



AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN IN KIRAN DESAI'S *INHERITANCE OF LOSS* (2006): AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Ecocriticism is a critical theory that examines how nature is depicted in literary writings as well as the link between literature and the natural environment. Ecocriticism studies the ways in which man's interactions with the natural world are represented in his literary creations. The research paper examines Kiran Desai's award-winning second novel The Inheritance of Loss (2006) from an ecocritical perspective. Her depiction of flora and fauna enriches the novel. This paper not only raises awareness about environmental and social concerns, but also serves as a warning against nature's threatening aspects by showing the devastation caused by natural imbalance. The novel encompasses a wide range of eco-critical elements. The author's descriptions are made more vivid by the inclusion of images depicting many parts of the natural world.



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An Environmental Concern in Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* (2006): An Ecocritical Study

Ecocriticism is the most often used word to describe the study of literature with an ecological perspective. The term "ecology" refers to the study of the interrelationships and interdependences among living creatures in their natural habitats. Humans and the natural world are not only just dependent on each other but also are interlinked. Ecocriticism examines how human connections with the natural world are represented in literature. Ecocriticism addresses a wide range of ecological elements. Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. (Glotfelty, xviii) William

Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism in his work titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." The essay was published in 1978. Though, ecocriticism did not develop as a distinct field until the 1990s. It can not be denied that critics have long been interested in the interaction between nature and mankind. Ecocriticism is a form of literary criticism that is being explored across the globe as a study of the environment represented in nature.

Ecocriticism aims to investigate environmental manifestations in literary writings. Environment and literature have always had a strong connection. Authors from all over the globe have expressed this connection in their work. Nature has provided the setting for a wide range of literary works, including novels, poetry, and short stories. Many authors and poets are increasingly concerned about environmental challenges. A critic may learn a lot by studying the works of authors who have addressed the interdependence of men and the environment. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey defines the term 'Ecocriticism' in their book titled *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as,

Ecocriticism was a term coined in the late 1970s by combining "criticism" with a shortened form of "ecology"—the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats. "Ecocriticism" (or by alternative names, environmental criticism and green studies) designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the damage being wrought on that environment by human activities.(96)

To understand the relationship between humans and the natural world, ecocriticism uses a distinct approach. It examines environmental challenges both literally and metaphorically. Nature destruction is just one aspect of the concerns at hand, but there are many others that must be addressed as well. It also identifies literary methods implemented in a work to build a relationship between the narrative and the natural world.

Nature has been a major theme in a number of Indian English novels. There is a similar impetus for most eco-critical writings. Among them, the first is, the distressing realisation that mankind has entered an era of ecological limitations, a period in which the effects of our activities are destroying the earth's natural fundamental vital systems. Serpil Oppermann talks about different branches of ecocriticism in *International Perspectives in*

Feminist Ecocriticism (2013) “If today we have such distinctive branches of ecocriticism as postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental justice ecocriticism, it is time now to start talking about a new feminist ecocriticism as well, which would connect literature with the insights of the nascent posthumanist philosophies.”(27)

There are several works of literature in Indian English literature deal with environmental issues. Writers have used a variety of methods to address environmental concerns. In *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) Swarnalatha Rangarajan talks about “emerging trends in the socio-cultural spaces of India that call for imaginative ways of engaging ecocritically with a contemporary ecological dharma.” (533)

Depending on the novel, it might be a major or minor part of the plot, depending on how important it is to the plot. Kiran Desai is an author who is extremely conscious and has a strong concern for the natural world. Not only does she advocate for environmental causes, but in her award-winning book *The Inheritance of Loss*(2006), she has shown her sincere devotion to the cause. Our environment is degrading and deteriorating for a variety of causes, which are explored in this research paper from an eco-critical viewpoint.

Her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), earned the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Fiction Award in 2006. The natural world and sceneries that she has described in the novel are breathtakingly gorgeous. It takes place at Kalimpong, a town in the Himalayan foothills in the northeast. It demonstrates Kiran Desai's admiration for the natural world. Her care for the environment is evident in this. The depiction of the mountain Kanchenjunga at the start and the end of the novel create balance and emphasises how important the mountains are to the plot. Nature's wealth is evident in the novel's opening sentences, which transport us to a paradise of breathtaking grandeur. The author describes, “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 summit.” (1) The author has depicted landscape more as a character, whose constant involvement impacts as well as influences the other characters. Kanchenjunga symbolises the strength of the natural world. A human-centered approach will not be able to conquer it as its own. Nearly all of the central protagonists are introduced against the background set in Cho Oyu, a remote location away from the bustle of the city. The serene and tranquil tone that dominates the novel's opening

pages implies that the natural harmony is one that should not be violated under any circumstances. Environment and mankind have a close and vital interaction. An already existing connection exists between the human psyche and the natural world. A person and the natural environment are so well matched to one another, it is feasible to understand each other.

Although nature is peaceful, the GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) members disturb it when they arrive at the home of the judge and demand that he provide them with food, accommodation, and a his weapon i.e. his gun. Sai, a child without parents, seeks refuge at the judge's (her grandfather) house, which is set in a tranquil setting surrounded by nature's most magnificent treasures. Even the path which leads to the house is beautiful. "Kanchenjunga glowed macabre, trees stretched away on either side, trunks pale, leaves black, and beyond, between the pillars of the trees, a path led to the house." (19) The ancient home remains as a genuine monument to eco-sustainable and environment-friendly building, and it is a place where one may get benefits from Mother Nature herself. Sai's troubled mind finds peace and tranquility as she strolls across the courtyard under the shade of the huge trees. Her heart and soul are soothed by the dreamy setting. She senses the warmth and tenderness of nature. "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)

The indigenous products of Kalimpong's woods are consumed and marketed to outsiders. As a result of the exploitation of the environment and natural products, inhabitants have been frustrated and without a source of income, leading to the formation of groups like the GNLF, Gorkha National Liberation Front. The urbanisation of the region has resulted in the extraction of stones from the river. There has been an increase in violence in the neighborhood due to the depletion of resources, and Biju being stripped nude and robbed of his resources is an illustration of how love has been lost amongst his own people for financial gain. "Every day the lorries leave bearing away our forests, sold by foreigners to fill the pockets of foreigners. Every day our stones are carried from the riverbed of the Teesta to build their houses and cities." (159)

Nature's creations would not be possible without the River. The river is emphasised since it is a flowing source of water that makes its way around any obstacles that it encounters. The river represents the beginning of existence and prosperity.

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. By the riverbank, wild water racing by, the late evening sun in polka dots through the trees, they parted company. (31)

Sai, who is dissatisfied with her life, decides to move to Kalimpong. Sai's life takes a profound turn as she becomes enamoured with the river's magnificence. Nature here is a wise preacher teaching life's principles. Throughout her life, Sai maintains a strong connection to her grandfather and is surrounded by warmth, love, and care. When She comes into touch with the natural world, she experiences a change in her confused mind that she cannot explain. Natural forces have an effect on Sai's restricted and oppressed mindset, allowing her to become more comfortable and relaxed. She acquires a feeling of kinship and experiences nature's interconnectedness.

Even from the perspective of nature-human relationships, Sai and Gyan's romance is fascinating to see. In the presence of nature, they both feel so empowered and at peace. Whenever Gyan comes to Cho Oyo to educate Sai, he is fascinated by the beautiful nature. "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." (78) The author talks about how humans' way of living affects the environment and has a big influence on it. Nature's everlasting features are blended into the simple and rural way of living. While suffering in a foreign country, the sad Biju is reminded of the happy days spent in his village, which instills thoughts of closeness with his family despite the fact that he is separated from them. Sweet memories of country life calm his disturbed soul. Biju gets a massive boost of strength from thinking about nature. Nature gives him the motivation to confront and conquer his mental condition. Biju has vivid memories of his childhood in his village. Both Biju and his father used to have a conversation with each other. His father was very contented:

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. (103)

This emphasises the value of village life in its pure state, where everything is pure and authentic. When Biju had a negative experience in the USA, he realised the significance and joy of rural life. Nature serves as an excellent backdrop symbol for the existence of socio-economic imbalance. All of the seasons, with their vibrant transformations, hues, and influence on individuals, are shown in stunning detail in this masterpiece. All the small insects, that flew by in different colours during the monsoon are talked about in this novel.

Using an environmental approach, the narrative is enhanced by the diversity of plants and wildlife found in the natural world. Fauna, flora, and even the tiniest of species are covered in great depth in this novel. Mutt, Judge's dog, is depicted as a character in this novel. The cook respects snakes as if they were deities and gets terrified when he disturbs cobras. As described in the novel "I went to the temple and they told me that I must ask forgiveness of the snakes. So I made a clay cobra and put it behind the water tank, made the area around it clean with cow dung, and did puja. Immediately the swelling went down."(27) Father Booty, on the other hand, has a dairy farm with cows, and he loves the cheese of his own farm so much that he regards the cheese of Amul as nothing more than a plastic wrapper. The incident is described as "This struck Father Booty as very funny, but he stopped laughing when they passed the Amul billboard. Utterly Butterly Delicious—"Plastic! How can they call it butter and cheese? It's not. You could use it for waterproofing!" (208) In addition to the pet, other little animals are given prominence in the novel. In one scene, Lola takes a caterpillar out of a cauliflower and tosses it to a nearby bird, who pinches the caterpillar's body like toothpaste, revealing her uncaring and westernised mentality. In addition to wildlife, vegetation is an important aspect of every ecosystem, and the novel is rich in description of flora. Many themes and ideas are conveyed via the novel's repeated use of floral symbolism. Even Kanchenjunga is referred to as the land of flowers because it has abundance of blooming plants.

Mountains are also a reflection of love and compassion. It is a joyous scene when Biju finally gets at the doorway and the cook jumps at his son, and the tale ends with the breathtaking description of Kanchenjunga once again. "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga

turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel if briefly, that truth was apparent.” (324) The novel comes to an end with an allusion to the loss of all materialistic possessions thing but restoring the optimism that comes from the priceless understanding of compatibility with family, and societal relationships. Kanchenjunga is the witness to this.

In this way, it is evident that Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*(2006) encompasses a wide range of eco-critical elements. The author's descriptions are made more vivid by the inclusion of images depicting many parts of the natural world. Literary and environmental topics are approached with a sense of intensity. These topics and concerns are all interwoven together with wonderful finesse by her. In this viewpoint, Kiran Desai's efforts demonstrate her environmental sense and emotional connection to nature.

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