
**An Ethos of Alliance: Ecological Aesthetics in Deepak Dalal's
*The Snow Leopard Adventure***

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ABSTRACT:

*Literature reflects novel perspectives and perceptions, keeping intact its classic integrity. Ecological concerns are gaining momentum as humanity has ventured into the all possible realms of nature only to enlarge human beings' comfort zone. Indian literature sketches the impacts of such anthropocentric attitudes. Not stopping with the mere portrayals of human beings' ruthless trespassing, it leaps forward to advocate ways for mending the impaired structures. Deepak Dalal is one such writer who is committed to expose the beauty of nature and its components to create a sense of belongingness, rather oneness with nature. The Snow Leopard Adventure of Dalal strives to create a space to experience the manifestation of ecological self. The storyline reveals the adventures of Vikram and Caroline Austin in the Himalayan ranges to rescue a young lama. Their trekking experience and encounter with the snow leopard not only drift their level of understanding truth but also provide room for the readers to muse over such perceptions. The theoretical framework of the paper attempts to place Deepak Dalal's **The Snow Leopard Adventure** into Gernot Bohme's Ecological aesthetics of atmosphere. According to Bohme, the process of experiencing the non-human world culminates in rediscovering one's naturality. This subtle phenomenological interaction paves the way to ecological aesthetics.*

Key Words: *Gernot Bohme, ecological aesthetics, Deepak Dalal, Leib, Korper, nature, atmosphere, environment*

Literature reflects novel perspectives and perceptions, keeping intact its classic integrity. Through ages, it voices various social issues and attempts to discern truth from the complex web of riddles. Writers' thought processes scale different dimensions enabling the readers to undergo a journey though the virtual worlds they create. At times, the worlds thus experienced provoke a jolting revelation. By capturing the spirit of the reality outside, the writers sensitize the readers about the contemporary scenario and the measures to be drawn for re-establishing harmony in the world. Indian writers own a meritorious share in this endeavour of enlightening humanity about the truth that underlies any facet of life. Ecological concerns are gaining momentum as humanity has ventured into the all possible realms of nature only to enlarge human beings' comfort zone. Indian literature sketches the impacts of such anthropocentric attitudes. Not stopping with the mere portrayals of human beings' ruthless trespassing, it leaps forward to advocate ways for mending the impaired structures. Deepak Dalal is one such writer who is committed to expose the beauty of nature and its components to create a sense of belongingness, rather oneness with nature. His novels serve as eye opener to realise the ecological self. Being a lover of nature and a man of wide travelling experiences, Dalal says in an interview thus: "There is great natural beauty in the

wild and exotic destinations of India. It is the splendour of these places that motivates my writing. I hope that my writing will kindle a desire for people – particularly children – to visit and explore such areas for themselves” (*India’s Endangered*, 2012). *The Snow Leopard Adventure* of Dalal strives to create a space to experience the manifestation of ecological self. The storyline reveals the adventures of Vikram and Caroline Austin in the Himalayan ranges to rescue a young lama. Their trekking experience and encounter with the snow leopard not only drift their level of understanding truth but also provide room for the readers to muse over such perceptions. Thus providing a key for the so long unopened realm of human mind, Dalal tries to enlarge the critical and sensitive insight of the reader community. The theoretical framework of the paper attempts to place Deepak Dalal’s *The Snow Leopard Adventure* into Gernot Bohme’s Ecological aesthetics of atmosphere.

Ecocriticism is a fast emerging field of study to discuss and debate the fatal consequences of anthropocentrism or social disorders. Ecocritical theories and deliberations highlight various ecological standpoints with reference to time, space, mind, and body. While some writers concentrate on the complexities of the outer world, a few others prefer to focus on the inner world to inculcate ecological ethics. Ecological aesthetics is one such attempt to animate the innate purest core within every human being. While Immanuel Kant’s aestheticism is based on the feeling of pleasure from experiencing an object provided that it should not spring out from the previous desire of that object, Holmes Rolston III opines that the aesthetic experience of nature must be participatory and it should be faithful to the objective reality. Gernot Bohme’s aestheticism is yet another nuance. Bohme’s moral dimensions redefining humanity’s alliance with the natural world facilitate collective flourishing. This radical outlook adheres strongly to the ideal of respecting earth and the network of interrelationships. Kate Rigby cites Bohme’s argument of the practical advantage of the ethos of alliance thus:

...rather than burdening ourselves with the impossible task of global environmental management, the ethos of alliance could enable us to create largely self-regulating ecological (i.e., social-natural) complexes (ökologische Gefügen), which would be conducive to human well-being while simultaneously respecting the interactive autopoiesis of other-than-human nature. (141)

According to Bohme, the process of experiencing the non-human world culminates in rediscovering one’s naturalness. This subtle phenomenological interaction paves the way to ecological aesthetics.

The trekking group in *The Snow Leopard Adventure* consists of more than ten members whose intention is to spot a snow leopard which is commonly called the ‘grey ghost’ of the Himalayas owing to its elusiveness and power of disappearance. Vikram and Aditya are entrusted with the duty of protecting a young lama. When the lama is kidnapped, commotion breaks in and the entire troupe is scattered. The adventurous journey of rescuing the lama is not without sudden revelations and realisations. The author’s depiction of the impact of the Himalayan landscape and its atmosphere upon the protagonists Vikram and Caroline evokes ecological aesthetics thereby tending their naturalness surface their material existence. The author, apart from highlighting the alliance between the human and the non-human world, underlines the importance of rooting ecological ethics in the societal mind-set which is

goaded by the desires of material possession, power, and glory. Also he broods over the fatal role of power politics in determining the design and the existence of any land or space.

Bohme offers a distinction between ‘*Leib*’ and ‘*Korper*’, the states of a body, to deepen the insight of ecological aesthetics. While the latter attaches instrumental value to a body, the former estimates the level of sensitivity. Kate Rigby examines the distinction; *Korper* is “the body you ‘use’ to type with” and *Leib* is “the body, that, ineluctably, you ‘are’; the body that aches when you have typed too long” (142). Only *Leib* enables phenomenological interactions. Realisations and revelatory states are made possible with the feelings animating *Leib*. A gross understanding of this connection leads to misconceptions regarding body and mind. Caroline is a typical exemplification of this theory as she undergoes radical change in outlook and behaviour once she comprehends this fine sensibility that paves the way for ecological aesthetics. Hers is a journey from *Korper* to *Leib*; then ultimately to realisation through alliance with the atmosphere.

At the outset, Caroline poses to be a short-tempered girl who is always with a war-like attitude towards her mother. Her behavioural pattern owes a lot to her childhood scars; the separation of her parents, the demise of her father, and her lonely life. Though all the referred to stages had *Leib* in action, the emotions felt were not given a proper insight thereby paving the way for her *Korper* to surface enabling a material existence of her body. She has used *Korper* to satiate *Leib*, and has not given a thorough study of *Leib*; hence her fall in the early stage of adolescence. Her *Leib* suffocates in the material atmosphere. Bohme’s idea about modernity goes thus: “For the experience of the body as something external to the self, and the objectification and instrumentalization that this facilitates, has become a more-or-less habitual state of being for most moderns” (Rigby, 142). Caroline attempts vainly to recover from the injuries, but lack of proper understanding misleads her. This unsynchronised tone of her body is regulated when she comes in contact with the Himalayan environment. Not that Caroline experiences an ecological aesthetics at the moment she steps onto the range, but it takes place at gradual degrees. The Himalayan ranges do not seem to do her any good in the beginning of the trekking as it only intensifies the depression that she feels at heart. Her falling into the pit of the loo tent is symbolic of her mistreatment of her body. It signifies her maximum usage of *Korper* and minimal knowledge of *Leib*.

The Himalayan ranges provide Caroline an atmosphere conducive to evolve ecological sensibility by allowing *Leib* to rule her consciousness. The instance of clinging onto a rock for life opens up a vast space in her *Leib*. This conscious occupation and complete surrender to the awesome vacuum around her indicate the inactivity of her *Korper* and the active interplay of *Leib*. This interaction with the non-human world is indeed revelatory as she notes down her emotions faithfully thus:

... suspended in space, dangling from your hands. I have never undergone such radical treatment. It shook me thoroughly... that single incident straightened me out... For the first time I was honest with myself. After taking a hard look at my behaviour and at myself I finally realised the obvious. My problem was me... that dangle in outer space knocked the blinkers off my eyes and I saw the truth. (46)

This meaningful interaction and surfacing of *Leib* consciousness alter her behavioural pattern completely that her actions and reactions reflect her sound understanding of life. Rigby points out that, "... the discovery of other-than-human nature is necessarily conjoined with the recovery of our own naturality. And that is where aesthetics comes in" (141). The girl who has been always gloomy and ill-tempered turns radiant and amiable. *Leib* does not only promote self-realisation but orients towards understanding others. Caroline, who has so far misunderstood her mother, loves her true to her heart. She even decides to be with her mother for the rest of her life. Thus, ecological aesthetics pave the way for the naturality to surface. Bohme talks about the overcome of the tension between the two states of the body: "we seek to mediate it through a practice of care for the self, incorporating a new dietetics oriented towards the acceptance, rather than the domination of our own naturality" (Rigby, 143).

In contrast to Caroline, the author depicts Mr. Akira Singh who is notorious for his smuggling operations. Not stopping with tiger bone shipments and smuggling of illegal items, he is engaged in kidnapping the young lama for which he expects lots of money in return. Akira can be cited as a typical example of the personified modern mentality of material comfort. The conscious manifestation of his *Korper*, driven by material impulses, makes his *Leib* inactive. He has lost the fine sensibilities that animate any life form. His mindset and course of actions involve *Korper* a lot only to acquire what he wishes. Except a few moments of his appreciative mood and his confession that he too loves animals, his *Leib* does not show any sign of communicating with the environment as it is. Through his character, the author wishes to state how misunderstanding the reality outside and a gross conception of nature may lead to a wrong outlook and behaviour that would in turn harm the environment along with the individual concerned. Akira's confession of his love for animals is revealed thus:

I have always liked animals. I have visited all the sanctuaries of this country... I have been to Kanha, Kasiranga, Rathambore, and Corbett. Dealing in animal products doesn't mean that I do not appreciate the creatures. I believe that people should be clear about their priorities, like I am. I am fond of animals. But I will not let that override my business instincts. Money is important. I am willing to pursue any job as long as the money is good! (85)

The soft core of the antagonist is exhibited through this outpour but the tragic reality is that he is unwilling to let the naturality rule both his *Korper* and *Leib*. He states his priority clearly as money. He is ready to take any risk for getting it. His passion for money takes possession of his *Korper* and *Leib*; and by its dominance, his tender emotions become stale and feeble.

Dalal presents Akira as a representative of the sect of people who are dominant in number. Those people's life style and thought processes are driven by monetary principles and they are ready to go to any extent to accumulate wealth. They seek money either out of desire or need. In both cases, they all very well know, like Akira, about their priority. But the truth is that the inner core of any being is interconnected with other living forms; for this reason they cannot altogether reject the momentary dictates of their *Leibs*. Akira's words that he is fond of animals validate the presence of universal love in any human being; but societal

atmosphere and class struggles suppress that delicate sensibility. This is in a way can be related to social ecology because social ecologists find fault with, not anthropocentrism but, societal disorder/ disharmony that causes environmental devastation. Michael E Zimmerman observes thus: “Social ecology explains the ecological crisis as the outcome not of a generalized anthropocentrism, but rather as the result of authoritarian social structures, embodied most perniciously in capitalism but also present in state socialism” (2). Money plays a pivotal role in the world in deciding any course of action. Having thus penetrated into all systems of social facets it has laid the path towards unimaginable disaster. Ruled by the dictates of it, humanity has lost its individuality or its soul. The traces of such virtuous ideals still linger in its heart that through its momentary exposures its true tendency is captured. Though Akira reveals his gentle heart, he never forgets to make a strong note on the cause of the problem. He affirms that he is only an agent and if he stops this business, some other would take up the job of killing tigers for their bones because the demand comes from elsewhere – from the so called educated people. He says furiously: “It is not I who is killing these animals. I am simply a businessman. There are millions of people who want medicines made from tiger bones. There are thousands who want to own shahtoosh shawls. These people need my services and are willing to pay huge sums of money for these items” (79). Also Akira shows his contemptuousness on the organisations that strive to capture him owing to his crimes. His irate remark pointing out the root cause of the problem reflects the mood and move of the elite sect:

I don't use tiger bone medicines and I personally don't care for shahtoosh shawls. ... it is not Akira who is driving these animals to extinction. It is those *educated* people with money in their pockets are responsible. ... Tell your precious organisations to focus on the *cause* of the problem. Their money can be spent on educating people not to use tiger bone medicines and not to aspire for shahtoosh shawls. (79)

As Akira notifies, the elite sect enables poisoned mindset to take root in the society to value money at the cost of other living beings. But at the same time, as Vikram retorts, this business would not flourish if there are no Akiras. So, the author seems to highlight societal flaws at its various facets. Ultimately, humanity can be redeemed either by individual reformation or through strict social codes protecting human and non-human world. Dalal even offers a solution to all these problems of societal and environmental disorders by portraying the simple livelihood of the Ladakh village people who lead a life attuned with nature.

Dr. Rahu Raman is the expedition leader and wildlife scientist. He briefs his troubles while encountering a snow leopard and it seems that it is worth undergoing such struggles for the sight of that elusive majesty. He has seen a mother and her cubs. For him, “It is the occasional heavenly encounter like this which persuades him to keep going... It was one of the most beautiful moments in his life” (19). The sight of the snow leopard provides aesthetic atmosphere to Raghu that he never wishes to lose the vision. He closely studies the behaviour of the animal and is taken by surprise at the knack of its hunt. Though he loves trekking in the Himalayan ranges, his passion for snow leopard keeps his spirits intact. That serves as a driving force. This ecological aesthetics of atmosphere is at full swing with reference to Raghu. Not only Raghu is aesthetically moved by the sight of the snow leopard but also Vikram and Caroline. While Vikram senses the presence of a snow leopard and its

cubs at a semi-conscious state, Caroline sees them with full consciousness in a moonlit night. Though both of them see the same animals, their aesthetic experiences differ. Vikram, in a dreamy state, wants the dream of being with the leopards to continue, and Caroline believes strongly that it is by the aid of her father in the heavenly abode that she has seen the animals. Seeing a snow leopard in wilderness had been the life time dream of Caroline's father though he had the animal caged in a zoo. So, when Caroline beholds the animal, it provides an immediate connection with her father's aesthetic experience thus enabling her to realise the double joy within – hers and her father's. This stands parallel with Bohme's explanation of moods as quoted by Rigby: "...space of moods is the space which in a sense, attunes my mood, but at the same time it is the extension of my mood itself" (143).

The realm that is a source of revelation throws light on the power politics that alters the landscape and space according to the desires of the elite group; this in turn changes the fate and mindset of the people who inhabit the land. The enmity between nations, particularly India and Pakistan, is analysed with reference to Jammu and Kashmir issue. Vikram and the other expedition members listen to the radio news that details the war between the two countries. It is quite unimaginable for Vikram that a battle for a land dispute has taken place just a hundred kilometres away from the serene atmosphere that they admire. The author, within that short space and time, is able to draw a sharp contrast between naturalness and anthropocentrism. The anthropocentric attitude of the human beings not only has led to the partition of land but also fuels the animosity between neighbouring countries. Possession and power drive humanity mad and never minding the devastation that they cause both to the human and the non-human world, human beings continue to strive for the illusory right over land. Land appears to be a commodity in their perspective and they no longer perceive it as a community to which all living beings belong. This perception does not promote harmony in this world; moreover in contrast to the serenity one should feel within, such paradoxical mental framework sows seeds of anguish, unrest, and insecurity that become contagious. On listening to the disheartening news of Indo-Pakistan war at Kargil, Vikram feels thus: "The peace and calm that enveloped us suddenly evaporated into the thin Ladakh air like an illusion. I felt vulnerable and insecure" (31). The statement of Vikram is an echo of the atmosphere that both Indians and Pakistanis have created in the Kashmir valley. While each of the human beings care much about the material possession that they leave to their children, they, collectively as humanity, least bother to leave behind a calm atmosphere and harmonious relations to the future generation. The musing of Vikram is a reflection of reality that captures the insecure feelings of the world's youth.

Bohme briefs that the nature of the aesthetic experience need not only spring from experiencing beauty but can also be felt by realising the truth of being. He states in an interview thus:

Aesthetics view points (*asthetische Gesichtspunkte*) do not pay attention only to the issue of whether nature is beautiful or offers us beautiful scenery but also to the fact that nature influences our own feeling of being there (*Befinden*) through our sensibility. (Wang, 2014)

This musing is echoed in Dalal's portrayal of the snow leopard which is the "mysterious and mystical animal often referred to as the 'grey ghost' of the Himalayas" (2). Raghu's expertise

and knowledge on snow leopards serve no practical results because the animal has such power of elusiveness to disappear from the eyesight though it is right in front. Raghu says that one can spot a snow leopard only when it moves. When he recounts experiences, both during his heavenly encounter of a mother and its cubs and while witnessing a snow leopard hunt, an astonishing revelation is unfolded that the animals, even the cubs, are bestowed with the power of stealth and secrecy. While he has been watching a herd of argali sheep on the slope of a mountain through a telescope he is excited to spot out the movement of a snow leopard. But the reality is that “The animal had been within his field of vision for a long time, but he only spotted it when it moved” (20). It is virtually impossible to move soundlessly on such terrain. But the snow leopard manages to move so. When Vikram sees them, he assumes that he is dreaming and when Caroline spots them out they appear to be shadowy figures. Caroline is thrilled to see the snow leopards in the Himalayan ranges though she has already seen them in a zoo. The excitement and revelation can be felt by the characters only when they see the animals in their atmosphere proper. Seeing its ‘being’ there is itself an aesthetic experience. The author thus exhibits the power of nature quite naturally. Any being’s spirit and soul remain pure and powerful in the natural atmosphere. Either voluntary or forcible removal of a being from its natural atmosphere would only yield disastrous results in near future. Humanity’s association with nature will reveal the truth and the reality that have so far eluded owing to the lack of true vision. The blooming of one’s inner self and the realisation of the ultimate truth are possible only with nature. Without it, humanity has no future. Thus, vibrating the chord of existence through aesthetic experience, Dalal attempts to chisel the insight of humanity that would enable an understanding and appreciation of the outer reality/beauty. An ethos of alliance should be sought to create a world of harmony and love.

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