



Epitome Journals

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

Nature and Landscapes in '*The Inheritance of Loss*'



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Research Paper :

Human being is part of the natural world. Scientifically speaking, he is made up of various elements: carbon, water, cellular material. These elements are all elements found in nature. Therefore, we are part of nature. In the natural world, everything is interconnected. Our culture influences the way we see the nature, which influences nature itself. It is easy to see how parts of our culture have influenced the world in which we live. All of nature has utility, all is important. If humans are to aid in the conservation of nature they must understand that every action has a repercussion. Today with rapid development of economy though living level is gradually raised the natural environment around us is becoming worse. The problems of global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain, the resource crisis of fresh water, energy shortages, decreasing resources of forest and the desertification of land etc are increasingly serious which make ecological environment be worse and worse. It tells us to pay more attention to the man-nature relation and review behaviour of human being. It is very much necessary to take every action into consideration. If humans take any one thing in this world for granted, then they start a vicious cycle of repercussions like extinctions of some species, which may lead to the extinction of the human race and the final chapter for this lively planet.

Ecocriticism is a critical approach which began in USA in late 1980s and in UK in early 1990s. Cheryll Glotfelty is first to use world ecocriticism in her pioneering work, *"The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology"*. She defines ecocriticism as the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. It is a literary discipline which seeks to examine the intersections of culture, literature and ecology. Through ecocriticism we examine all literature, all elements of culture and natural process to help us to interpret our relationship to nature the natural processes themselves and human conception of 'the natural world.'

Ecocritical study of prominent novels of pre-independence and post independence novelists reflects changing natural landscape due to industrialization and increasing population. It also throws light on changing human attitude towards environment.

'*The Inheritance of Loss*' is a second novel by Kiran Desai. It was published in 2006. It won a number of awards including the Man Booker Prize for that year, the National Book Critics Fiction Award in 2007 and the 2006 Vodafone Crossword Book award. In her both novels she has portrayed beautiful scenes of nature and landscapes. Setting of this novel is Kalimpong which is situated at foothills of northeastern Himalaya. It shows that Kiran Desai is a lover of nature. It reveals her deep concern of environment.

'All day the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature, across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its moment'[Desai]

'*The Inheritance of Loss*' begins with a beautiful description of Kanchenjunga. Kiran Desai pictures various natural scenes and landscapes of Himalaya Mountain especially Kanchenjunga, a peak appearing as if whittled out of ice. This peak provides a very suitable background. According to mood of characters and events of novels, nature provides favourable background atmosphere. Mist is moving like a water creature across great flanks of mountains.

Sai is observing Kanchenjunga, its wizard phosphorescence with a shiver. There is misty atmosphere and forest is old and thick. The bamboo thickets which have grown thirty feet are personified as gloomy. The trees are personified as moss slung giants, beunioned and misshapen; tentacle with the roots of orchids. Taking advantage of thick mist and dense forest Gorkha boys intruded in house of judge Jemubhai. They took away his guns.

Kalimpong ecologically rich, situated in northeastern Himalaya. Indian Nepalese were fighting for their own country. It was important juncture where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim. Beauty of Kalimpong and its ecological richness not only attracted but created great hunger in Chinese to possess this land. Kiran Desai describes mist which was working like a dragon dissolving, undoing, and drawing borders. Beautiful mountains glowing like opal, thick forest of north eastern Himalaya is valuable wealth of India. It is a jewel in the crown of India. There was wetter climate, a rusty green landscape and paddy fields. There was Teesta river leaping and flowing between white banks of land.

'by the riverbank wild water racing by, the late evening sun in polka dots through the trees, they parted. To the east was Kalimpong, barely managing to stay on the saddle between Deolo and Ringkingpong hills. To the west was Darjeeling, skidding down the Singalila mountain. The nun tried to offer a final counsel, but her voice was drowned out by the river roar [Desai31].

When Sai arrived at Cho Oyu she felt change in atmosphere. She was travelling by car. On the way at one place it tilted back its nose was pointed to sky. If there would have been slightest mistake, it would have tumbled into deep valley. Nature was very beautiful but at the same time it was very much dangerous where anything can be happened at anytime. At one side high mountains of Himalaya and at another side there were deep green valleys. There was forest making sss tseu ts ts uuu sounds. Sai entered in enormous space where there was mountains covered with mist, swollen forest, sounds of hollow knuckled of bamboo, the sound of jhora that ran deep in the décolleté of the mountain. Jemubhai completed his education in England but he could not enjoy beauty of English countryside. He became pusillanimous and lonely. He lived always in solitude.

Rich persons always kept pet animals for hobby. Mutt dog of Jemubhai, Mustafa cat of Lola and Noni are taken care by them. There are cows which booms like

foghorns through mist. There is rooster of uncle potty from where kookar raja sent big Kukrookoo up like a flag. Its sound is described as silly and loud as if calling everyone to circus. Due to cloudy atmosphere in Kanchenjunga there was not clear broadcast of radio television. There was messy weather when moths occupied trees. Mountains used to shimmer in pure 24k and powdery mist burn off in the sun.

Cook and judge used to go for tour. Judge used to ride on horse because there were no good roads and hardly any bridges spanned the rivers. When there were jungly areas and deeper, swifter currents he used to ride on elephants. Summer was very hot in Kalimpong. All over the mountainside the heat reduced the townspeople to a stupor. Tin roofs sizzled, dozens of snakes lay roasting on the stones, and flowers bloomed as plushly and perfectly as on a summer outfit. Nature grows and gives with free hand to human being without any expectations. Man wants pure water, pure air and everything clean and fresh. In Kalimpong plum tree outside clinic was watered with rotted blood from path lab. It produced so many flowers. Mountains, covered with snow, were the manifestations of beauty and bounty of nature. People who live in lap of this nature were dependent upon natural resources available in the region. In the market one can see herbs, vegetables were kept for sale for e.g. there were muddy mushrooms covered with brackish leaves or greenery, ganglions of roots, stalls of yak hair, untidy and rough as the hair of demons and sacks of miniature dried shrimp with oversized whiskers. There were smuggled foreign goods from Nepal. Smuggling was possible because natural structure of region made foreigners to intrude and capture Indian market. It is also told that wool caravans were coming through chaperoned by Tibetan muleteers in furry boots. Biju son of cook was working in America in restaurant. He always remembered his village where he lived with his grandmother. The village was buried in silver grasses that were taller than a man and made a sound shuu, shuuu, shu, shuuu as the wind turned them this way and that. He remembered dry gully through

the grasses there was a tributary of Jamuna. Men travelled downstream on inflated buffalo skins, the creatures, very dead legs, all four, sticking straight up as they sailed along. The river scalloped shallow over the stones. Fishing eagles hovered above the water. On diwali the holy men lit lamps and put them in the branches of the peepal tree and sent them down the river on rafts with marigolds. Kiran Desai throws light on how culture of human being interferes in the nature and creates serious impact on it. Biju remembers everything about his village. He used to sit with his father outside of home in evening. His father was quite happy with that life.

'how peaceful our life is. How good the roti tastes there it is because the atta is ground by hand, not by machine and because it is made on choolah, which is better than anything cooked on gas or a kerosene stove. Fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk, still warm from buffalo' [Desai103]

This underlines importance of natural life of village where everything is fresh and original. Biju understood importance and delight of village life when he got bad experience in America. Ecological wealth of birds like bats, eagles, butterflies, pet animals like pet buffaloes, horses, elephants, donkeys, snakes, caterpillar gives this novel crucial importance from ecological perspective. People face natural disasters like landslides, storms, thick fog, extreme cold, and aqueous season.

Kiran Deai has beautifully personified nature. She has stick human qualities to nature. The sky gaped lit by flame, blue fire ensnared the pine tree that sizzled to an instant death, leaving a charcoal, a singed smell, a crosshatch of branches over the lawn. Aqueous season was four to five months. It created big effect on each and every thing. 'condensation fogged the glass of clocks and clothes hanging to dry in the attic remained wet for a week' [Desai 106]. People learnt to adjust with environmental problems. It was difficult to communicate with each other. Jhora overflowed its bank and carried the bridge downstream. Gorkhas were expressing their discontent through strikes and procession but it

could not become successful. Due to excessive rain streets had flowed. Because of bad weather everybody was imprisoned in their house. They could not do outdoor movements.

All seasons with its vivid changes, colors and its impact on human being are pictured very beautifully. All tiny creatures as beetles which flew by in many colours in rainy seasons are described. The air was spiked with pinpricks of moisture that made it feel as if it were raining indoors as well. Nature is personified here. 'Rain and wind whooshed and banged, tree heaved and signed'. [Desai120]. Due to aqueous season even the letter in post office was also wet. It was humanly impossible to keep them dry. Roads remain closed for so many days. There were frequent landslides. Harmful tiny creatures became active. Season gave birth and there grew insects like mosquitoes, ants, termites, millipedes, centipedes, spiders, woodworms, beetles in thousand numbers.

There was museum in Darjeeling. Sai and Gyan visited it where they saw socks of Tenzing and his other things. For Gyan Tenzing was a real hero. It is to be noted that Sai had wondered should human conquer the mountain or should they wish for the mountain to possess them? Sherpas went up and down ten times, fifteen times in some cases. But they never expected glory, claim of ownership of mountains and there were those who said it was sacred and should not be sullied at all. Tenzing and Sherpas were brave, courageous, strong broad minded. They never think of possessing conquered land. But now Gorkhas were fighting for their separate Gorkhland. Enchanting beauty of nature and landscapes satisfied and soothed mind of these people but its usefulness created greed in countries around mountain to possess it. Not only natives but foreigners also disturbed nature and exploited its wealth to fulfill needs.

Kanchenjunga is presented as that part of nature which pays for the brutality of humans and where beauty is destroyed in war for power. It is said in the novel "India had swallowed the jewel colored kingdom where blue hills they could see in distance." In this novel landscape is dominant character where a significant

interaction occurs between author and place, characters and place. Landscape by definition includes the non-human elements of place- rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air-as well as human perceptions and modifications. From eco-perspective this novel can be titled as 'Ecopolitics'.

Thus we see that Desai's "*The Inheritance of Loss*" covers almost all the different concepts and definitions that have been put forth by various critics of eco-criticism. Her novel is rich with eco-critical references and among the recent fictions can be most aptly given an eco-critical reading.

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