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English Literature

AN ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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ABSTRACT

Environmental issues pose new questions to inherited modes of thought and arguments. Nature and Literature always shared a close relationship as envisioned in the literary creations. The application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature is termed as eco-criticism, an earth-centered approach to literary studies to examine the manifold significance of nature and the environment. The *Inheritance of Loss* illuminates the issues of globalization, multiculturalism and the ambiguities of post-colonialism. Kiran Desai, stands as a propagator of Green Studies, with a message as nature provides peace and bliss, when man runs to the lap of nature. The beauties of nature can inspire and tranquilize the state of mind. With great dexterity, she wears together, the themes and issues that draw critical attention. Kiran Deai's efforts in this perspective affirms her concern in manifestation of sensibility towards environment.

Today, mankind has seen numerous developments brought by industrial revolutions and modern technology. However, the rapid changes are causing serious negative effects. The changes in environment have made drastic influences in the different aspects of life. Environmental issues pose new questions to inherited modes of thought and arguments. Therefore concern for environment is one of the most discussed issues today. It is the concern of every country to replenish the diminishing factors of ecology, which threatens human beings the most. The contemporary issues are reflected in literature. Thus, Nature and Literature always share a close relationship as is envisioned in the literary creations of the writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. The application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature is termed as eco-criticism, which urges an earth-centered approach to literary studies to examine the manifold significance of Nature and the environment.

The Booker Prize winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, heralds Kiran Desai as one of the most insightful novelists. The prodigious effort of Desai stands in the ranks of literary stars like Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, to name a few. With the sensitive instrument of fiction, Desai registers the reverberations of the new millennium. *The Inheritance of Loss* is a majestic novel, illuminating the issues of globalization, multiculturalism and the ambiguities of post-colonialism. It spans continents, generations, cultures, religions and races. It zips back and forth between the remote province of Kalimpong, a tiny Himalayan region and the streets of New York City. The physical setting of the novel contributes a new dimension of thought to the eco-centric approach.

From an ecological perspective, a bioregion is a geographical area with its own aspects and features. Kiran Desai views Mount Kanchenjunga and its surroundings not only as the territory defined by natural markers but also a domain of consciousness interlinked with the prominent characters. The novel opens with the description of the natural beauty of Mount Kanchenjunga. The mutability and unpredictability of the seasons assume greater significance, as it plays an indispensable role in the mindscape of the characters.

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 as its summit. Sai, sitting on the veranda, was reading an article about giant squid in an old *National Geographic*. Every now and then she looked up at Kanchenjunga, observed its wizard phosphorescence with a shiver. (1)

Man's relationship with nature is intimate and crucial. There is a pre-existing bond between the mind of man and Nature. Since the individual mind and the external world are exquisitely fitted to each other, communion between the two is possible. But this communion is possible only when the soul of man is in harmony with the soul of nature. The Nature poet, William Wordsworth, reflects that Nature has a secret incomprehensible workmanship to change the discordant elements of terror, pain, regret, irritation and moods of lassitude, and provides a source of energy to the disturbed mind.

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society. How strange, that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! (The Prelude – Book I 340-350)

The parentless and orphaned Sai takes shelter in her grandfather's residence situated in the serene and calm atmosphere where the beautiful treasure of nature can be enjoyed. The old house stands as a true testimony to the contemporary eco-friendly architecture, where one can receive umpteen of nature's blessings. The disturbed mind of Sai draws comfort and solace, when she takes a walk in the garden among thick and tall trees. The place shrouded with mist soothes her body and mind. She feels the human touch of love and affection.

She shut the magazine and walked out into the garden. The forest was old and thick at the edge of the lawn; the bamboo thickets rose thirty feet into the gloom; the trees were moss-slung giants, bunioned and mist shapen, tentacled with the roots of orchids. The caress of the mist through her hair seemed human, and when she held her fingers out, the vapor took them gently into its mouth. (2)

Kiran Desai, here stands as a propagator of Green Studies, with a strong message that Nature provides peace and bliss, when man runs to the lap of nature. The beauties of nature can inspire, tranquilize and repose the disturbed state of mind. Krishna Singh says:

Nature is, here, subservient to human emotions and actions; Gives force and meaning and aesthetic beauty as well. The Sunday Express has eulogized Desai's portrayal

of nature and landscapes and masterly use of language: "Descriptions of the mountains and the people of Kalimpong, the changing seasons and the inner mindscapes of her characters are mesmerizing: her use of language is virtuous, and her ideas sparkle. (181)

The River plays an indispensable role in Nature's creations. River is centered on as a moving body of water and finds its way to overcome its impediments. River stands for emergence of life and fertility. Sai, vexed by the life in convent, moves from Dehra Dun to Kalimpong. The desolate and lonely life of Sai attains a meaningful turn, when she is engrossed with the beauty of the river. Here, Nature acts as sensible preacher imparting the values of life. Sai affirms her relationship with her maternal grandfather and spends her life in the midst of love and affection. When Sai comes in contact with nature, there happens a transformation in her troubled mind. The suppressed and repressed attitude of Sai gets eased and relieved due to influence of nature. She develops the sense of belonging and feels the oneness of nature. The lonely and outcasted Sai, devoid of love and affection confronts a pleasing and delightful situation, which makes her to experience the warmth and intimacy of her native place and relation. "Suddenly to the right, the Teesta River came leaping at them between white banks of sand. Space and sun crashed through the window. Reflections magnified and echoed the light, the river, each adding angles and colors to the other, and Sai became aware of the enormous space she was entering" (31). The author expresses the idea as if man approaches nature in a mood of 'wise passiveness', wisdom, peace, truth and joy are the qualities that pass into life of man from Nature.

The permanent forms of Nature are incorporated in the humble and rustic life. The undisturbed simple and natural growth of the natural vegetation provokes the essential passions to attain maturity. The pathetic Biju reminds of the blissful days in his village and this instills the feelings of oneness with his family, even though he suffers in an alien country. The sweet reminiscences of the village life soothe his troubled mind. The thought of Nature is the source of enormous energy to Biju. Nature provides him with the impetus with which he can fight with himself and overcome his disturbed mental state.

Lying his basement shelf that night, he thought of his village where he lived with his grandmother on the money his father sent each month. The village was buried in silver grasses that were taller than a man and made a sound, shuu, shuuuu, shu, shuuu, as the wind turned them this way and that..... When he had visited his father in Kalimpong, they had sat outside in the evenings and his father had reminisced: "How Peaceful our village 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 a choolah, better than anything cooked on a gas or a kerosene stove.... Fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo..." (102-103)

Kiran Desai pictures the exotic grandeur of nature. The silver grass taller than a man, the fishing birds with one dive rose with its prey, bring out the richness of nature. By the influence of Nature, a person enjoys not only the abundant beauty of nature, but also it provides health, wisdom and grace of body. The scientific and technological developments lead to variations in life style of mankind. Today's urbanization and modernization make the younger generation to yearn for nature and natural products.

Nature's warehouse has mind to offer to the world of romance. The pleasant Nature endears the emotions and passions of the mankind and congenial atmosphere to express feelings of love. The author has made references to the situations in the novel. The love of Sai's parents blooms in the natural surroundings. They met in the park for the first time in the beautiful ambience of nature. The refreshing scene of nature boosts and provides impetus to Mr. Mistry, Sai's father, to propose his love to Sai's mother who used to go to public park near her ladies dorm to dry her hair in the shade of a neem tree.

They became acquainted in this grassy acre, cows tethered to enormous rusty lawn mowers slowly grinding back and forth before a crumbling Mughal tomb. Before a year was up, in the deep cool centre of the tomb, golden indirect light passing from alcove to hushed alcove, duskier, muskier through the carved panels each the light in a different lace patterns --- flowers, stars -- upon the floor, Mr. Mistry proposed. (26)

Thus nature invokes the sensitive feelings and promotes passions that can embolden human relationship. The tender touches of nature nurture the love of Sai and Gyan. Both of them feel enthralled and activated. The spell bond charm of nature ties them, their hearts feel elated and the long tedious journey of Gyan turns into a refreshing and enjoyable one because of his walk through thick bamboo trees. " He enjoyed the walk to Cho Oyu and experienced a refreshing and simple happiness, although it took him two hours uphill, from Bong Busti where he lived, the light shining through thick bamboo in starry, jumping chinks, imparting the feeling of liquid shimmering" (71).

Kiran Desai has interwoven the plot and ecology text in an artistic manner. The beautiful landscape of Kanchenjunga with valleys, forests, trees, rivers and grassland form the setting of the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. Images of nature and aspects of natural environment add luster to the author's description. Literature and environment is explored with a spirit of commitment. With great dexterity, she weaves together, the themes and issues that draw critical attention. Kiran Desai's efforts in this perspective affirm her ecological sensibility and emotional correlation with the environment.

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