve years they have lived in this wooden house on this illegal land, he and his family had never faced a water problem quite as bad as this... but it is now the fourth month that this problem has afflicted their lives, a life that is already shackled to poverty. (Balakrishnan, 2003a, p. 72).

Urban living is often associated with lack of space, a feature incorporated in several of the stories in Balakrishnan’s anthology. Even burials necessitate the spending of huge amounts of money with cemetery plots costing several thousands of ringgit each, as can be seen in ‘Sewangi Bunga Tanjung’. This story compels us to rethink on our urban lifestyle and its impact.

Unsystematic management of waste also results in the degradation of clean air. Toxic elements from untreated rubbish in landfills, for instance, seep into the ground and eventually contaminate rivers and water catchment areas. This degrades the quality of our water, even the underground water never escapes.

It cannot be denied that the creation of new urban areas has indeed contributed to the social and economic development of our country. However, a by-product of this progress has been the marginalisation of the original inhabitants of the land. A study by Narayanan and Rostam (2012) on the acquisition of land towards the construction of Putrajaya proves that this process in actuality had created complex economic and social problems associated with the forced re-location of those who were previously living on those lands. Relocation has its own problems such as employment in the new location, schools for kids, and public transportation. A major impact, however, was psychological, losing a peaceful farm life that belonged to the families for generations. An urban environment and lifestyle was an acute challenge, especially for the poor and the aged who lived a harmonious lifestyle with nature.

A rise in global temperature that causes a faster rate of evaporation is yet another factor in the incidence of inadequate water supply. Balakrishnan’s “*Germis Dalam Kemarau*” similarly draws on this issue of lack of water from the viewpoint of a woman struggling through difficulties and hardship

in managing her household. The problem of the urban populace is presented in a riveting manner in the story, like a thorn in the flesh.

Urban life is hectic and full of haste, a feature explored in 'Senjakala' and 'Mengejar Impian' in Balakrishnan's anthology. In the former, the reader witnesses the city dweller's obsession with work and the pursuit of material wealth, and how these very things become meaningless in the face of death. The character Rita pines for her husband and three children who were victims of a road accident; she is filled with a deep regret that her work had made her neglect her family, and now it is too late to undo this wrong. In 'Mengejar Impian', the maddening pace of everyday life becomes an important image of the city dweller with each one in a seeming race to improve their lives, thereby having to unwittingly sacrifice that which is most precious to them.

Such issue can be seen not only in Malaysia but also throughout the globe. Urban life becomes harder due to environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, more population, industrialisation and so on. Tiang (2001) stated about Singapore urban lives through his book to the global readers that people were living in urban with more stress.

Living people betraying the deleterious effects of living in a time of rapid change, in a society that was becoming more highly competitive and achievement-oriented, and when the interests of the state seemed to prevail over those of the individual... (Tiang, 2001, p. 70).

Similarly, She (2001) narrated about urban as, "Don't you worry about it, I'll find it! This sort of thing happens all the time.... here in this place..." (p. 385). In an urban context, anything can happen at any time and when time passes on, its become a common or a usual thing. No doubt, the works of literature across the world focus on the effects in urban too.

Technology, Sustainability and Environment

In modern life, we cannot avoid technology. However, the advancement of this technology also affects the sustainability of human life in this era. Some short stories emphasize this fact. In 'Kilau-Kemilau Kandil Hijau', Balakrishnan puts forth the theme of environmental sustainability with the storyline anchored on the awareness of nature. The writer through the story's central character Dr. Adnan, proposes the development of environmentally friendly technology in the pursuit of progress. The corporate sector that generates knowledge should re-evaluate work procedures to ensure sustainability of the environment. As concerned citizens, preservation and upkeep of our natural surroundings should be our top priority. Simply by sponsoring research to help in conservation of nature or by donating to such funds cannot absolve us of our responsibility. The story urges us to cultivate an eco-friendly outlook as a mainstream in our life. The writer cleverly selects the backdrop of the story, and utilises flashback technique, plot, imagery, dialogue, and monologue in an interesting manner appropriate to the tale. 'Kilau-Kemilau

Kandil Hijau' instils awareness in the reader and invites him to re-evaluate his views and attitude towards the environment.

'Lambaian Malar Hijau', anchored on the theme of love and concern for nature and environment, stresses the fact that these feelings are reinforced by sound knowledge and understanding, without which our stand and ideas would either be ignored or considered irrelevant. The story is set against the background of lush jungles and the intense love of Daneng for nature, provides a very touching scenario. Balakrishnan makes us aware of the unsung heroes among the current generation, boldly leading the fight against the destruction of our forests and nature. 'Lambaian Malar Hijau' strongly suggests that one must not only be smart and judicious, but support this with knowledge and determination to save forests and make them sustainable. From the story, we are made aware of the consequences of an earth made precarious by the greed of man driven by modernisation and forgetful of the contribution of nature. It is a rousing call to us to wake up from our slumber and be of spirit like Daneng to fight for the sustainability of our environment.

The forests of the 'Orang Asli' is presented by Balakrishnan as a place of lush beauty with the sounds of insects and chirping of birds permeating the loveliness and serenity of the setting. The writer touches on mankind's greed and disregard of nature when she talks about the widespread illegal logging activities in the vicinity of Orang Asli settlements, an easy-going people attuned to their environment, wholly

dependent on the fruits of the forest for their livelihood, and practising an unhurried and peaceful day-to-day living. 'Lambaian Malar Hijau' is told from the perspective of Cikgu Jo, a teacher from town.

'Kuak-kuak Di Batin' is a tale of the adverse effects of genetic engineering on humans. We become forgetful and overlook many things when we become too dependent on science and technology, and forcibly push ahead against the order of nature. Although the actions of the Brazilian government may seem acceptable to the rational mind, and their acts are seen as beneficial to mankind, these in fact eventually lead to adverse human consequences. Progress in cloning brings forward various polemics on this issue. The character Babalus in the story is endowed with two sets of feelings or emotions that constantly compete against the other to control his egoistic soul. Babalus often becomes confused between his feelings as a human and his tendencies as a cow. Through the story, the writer beseeches us to evaluate and assess the actions of men who seek to justify their doings in the name of sustainable living.

Mamat (2009) pointed to the constant interaction between development and the environment; in this era of rapid and volatile progress, advancement in science and technology is inevitable and these drastic changes will often expose the environment to various problems. The need to protect nature against this onslaught of change cannot be ignored; we must find solutions or learn to live as an integral part of our ecology. Man, therefore, has to become

a harmonious species, not the destructive variety (Balakrishnan, 2003a). From this statement, it becomes clear that the writer's prime concern is nature, a philosophy very much reflected in the stories in *Keinginan Kecil di Celah Daun* with various issues related to nature and the environment both directly and indirectly featured in the story plots.

CONCLUSION

The anthology highlights several findings on the manner of interaction between literature and the environment. This makes it amply clear that literary works cannot be viewed in isolation as output that simply entertains but does not benefit readers. Knowledge and understanding of other disciplines is necessary to strengthen the value of such writing. Studies on the environment in literature are admittedly not a novel endeavour in Malaysia; however, explorations on works of literature have focused primarily on the perspective of beauty and aesthetics without any deep insight into ecology or the environment. Numerous issues related to nature can be observed in literary works such as competition between species, technological effects, man's attitude towards nature, effects of land use on the environment, and the degradation of environmental value due to pollution.

The reading of Balakrishnan's stories in this anthology provides the reader with a new perception and understanding related to environmental awareness. It can be concluded that Balakrishnan short stories

show the presence of urban landscape or towns in literature as a means to show an urban environment. An analysis of Balakrishnan short stories shows that the interplay of urban life is influenced by the characters created or vice versa. This study shows that Balakrishnan consistently created an image reflecting the psychological and sociological burden of modern society and post-modernity in Malaysia through her short stories.

While in the context of the characters portrayed in the stories as an instrument of presenting the essence of urban life and sustainability, this study found that Balakrishnan has successfully explained to us the relationship between the characters she created in her short stories with urban images. The various problems and nuances of the city's features that are now a reality in the lives of Malaysians are clearly illustrated in the stories. In this context, Balakrishnan has successfully injected some understanding of urban life through literature. The themes and issues relating to city life are intriguing. The issue is more focused on the social changes made possible by the urbanization process reflected through activities dominated by modern and post-modern living by using characters occupying urban areas in the short story. Moreover, illustrations from other pieces of literature in the globe are labelled in brief.

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