



07

REFLECTIONS ON NATURE AND CULTURE IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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Abstract:

*The present paper attempts to focus on nature and culture in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. It deals with the life struggle of the people in the hills after colonialism and also focuses on the relationship between nature and man. The novel takes place in a town called Kalimpong, which is near Darjeeling in the north-western point of India. It includes natural elements like mountains, peaks, hills, valleys, and so on. It also highlights on the dependence of human beings on nature.*

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, Mystic, Narrative, Testimony, Nature, Culture, etc.*

The present paper attempts to focus on nature and culture in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. It deals with the life struggle of the people in the hills after colonialism and also focuses on the relationship between nature and man. The novel takes place in a town called Kalimpong, which is near Darjeeling in the north-western point of India. It includes natural elements like mountains, peaks, hills, valleys, and so on. It also highlights on the dependance of human beings on nature.

Ecocriticism explores the relationship between human and the environment in all areas of cultural production especially literature, the presence of nature in literature from the ages shows the mystic relationship between men and nature. As a men can get happiness by creating harmonious relationship with things around him poets and writers from Wordsworth to Thoreau use nature as source of inspiration in their work. Often, they found solution of their problems in the company of nature. The intimate relationship between natural and social world is being analyzed in all departments of knowledge and development. India is a country which has variety of natural landscape differs from region to region from Himalayas, deserts, coastal area to lush green fields and forests. The natural landscape dominates the themes of Indian writers and writing in English for instance, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* or the *Malgudi Days*, Anita Desai, *Cry the Peacock* or Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Kiran Desai gain the literary attention in 1998 after her celebrated debut *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* which own the 'Betty Task Award' a prize given by the society of authors for the best new novel by citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations under the age of thirty-five. Eight years later in 2006 Kiran Desai won The Men Booker Prize for *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel demonstrates the influences of post coloniality, globalization, inner and outer conflicts, sensibilities of individuals and environment. *The Inheritance of Loss* begins with the beautiful description of Mount Kanchenjunga as, "Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms as its summit" (Desai, 01).

In the novel Kanchenjunga is presented as the part of nature which pays for the brutality of humans and whose beauty is destroyed in the war of power. The novel tells of 1980s rebellion of the



ethnic Nepalese in the Himalaya town, who were fed up of being treated like the minority in the place where they were majority, the rebellion was bloody and chaotic in the sense that nearly every character not only at some stage degraded and humiliated but they also degrade and humiliate others. The 'loss' is physical, spiritual and environmental. Battle and rebellion are an act of human being to establish supremacy by conquering the beautiful place. Kiran Desai has portrayed the realistic picture of a beautiful landscape stands dignified while corrupted by terrorist and militant activities. It is said in the novel as: "India had swallowed the jewel-coloured kingdom, whose blue hills they could see in the distance" (Desai, 92).

The house in which a retired judge with his orphaned granddaughter Sai, a servant and a dog, Mutt lives is situated at a place from where the beautiful treasure of nature can be easily enjoyed. The rooms were spacious in the old manner of wealth, windows placed for snow views. It is an old house that stands in true testimony of contemporary eco-friendly architect where one can receive maximum of nature's blessings. Though it is winter season and the surroundings are very cool, nature proves to be a source of energy to Sai, the judge and even to Mutt. They are involved in their activities and simultaneously enjoying the pleasures of natural beauty. They prefer to sit in veranda because "inside the house, it was still colder, the dark, the freeze, contained by stone walls several feet deep" (Desai, 01). The approaching evening and misty environment could not hamper the spirit of Sai rather she gets motivated by them and begins to walk into the garden. The *Inheritance of Loss* set in the mid-1980s in Kalimpong high in the northeastern Himalayas, centers on three people and one dog living together in an ancient house named Cho Oyu. There is the frustrated, reptilian judge, Jemubhai Patel, lost in his chessboard and in his memories of a youth spent at Cambridge decades earlier; of humiliation in a foreign land. Staying with his beloved dog Mutt and his 17-year-old granddaughter Sai, who was orphaned as a child. The judge's cook, who manages the household, and a few neighbours scattered around the area, round off the cast. As the story unfolds, insurgency is growing in the region the Indian Nepalese want their own country or state, a Gorkhaland where they will not be treated as servants; young boys, trying to be men, roam the mountainside looting houses, collecting ammunition. Their predicament is contrasted against that of Indians settled abroad, the cook's son Biju, stumbling from one job to the next in the US, in a grimly humorous parallel narrative. The last chapter of *The Inheritance of Loss*, like most of its earlier chapters, is written in the form of a collage. An attempt to summarize the events of the closing chapter may stand like this: the cook, in a fit of drunkenness, admits to Jemubhai Patel that he had cheated his master in several ways and was responsible for the loss of Mutt; the judge beats the cook frantically, Sai is disgusted of the whole chaos; Lola, Noni, Mrs. Sen and Uncle Potty abide in their crumbling world while Biju, ransacked by the Gorkhaland activists, returns to Cho Oyu and meets his father.

The actions of the judge and the cook need to be decoded in order to comprehend the implications of the closing chapter. A major portion of the narrative is taken up by Jemubhai's past, his journey from a small village in Gujarat to England and his subsequent return as an ICS officer of the Raj. The journey has had the most profound effect and his experiences in England, the humiliations whether real or perceived have seared into his soul, changing him forever. So, as Jemubhai climbs the ladder of material success, his soul plummets to new depths. It may appear surprising that a man who could not love his wife, his daughter and his granddaughter shares an intense relationship with Mutt, his pet dog. His relationship with Mutt is not a common relation of a man with his pet dog; he came to the realization that an animal is better than a man is. Desai though the judge brings out the inhumanity of the human world whose actions ruin the other creatures of the ecosystem. She writes about the judge's emotion as "he couldn't conceive of punishment great enough for humanity. A man wasn't equal to an animal, not one particle of him. Human life was stinking, corrupt, and meanwhile there were beautiful creatures who lived with delicacy on the earth without



doing anyone any harm. ‘We should be dying; the judge almost wept. The world had failed Mutt. It had failed beauty; it had failed grace. But by having forsaken this world, for having held himself apart, Mutt would suffer’ (Desai, 92). It was a time when Sai the granddaughter of Jemubhai had also losses connection with Gyan, her love interest. Gyan, a young man of twenty, was also attracted toward her. Their romance flourishes even when the trouble has started in Kalimpong. They are so much engrossed in love that they use nicknames for each other. Even the nick names they selected for each other were taken from the beautiful objects of nature- Sai called Gyan ‘Kajau’ and he called her ‘Kishmish.’ Sai goes on excursions with Gyan and visits almost each and every place of Darjeeling and other picnic spots. Gyan’s feelings towards Sai are volatile whereas Sai considered her feelings towards Gyan with substantial seriousness. Somehow, the upsurge in Kalimpong takes Gyan in its grip. Gyan sees a procession in the market demanding Gorkhaland. He sees his friends as part of this procession. Out of curiosity, he also joins the procession. The procession ends with the speech of a leader. The speech of the leader affects him so much that he becomes aware of the deficiencies in his life and begins to compare his poverty with the luxuries that Sai enjoys when Naps revolted against the glowing impact of the outsiders; the Bongs with clear animosity, Gyan shifted his loyalties from Sai to the revolution. Naps considered themselves strangers in their own homeland and for this they held Bongs responsible who took away the key posts from them and subsequently they were forced to lead the life of an underdog. Kiran Desai has admirably shuffled with the fluctuating graph of feelings in her novel. This fluctuation has been successful in keeping our curiosity to know the outcome, alive throughout the novel. Sai was unable to show her confusion and unhappiness in public, while searching for Mutt as Desai narrates: “She felt grateful for the greatness of this landscape, walked on trying to recover the horizon for it felt as if the space bequeathed her at the end of a romance that had promised a wide vista well, it was nonexistent” (Desai, 309).

When judge mercilessly beat up cook for losing Mutt, Sai was shock to see this act, she felt disgusted and humiliated for being what she is a grandchild of cynical judge or so-called dignified creature, it was raining heavily at that point of time BBC was diced by storm, it is the storm within the hearts of Sai, judge and the cook. The savagery of human was matched by that of nature as, “Uncivilized voluptuous green would be unleashed; the town would slide down the hill slowly, painstakingly. Like ants, men would make their paths and civilization and their wars once again only to have it wash away again” (Desai, 323).

In the end of novel Kiran Desai uses the image of nature and its holiness when Biju the son of cook returns to ‘Cho Oyu’ the old house of judge, he returned to the place he belongs, a place of which he is part of like a human who is part of nature, tress, rivers mountains which permit him to come and submit himself without hesitation or worries o future, with realization of power one has within one own self.

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