

Representation of Nature in the Contemporary Indian English Fiction

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Nature, in the broadest sense, is equivalent to the natural world, physical world, or material world. "Nature" refers to the phenomena of the physical world, and also to life in general. It refers to the world of living things and the outdoors. The word *nature* is derived from the Latin word *natura*, or "essential qualities, innate disposition." Mother Nature is a common personification of nature that focuses on the life giving and nurturing aspects of nature by embodying it in the form of the mother. Right from the existence of human race on this planet, man has looked at nature as the source of energy and life. In the primitive stage man was totally dependent on the natural sources to survive. These sources have helped him immensely to achieve different stages of development and progress. He has capitalized on these sources and made his life better from ancient to modern period. Apart from this nature has remained a chief source of inspiration for human

beings. The cycle of day and night, seasons, various birds, animals and the green vegetation highlights the importance of regularity and continuity. This natural surrounding makes its impact and influence human beings. Human mindset and creativity is shaped in the company of nature. Great poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore's *Shantiniketan* is one fine example of the relationship of nature and human beings.

Nature and literature have always shared a very close relationship as it is clearly evident in the works of creative writers. Nature is portrayed as the preserver and destroyer in all the genres of literature. India is the country known for its diversity. This diversity is reflected with a variety of ecosystems. In the second half of the 20th century these ecosystems have been affected due to industrialization, city beautification, over population, urbanization and deforestation. Being the mirror of society, literature and particularly Indian English literature could not remain

unaffected. The changing face of nature and the threat to the ecological balance has compelled the modern writers to represent it in their writings. The concern for diminishing nature is clearly evident with the portrayal of Mother Nature. The contemporary issue of ecological balance is reflected in the Indian English fiction. This paper tries to analyze and interpret the representation of nature in the contemporary Indian English fiction. It chiefly focuses the fiction after 1980. The young generation of Indian writers has expressed different views, observations, hope and concerns about nature, its changing face and the future of our own dear planet Earth.

Vikram Seth is one important writer on the horizon of Indian English literature. His three novels *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and *An Equal Music* (1999) depict the stories set in different countries and of the characters of different backgrounds. It allows the reader to get a comparative picture of endangered nature across the world. His characters vary from the field of computers, engineering, education, politics and commerce to the world of music. These three novels are respectively set in the silicon valley of Californian bay area, India after independence and in London and Vienna.

Threat of war and nuclear weapons and the preservation of nature is a chief concern in his *The Golden Gate*. The group of typical Californian professionals involved in the high-tech computers and electronics is presented. The character John Brown represents the workaholic young generation interested in personal progress. He works in the area of nuclear research. He opposes the anti-nuclear war peace campaigners. He refuses to consider the implications of his work. He does not question the ideological apparatus that constructs his consciousness along with the other under plant employees. While Liz Doroti, a 27 years old working girl is invited to a protest meeting by anti-nuclear demonstrators. She is initially unwilling to commit herself and risk her career but eventually makes a spirited defense in court on behalf of the protesters. Seth expands upon the scale of devastation that nuclear weapon can wreck. The effects of radioactive fallout will step through the earth and all living things will die. Sixty years old father O'Hare deliver a 24-page long passionate and knowledgeable plea, and appeals to his audience to transcend their petty concerns and to unite the movement against a possible nuclear abyss. He appeals to "choose the life" and asks to learn a lesson from history. Liz's speech on innocent flora and fauna has

echoes of the plight of the animals. She says,

If we die/ we humans, that is –it may serve us
 Right for our silliness and hate.
 But what we cannot vindicate
 Is killing all the other fauna
 That have developed on the earth.
 On field or floe, in every corner,
 From Maine to Thule, from Minsk to Perth,
 They'll die. I'm not exaggerating.
 The reason is illuminating;
 Blinding in fact. With ruined eyes
 A cheetah, or an insect, dies
 ---- and lingeringly ----of starvation.
 Deplete the ozone layer by two
 And more ultraviolet through—
 Viola! We've blinded dumb creation
 (7.45-7.46)

The preservation of nature and surroundings is the responsibility of human beings. The modern tendency of possessing nuclear weapons and the increasing obsession for it have created a great threat for nature and put it on the verge of devastation.

The contrast between the Urban and the rural area, the city and country regarding the abundance of natural surroundings discussed in Seth's *An Equal Music*. The fiction is set in London and Vienna. Michael, a young violin player belongs to a small countryside place Rochdale, full of natural beauty. He says, "In Rochdale within minutes I would be in the open country side. Sometimes I would walk on the tops, sometimes just lie in the

grassy hollows where I could no longer hear the sound of the wind. And into that silence after a minute or two fell the rising song of a lark...and sometimes, when the sun came out after a drizzle, there would be a whole scrum of skylarks." In the hubbub of London he longs for that natural beauty and silence. He points out, "In London, high up though I am, there is no natural silence. Even in the middle of the 600 acres park, I can hear the traffic all around, and often above." This contrast underlines the price human beings pay for the "progress." He highlights the increasing distance between man and nature. Various aspects regarding urbanization are responsible for the devastation of the nature. And unfortunately it affects the human mind negatively and leaves it restless.

In Seth's *A Suitable Boy* he has presented the Indian scenario just after Indian independence. In this novel he has presented a guided tour of India. The story moves from town- Brahmpur to Calcutta and so on. Seth has presented the beautiful site of river Ganges. The mist, banyan trees, boats, birds and the description of the bank underlines the rich natural heritage of India. It also states the relation of nature with human temperament. Lata's falling in love with Kabir, the development of her emotional bonds and the breakup everything happens in the presence of river

Ganges. Its flow stands for the flow of life. The deeply rooted cultural significance of nature in Indian culture is also focused. In India various plants, birds and animals have references in Indian mythology and religions. The reference to the Harsingar tree underline the close relation of nature with human beings.

In Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* he has presented the imbalance of ecology due to city beautification program. These beautification plans have changed the original face of the city and created danger for nature. Dr. Farokh Kohlal and his son Maneck belong to a hill station in north India. The change in the hill station, the new road construction raiser and pollution scattered the self of Dr. Kohlal. He feels helpless. The effects of this so called progress make him restless. He misses the lost vegetation and starts talking to rocks and plants. Maneck feels boiled with anger towards insensitivities of people but, "He wept helplessly, silently...there was no place of escape. His dreams have succumbed." Increasing constructions and changes are minimizing the greenery even on the hill stations.

Amitav Ghosg's *The Hungry Tides* (2005) presents the problems arising due to increasing population and snatching away the land of animal's natural habitude. It presents the terror of tigers, known for killing animals and men in Sunderban and

the islands. Increasing needs of huge population has destroyed the ecological balance. The vastness and the terror of nature is pen painted in contrast to the helpless people.

In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* people from different cultures and backgrounds are presented. The fiction presents an insurgency in India and the immigrant experience. She has presented the local problem in the form of Nepali insurgencies. The nepali's living in Kalimpong and other eastern part of India try to snatch the belongingness by fighting for it. In their fight they don't hesitate in killing the innocent animals. It seems unimportant for them on the background of human killings. She presents the inhumanity of human beings which endangers our ecosystem.

The contemporary Indian English fiction presents the threats to nature. The process of urbanization, city beautification, overpopulation, industrialization and evens the increasing threat of nuclear weapons are all man made threats to our own surrounding nature. It is also highlighted in these writings that the insensitivity and blindness towards nurturing the nature is responsible for the fast devastation of nature. The soothing and beautiful portrayal of nature in the ancient literature is replaced by the concerns for nature and the ugly face of human beings is

uncovered. This contemporary fiction highlights the need to pay high attention to maintain this ecological balance. It also warns us to take steps to improve the situation as it has turned a global problem today which encompasses all countries in the world. The effects of this loss are unbearable for the human race. The reference to Bengal Famine by Kamala Markandeya in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is apt to conclude. She writes, "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless and forgetful, and it has you by the throat."

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