

## Environmental Fiction and Concept of Nature in From Heaven Lake

Dr. Bipin Chandra Uniyal

Assistant Professor, English

Bal Ganga Degree College Sendul,

Kemar, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India

bipinuniyal2511@gmail.com

### Abstract

Environmental fiction is one that deals with men's social conditions, environment and nature. It is a study of relationship between man and nature. Man is always dependent on nature. He cannot live without it. Nature provides the means of livelihood to the human beings. Nature is mighty and powerful to man. Man has always tried to make a victory over nature, but it is very temporary or momentary. Nature always makes a balance, but if there is any kind of nature created by man, there is every time a natural imbalance between man and nature. For removing this imbalance, man always makes a compromise with nature. Nature is cruel and so, it is necessary to compromise with nature. Otherwise, nature will destroy all those things which concern man.

**Keywords:** - Environment, Cultural, Nature, Imbalance, Relationship, Dependent.

Vikram Seth, the poet and the novelist, was born in Calcutta, India, on 20th June 1952 in the family of Mr. Prem Nath Seth and Mrs. Leena Seth. As an exponent of Indo-English fiction, Seth has exhibited calibre in spear-heading a literary movement of its own kind. He is prolific writer and has written poems, stories and novels. He is recipient of Sahitya Academi Award, Commonwealth Writer's Prize, W.H. Smith Prize and many other awards and distinctions. He got world wide popularity. His works are widely accepted both in India and abroad. His travel literature is full of realism, irony and humour.

From Heaven Lake is a travel book describing the life style and also the culture of both China and Tibet. The lake described in From Heaven Lake is fed on snow and is described to be deceptive, calm and still in its water.

“Fiction is a prose work in narrative form, consisting of the characters, and the incidents, wholly or partly imaginary”. (1). Fiction is perhaps the most elastic and adaptable form that the literary persons have discovered and developed. Fiction presents and gives us a more complete picture and the panoramic view of the life of the contemporary time. So it is a social document of great value and significance, a popular media of presentation of social milieu in the modern times.

Environmental fiction is one that deals with men’s social conditions, environment and nature. It is a study of relationship between man and nature. Man is always dependent on nature. He cannot live without it. Nature provides the means of livelihood to the human beings. Nature is mighty and powerful to man. Man has always tried to make a victory over nature, but it is very temporary or momentary. Nature always makes a balance, but if there is any kind of nature created by man, there is every time a natural imbalance between man and nature. For removing this imbalance, man always makes a compromise with nature. Nature is cruel and so, it is necessary to compromise with nature. Otherwise, nature will destroy all those things which concern man.

Human being is surrounded by its environment. An environment includes all the physical, social and the cultural factors and conditions. Environment paves the way to man. We get differences between two persons who are living in two different places, having a different environment. We get these differences in man’s cultural, social, economic, educational and physical appearances. A particular region has its own environment, culture, social and economic standards, which differ from other regions. The people living in that region have the same habit and practices.

Environment creates situations for man; man does not create environment. The artificial kind of environment creates many problems. So the environment plays a great role in the development of man. We can compare two students, one from the city and another from the remote area of villages. In city, there is a different kind of environment from villages. There are good schools in large cities, whereas in the villages, schools are rare. So both the students will have a different standard of education. Education is the chief factor of development. It makes differences in each field.

Situations are according to the environment. Places are of different climate, and so, there is different environment. Turfan is desert area in China. So in summer season, it becomes very hot. Turfan's tourism is not very prosperous, but still people come here. The weather situation is unbearable, since the temperature difference is really very high. "Turfan is also known as a 'Fire Place' in China. It has a 40 degree centigrade temperature in average. It is funny to see that the people sweat since it is evaporated before they come out to the outer layer of the skin". (2). But still the visitors come here. Turfan is Muslim area. But it has developed its own culture.

Nature is of two kinds, one is internal and another external. In internal nature, there are men's consciousness, feelings and emotions connected with the nature's objects. In external nature, the nature's objects are before us, but the feelings and emotions are not associated with these objects. So the external nature is outwardly, and it is attractive and beautiful. The association of feelings and emotions change the external objects into internal objects. Implicit nature is hard and it has both beautiful and ugly sides. In it, there is inner reality, while the external nature is but the outward side of the internal nature. External nature has a fixed shape, which always tempts the beings. According to Hindu mythology the Banyan and the Pipal trees are holy. It is believed that these trees are abode of holy spirits. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Brahma lives in the papal tree's roots, Lord Vishnu

lives in the papal tree's trunk, and Lord Shiva lives in the papal tree's leaves. It is believed that papal tree has a spiritual significance as Hindus believe that Lord Vishnu with his wife Laxmi resides on this tree on Saturday. That is the reason that Hindu people pour water to the root of the tree on every Saturday. It is also believed that trinity Lord Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma conduct their councils under this tree. It is also believed if a woman circumambulates the papal tree, she is blessed with children and gains the desired husband. In Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism the Pipal tree is considered auspicious. In Hinduism the leaf of of the Bunyan tree is said to be the resting place of the lord Krishna. People believed that this tree holds the power to grant any wish that a devotee asks for. The people worship these trees. But another community enjoys its outward beauty.

Vikram Seth's 'From Heaven Lake' is an environmental fiction; Seth visited the lonely places, the remote region, and the minority areas. These places are beautiful. He depicts these places in both internal and external ways. Vikram Seth presents nature in both its internal and external facets, just as the Grand Mosque of Xian is both internal and external at the same time for various communities. To the visitor, the Grand Mosque is the outward attraction. But, for Muslim community, it is a holy place because their religious feelings are associated with it.

Xian is a historical place in China. Here are the famous collections of calligraphic inscriptions and tomb of Empress Wu Quin Shi Huang was buried here with his thousands of soldiers and horses. It's atmosphere is just like of Delhi. Seth reminds Delhi. Here are the broad and long streets, much populated areas, commercial architecture and crowd of vehicles and many other things compelling Seth to remind himself of Delhi.

At the grand Mosque of Xian, there are always prayers by Muslims. Seth sat there for a short period, and enjoyed the environment of the surroundings of grand mosque. Such types of places are always the sources of calm and peace for those people who are in search of it,

and those who are bothered and puzzled by modern world. Such people always get peace there and satiety. Seth also enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere of this place and found it as heaven among the crowded areas of Xian.

Seth's concept of nature is same as of Thomas Hardy and Tennyson. In the poetry of Tennyson and the novels of Thomas Hardy nature no longer remains a "kindly mother with a holy pain of her own. Tennyson speaks of nature "as red in tooth and claw" (3).

The region of Heaven Lake is beautiful. Seth declares "I could live here content for a year" (4). Outwardly the water of Heaven Lake is attractive, but at the same time the water is deceptive. According to Mr. Cao "people are often drowned here" (5).

So such an attractive and glamorous lake, or natural scene, becomes the causes of tragedy, if human beings do not take precaution. Natural scene is always beautiful, but if a human being does not compromise with it, it becomes cruel.

Everywhere in nature there are places which provides rest and peace to man. Seth writes: "At Nanhu there are actually two lakes. I discover both fed by springs. There is a larger, broader, very clear lake below, and above it a narrower serpentine lake of yet more amazing cleanliness, almost as pure as Heaven Lake, near Urumqui. It is a paradise on hot day like this" (6).

We can compare Vikram Seth's concept of nature with Thomas Hardy. Hardy is even more explicit. He paints both the ugly and the beautiful in nature and regards 'mutual butchery' as the law of nature. He gives knockout blow to the romantic exaltation of nature and makes us see her in her true colour. Impelled by scientific rationalism, he "scoffs at the cause of things, and conceives of him as a blind power working ceaselessly, unmindful of human suffering" (7). Hardy is regional novelist. His each novel deals with a particular region that is Wessex. It appears and re-appears successively in one novel after another and it is "seldom that he strays out of it" (8). But his treatment of this particular is not limited. His

theme is man and society not of Wessex, but of the whole universe.

Seth's attitude towards nature is simple and curious. *From Heaven Lake* is a regional fiction. Seth is not a regional writer, because in his other works, he does not write about a single region. But his treatment of this region is not narrow. He gives it a broader sense. The scene and sights of both Sinkiang and Tibet are a part of the universal nature. He has revealed the essential nobility and grandeur of the soul of humble humanity that remains unknown in country isolation. He has thus completely broken away from tradition and his novels do not suffer in this regard. Seth's *From Heaven Lake* shows a genuine sense of natural beauty and the charms of rural life. He is more interested in the wilder and vaster in nature. His treatment of nature is sensuous and pictorial.

Vikram Seth has propounded a new idea of environmental fiction in his *From Heaven Lake*. Instead of adding society to culture, he has emphasised upon environment as a basic percept for maintaining human culture. There have been very good writers on both Indo-English poetry and fiction, but Seth has made the travel writing a new genre, bringing to light a travel renaissance in art through environment. His book is not only a literature in travel writing but as well as an experiment opening new vistas to the study of environment in its interaction with society. There are both possibilities that the society makes environment and the environment makes the society. Among all other things Seth has opened new doors interpreting nature afresh to both English romantics and Indo-English classicists.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of all authors, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

**Copyright:** © 2023 by Dr. Bipin Chandra Uniyal. Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

**License:** This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial

purposes, with proper attribution. Authors are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

### References

Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, New York: Funk and Wagnalls Publishing Co.

Inc. 1976, Vol. I, Page 236.

Vikram Seth, From Heaven Lake: Travel Through Sinkiang and Tibet, New Delhi: Penguin

Books (India) Ltd., 1983, Page 193.

Raghukul Tilak, History of English Literature with Social Background, Meerut: Rajhans

PRAKASHAN, 1990, Page 276.

Vikram Seth, From Heaven Lake: Travel Through Sinkiang and Tibet, New Delhi: Penguin

Books (India) Ltd., 1983, Page 20.

Ibid Page 23.

Ibid Page 69.

Raghukul Tilak, History of English Literature with Social Background, Meerut: Rajhans

Prakashan, 1990, Page 270.

Ibid Page 309.