

Is Industrialism A Blessing? A Study of Anjali Deshpande's Impeachment.

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ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. The interest on this Topic 'Ecocriticism' aims at more about the relationship between 'Nature and Literature' More over to quench the thirst through research for the basic reason of different culture. Is it because the influence of nature? or what are the things play the predominant role here? Now a days some changes are happening in the nature. So the curiosity is here to know about the consequences on the society: that is literature. Bhopal gas tragedy occurred on the night of 2-3 December 1984 at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Over 500,000 people were exposed to methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals. The toxic substance made its way in and around the shantytowns located near the plant. The government of Madhya Pradesh confirmed a total of 3,787 deaths related to the gas release.

Keywords- Ecocriticism, Environment, Isocyanate gas, Pesticide, Toxic substance

I. INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism it is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view in which all the branches of sciences play their eminent role to analyze the environment. Nature and environment, though it sounds alike, differ a lot. Environment is more abstract and also a more vague concept than nature. Environment plays a vital role in the attitude of human beings. Each change in the nature affects directly in the nature of the inhabitants of the particular area. Based on this concept, Anjali Deshpande has written about the infamous Bhopal Gas Tragedy which has consumed the lives of over one lakh people.

Bhopal gas tragedy occurred on the night of 2-3 December 1984 at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Over 500,000 people were exposed to methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals. The toxic substance made its way in and around the shantytowns located near the plant. The government of Madhya Pradesh confirmed a total of 3,787 deaths related to the gas release.

The UCIL factory was built in 1969. It has been already informed of pollution within the plant in 1976 by two trade unions. In 1981, a worker was splashed with phosgene. In panic his mask was removed and a large amount of phosgene gas was inhaled. It resulted in his death 72 hours later. UCC was warned by American experts who visited the plant after 1981 of the potential of a 'runaway reaction' in the MIC storage tank. Local Indian authorities had warned the company of the problem

as early as 1979, but it is very pathetic that constructive actions were not taken by UCIC at that time.

The Bhopal tragedy is the central theme of Anjali Deshpande's novel Impeachment. The story of Impeachment depicts such people—journalists, activists, lawyers. They are already annoyed with the settlement announced by the Supreme Court on February 14, 1989. The Court settled on 470 million dollars as full and final payment. This is just a little more than the amount the UCC was insured for—350 million dollars. The fight for justice still persists because of the grit and determination of a small group of activists who are tirelessly fighting to get justice for the affected. Not only Avidha, a journalist gives her sleepless nights for the benefit of the victims, but also lawyer, NGO-worker and academician friends are committed to helping Bhopal's victims, cheated many times over get justice.

It depicted the hardships of the people who were the victims of the gas leak. People in Delhi seemed very cold and formal. The whole city had poured out.

Chemists had emptied their stocks of medicines and eye drops. Students had rushed to the Hamidia and Kasturba Hospitals and fetched water from hand pumps and people's houses. They had started a collection drive and bought fruits and milk to feed the sick lying in the hospitals. (pg.67)

The initial effects of exposure were coughing, vomiting, severe eye irritation and a feeling of suffocation. People started running by these symptoms from the plant. Those who ran inhaled

more than those who had a vehicle to ride. According to their height children and other people of shorter stature inhaled higher concentrations. Apart from this many persons were trampled trying to escape. It was the sound of thousands of throats coughing together in an irregular rhythm as if the devil's choir was practising a new dirge. Shrieks punctuated the funeral chorus. The road was slippery with vomit, urine and globs of spittle, green and yellow. Three goats lay dead on the road, their bellies swollen and bulging as if they had drunk too much water. Shall we say 'Industrialism is a blessing?'

A whole city moved to the brink of extinction; amidst the chaos of 'perceived justice. Who deserves impeachment? Avidha finds her commitment to the cause beginning to thin... After all the Bhopal tragedy is no longer news. The dwindling band of her activist-friends - journalists, lawyers and NGO members - with whom she has been fighting the Supreme Court verdict effectively. They categorically mentioned Union Carbide's legal and moral responsibility towards the gas-leak survivors, have their own problems and different thresholds for compromise. Impeachment is an insightful portrayal of the fight between Indian legal system, and the dedicated and educated liberal classes who lent support to the survivors of Bhopal. These supporters tried to wipe out their tears whereas the authority passed their responsibility on different sections. The victims were helpless and they are not aware of basic rights.

Chapter 9 is perhaps the core chapter which shows how innocent people were thrown in the lap of death! Anjali tells us the story of the doctor who was interviewed by Avidha and the revelation he made. The Head of the Forensic Department who handled the dead bodies initially said from the colour of the blood that they died of cyanide poisoning and prescribed the antidote—sodium thiosulphate. Unfortunately for the victims, he was dubbed 'The Doctor of the Dead' and totally dismissed by the Head of the Medicine Department. Even they were bold enough to blame malnutrition was primarily responsible for their death, gas intake may have hastened their demise! Avidha watched with stunned silence how the antidote suggested was never used with the pretext of protecting people from side-effects of sodium thio-sulphate to which the forensic scientist replied 'with bitter sarcasm—push them into the trap of one sure after-effect—death.

They burnt the bodies ten-fifteen days later. They burnt them inside the factory grounds. To make sure nobody could see what they were doing they draped the fence with lots of jute cloth. You know, cloth they make gunny bags with? We could not see what was going on inside. The whole press was there. They were also not allowed to go in.' (156)

Actually after the incident the factory had three

tanks full of MIC. Later the authorities came to know that the gas in other tanks could leak too and must be neutralized. After much discussion the government decided that the best way out was to use it up to make Sevin. That was the brand name of the pesticide Carbide produced. There was a lot of panic about more accidents. The government made elaborate arrangements to contain the leak if other tanks also exploded or the gas leaked. They draped gunny sacks on the fence. The whole administration stood by. The army was put on high alert. Water is supposed to neutralize MIC, so they doused the gunny sacks with water and the helicopters made their rounds sprinkling water as another precaution.

The trees in the vicinity became barren within a few days and 2,000 bloated animal carcasses had to be disposed of. Tanks 611 and 619 were emptied of the remaining MIC on 16 December. The consequence was a second mass evacuation from Bhopal. The Government of India passed the "Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster Act" that gave the government rights to represent all victims. The lack of information was questioned everywhere. An Indian Government spokesman said, "Carbide is more interested in getting information from us than in helping our relief work."

Formal statements were issued that air, water, vegetation and foodstuffs were safe within the city.

How can it be happened? The nature itself is crying bitterly. At the same time, people were informed that poultry was unaffected but were warned not to consume fish. No one under the age of 18 was registered at the time of the accident. The number of the children exposed to the gases was at least 200,000.

February 14, 1989, will be considered the most disgraceful day in the history of the Indian judiciary because the Supreme Court passed that day has been condemned all round as a sell-out and a betrayal of the people of India. The government gave three arguments in favour of going to a US court. One, it said that the Indian law of torts was too undeveloped to handle a case of this magnitude. Two, it argued that the judicial system in India is very low and would not be able to deliver justice speedily. Three, it said that UCC was responsible for the design of the UCIL factory in Bhopal and all the evidence is in the US.

The real characters remain the gas survivors showed their boldness to fight against injustice. Really it was appreciable the efforts like facing enormous discomfort of being huddled in Delhi to take part in marches to Parliament, the Supreme Court and Union Carbide office in Delhi. Sometimes the insensitivity of the press and ruthlessness of the Delhi Police come out very sharply. The manner in which the assistant of a documentary film-maker asks one gas survivor, Su-

mitra, how she felt when she was running away from the leaking gas is quite hilarious. Sumitra replies: 'Buy a packet of chilly powder and rub it in your eyes, you would know how it felt!' It reminds of the naïve questions asked by TV commentators very often!

Let me conclude by telling that we are not against Industrialism: But proper safety measures must be taken. If not such an Industrialism will be uprooted in future.