

# Myths and Ecological Awareness of the Riau Archipelago Society in the Short Story “Commander of the Sea” by Abdul Kadir Ibrahim

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**Abstract.** The maritime tradition in the life of the people of the Riau Archipelago is known to be very strong. To find out about this maritime tradition, it is necessary to study the works of fiction written by writers from the Riau Archipelago, namely Abdul Kadir Ibrahim. In one of his works of fiction entitled “Panglima Laut”, AKIB is very good at narrating the stories of the life of the coastal community and the myths that are still developing in the life of the Malay community from ancient times to the present. Myths related to cats, the sea, and fishing will be the focus of this study. When examined further, it is evident that these myths lead to efforts to preserve the natural environment. This also certainly can prove how the ecological awareness of the community towards the environment. Data obtained through heuristic reading and recording techniques. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative method which refers to ecocritical theory.

**Keywords:** Myths; short stories; ecocriticism

## INTRODUCTION

Literature which is part of the representation of people's lives will not be separated from the culture and environment of the community itself. All the problems and conflicts presented by writers in fictional stories will not be much different from the reality that occurs in the author's environment (Bahadur, I., & Ediyono, S., 2017). Thus, the writer's living environment can be one of the factors that will influence the creation of a literary work. Natural factors in relation to literary works, according to Stanton (2007:35) are also something that cannot be avoided in the creative process of creating literary works. The environment in which the author grows will more or less influence the work he writes. This is in accordance with the opinion of Semi (1993:73) that literary works are essentially a form of reflection of conditions and values contained in people's lives which more or less influence the mindset, perspective, and life of the writer.

Based on some of the research results that were successfully uncovered by previous researchers, we can see various social, historical problems, as well as a description of the reality of a group of people presented by the author in his work. However, the real problems in human life are not only related to social problems that occur in society, natural problems also of course have something to do with human life. This problem concerning human life and nature is now interesting to be discussed by literary critics since

the existence of the concept of eco-criticism in literary studies.

The term ecocritic (*ecocriticism*) is used as a term regarding the concept of literary criticism from an environmental point of view. Ecocriticism can help determine, explore, and even solve ecological problems in a broader sense. In its function as a medium of representation, views, and community responses to the surrounding environment, literature has the potential to express ideas about the environment, including local wisdom values. This is very reasonable because literature grows, develops, and originates from society and the environment (Garrard, 2004).

According to Harsono (2008:35), ecocritical theory is multidisciplinary, which combines ecological theory and literary theory. Furthermore, Harsono also revealed that etymologically the term ecocritic comes from English *ecocriticism* which is a form of the word *ecology* and *wordcriticism*. Ecology can be interpreted as a scientific study of the pattern of relationships between living things such as plants, animals, humans, and their relationship to their environment. Criticism can be interpreted as a form and expression of judgment about the good or bad qualities of something. In simple terms, eco-criticism can be understood as environmental criticism.

Looking at the development of writing literary works lately, we can catch a variety of new problems that several writers in Indonesia want to uncover. This was concluded from

several results of studies that had been carried out by previous researchers, such as research that had been conducted by Taqwiem, A., & Alfianti, D. (2020) with the title "Garbage in the Novel Aroma Karsa by Dewi Lestari: An Ecological Review of Literature". The results of the research revealed that waste has caused various problems such as air pollution from the smell of uncontrolled garbage, the circulation of liquor and illegal drugs, to unhealthy competition between middlemen which leads to murder. Thus, the novel can be an alternative reading to remind the public about the waste problem that has been happening lately.

Furthermore, research conducted by Juliasih (2012) entitled "Humans and the Environment in Novels *Life in the Iron Millis* By Rebeca Hardings Davis." The results of the research show that there is environmental damage contained in the story. The findings of this assessment also show the need for action based on moral principles as a consideration in various areas of life. Principles such as respect, responsibility, love, moderation, fairness make it possible to change the lifestyle of every individual to a simpler one. In addition, everyone must actively implement environmental ethics together. The problems studied in the novel are analyzed based on perspective *ecocriticism* (ecocriticism).

Regarding environmental issues raised by various writers in the country, there are several works of fiction written by writers from the Riau Archipelago that deserve further attention and study. One of the things that is of interest to researchers is the works of fiction written by Abdul Kadir Ibrahim or also known as AKIB. With a story set in the Riau Archipelago, where most of its territory is sea and the livelihood of the majority of the population is fishermen, AKIB tries to uncover some of the myths and problems that often occur in the reality of people's lives in these waters. The characters in the story shown are not only imaginary, but also figures who have lived in society with a clear background in the Riau Archipelago.

The choice of the short story "Panglima Laut" by Abdul Kadir Ibrahim as the object of research is also related to the opinion (Taqiem, 2020) that there may be several literary works that place nature more than just a complementary element. In fact, we can also find several literary works that use nature as the main subject or theme in storytelling. In fact, not infrequently a work presents a problem that really originates from environmental conditions which become a major

representation of a story. Based on the preliminary readings that have been carried out by researchers, it was found that there is a connection between environmental problems, myths, and forms of community ecological awareness of their environment.

## METHODS

This study uses a literary ecological approach. This approach is used to dismantle how eco-criticism forms the exploitation of natural resources in short stories written by Abdul Kadir Ibrahim (AKIB). Based on the characteristics of the research, the research design used in this research is qualitative. A qualitative research design combined with a literary ecological approach is used in an effort to reveal the role of nature and how the role of literature has on nature.

This research is focused on a material object in the form of written literature, namely the short story "Panglima Laut" by Abdul Kadir Ibrahim. The selection of these objects is based on consideration of the author's activeness in quality and quantity in producing works of fiction that also represent the current environmental conditions. The data used are in the form of sentences, paragraphs, and fragments of discourse which are thought to represent local wisdom in the form of myths and representations of the ecological awareness of the people of the Riau Archipelago which are revealed in the work. Data collection techniques used in this study include heuristic reading techniques followed by note-taking techniques.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the life of the people in the Riau Archipelago, there are several myths related to nature. The myths that develop in people's lives can also be associated with forms of public awareness of the environment. For more details about these two things will be discussed as follows.

### 1. Myths

Until now, in the life of the people of the Riau Archipelago, various myths still exist and develop concerning various matters in human life. Among them are related to cats and sea guards or what is often referred to by the islanders as sea commanders. Stories about the power of cats for the community do not only apply to land areas, but also to water areas, sea areas.

In AKIB's short story entitled "Panglima

Laut”, through the character Pak Raus and his son Kirin, at first the reader will be invited to take part in an adventure across the ocean to get fish by fishing. The voyage to the sea is reached by using a sampan jongkong, which is the simplest small boat made of wood. This can be seen in the following quotation.

Kirin and Pak Raus arrived at the coral sea, the fishing location. In the east, a naked star rose up into the sky. The scent of the ocean caresses the sense of smell. A gentle breeze patted the neck of the squat. The cute waves caressed the barge boat. Nun, in the distance there are several green-blue islands, beautiful and amazing. Eagles, seagulls, and seabirds fly in the air, occasionally swooping down to grab small fish.

Later, on the way, Kirin asked his father a lot. One of them is about whether there will be many fish that can be caught in the place where the squatting was stopped by the father. The question arose because Kirin previously dreamed of feeding the cat until it was full. This can be seen in the following quote.

“Dad!”  
“What's wrong, Kirin?”  
“I feel... Today we got a lot of fish!”  
“How do you know?”  
“Last night my mother dreamed of feeding the cat until it was full...”  
“Hush! In the sea it is forbidden to mention cats!”  
“Ha ha ha.... Father also called it!”  
“You mess up. Why are you looking for trouble, Kirin! Ha ha ha....”  
“Oh....”  
“Yes. Don't mention the beast again! Seize it later, storm down!”  
“That is right?”  
“Yes. The elders said first.”

In the conversation between Kirin and Pak Raus, we can find out one of the taboos or myths that are still believed by the people in the Riau Archipelago regarding cats. Cats are believed to be animals that have extraordinary powers. Whoever hurts the cat, he will get karma, and vice versa. This is also related to the teachings of the Islamic religion that cats are one of the animals most loved by the prophet. Good maintenance of cats will give good blessings to those who care for them.

Furthermore, why is it that the mere mention of the word “cat” in the sea provoked havoc? That is what is called a myth. In accordance with the opinion expressed by Mulyani (2018), myth is actually a story from the past from ancestors which is considered to have a message and meaning of truth. In fact, cats are one of the animals that are afraid of water. If someone sprays water at a cat, then the cat will definitely run away and sometimes make noises that show his anger. So saying the word “cat” while in the ocean will bring havoc like strong winds, typhoons and storms in the ocean. This also happens in the short story as the following quote.

The wind is blowing, the heat of the sun is no longer spicy. It's almost evening. Pak Raus and Kirin are still busy fishing. More fish are obtained. Time passed. Pak Raus wanted to tell his son, immediately raise the anchor. After that, return to the mainland coast. But, the man was shocked! His gaze is bright! In the West, black clouds, dark clumps! His heart is very narrow. Chest pounding so much! He looked at Raus, full of fear. Even the whistling of the wind felt like it was slapping hard. The roar of the waves hitting the ingots looked violent, until the ingots were thrown around. The wind is getting stronger crashing and crashing!  
“Daddy day, daddy! The typhoon is raging!”  
“Yes, son. Quickly unload anchor! Hurry, son, before the ferocious waves crash into our buttocks! come on! Hurry up, Jang!”  
Pak Raus exclaimed, abysmally worried!

Thus, it can be seen how important it is to maintain maritime traditions such as abstinence or myths related to human life which always mingle with nature. Myths can be used as a guide that contains good messages. With these myths, people can measure which behaviors are good to do, and which are bad behaviors that should not be done.

## 2. Community Ecological Awareness

The Riau Archipelago is one of the provinces in Indonesia which has the largest sea area compared to the land area. Such conditions have made the people of the Riau Archipelago more dependent on the sea for their livelihood. Most of the people meet their needs from natural resources in the sea. This can be seen in the following quotation.

How familiar the children are. They are in bullion measuring around 18 feet long. Fun fishing. The son is in the bow and the father is behind him. Feel the breeze. You can also see the swaying of the waves, so that the squats seem to be dancing. Sometimes Kirin laughs and his father shouts. Both were very happy.

They continue fishing. Unexpectedly, before noon, the jongkong area where the fish were collected was packed full of lured fish. Of course, I am very happy with the fish's multiplied fortune. Kirin imagined the stacks of money she would get after selling fish in the residents' villages around her house.

Based on these quotes, it can be seen how the sea plays a very important role in people's lives. This also gave birth to a maritime tradition that exists in the life of the people of the Riau Archipelago making the sea and humans as things that are interrelated or influence each other. In fact, if the natural environment is maintained, clean and sustainable, then people's lives will be better. However, vice versa. If humans are greedy or better known by the Malay community *asthirsty* or greedy, then nature will be damaged, and of course it can bring natural disasters that will harm humans. This can be seen in the following quotation.

"Here, Dad. My teacher said at school, the environment must be preserved. Whether it is the environment of home, school, or nature. We cannot do more than that. Don't waste..."

"Father knows, natural wealth is the legacy of our children and grandchildren. So, it must be maintained, it must be used properly and appropriately..."

"So how was it, Father? Shall we go home now?"

"Not yet. We're fishing again. It's a little late, we just got back. Not quite enough. Don't let us go back now. Yes, the fish are still eating our fishing rods."

"But, Father..."

"Amboi, Jang... Father understands that you are worried. You are afraid that we will become greedy humans and end up being redundant. Don't worry, the fish we get are not to be thrown away, but to be sold and the rest is for side dishes at our house."

Based on these quotations, it can be seen that the existence of a maritime tradition in the form of using a jongkong boat for sailing and fishing, as well as people's beliefs, taboos, myths, or better known as folklore is a form of community ecological awareness to be able to preserve nature. Efforts to maintain these natural conditions are expected to be able to pass on more beautiful natural conditions to future generations.

## CONCLUSION

By reading the short story "Panglima Laut" by Abdul Kadir Ibrahim, it can be understood that the presence of a literary work among readers can be a tool to guide society towards goodness. One of them is to renew the reader's awareness of natural conditions and also environmental preservation. The myths that are still preserved in people's lives are a form of maritime tradition which is a manifestation of people's ecological awareness of environmental conditions. The use of traditional tools such as simple boats made of wood for sailing and the use of fishing tools that are environmentally friendly is also a form of maritime tradition that must be maintained and preserved by the community, so that efforts to conserve nature can run and continue to be sustainable.

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