

**Indigenous Ecology For Sustainable Living With Reference To Isabel
Allende's *City Of The Beasts***

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Abstract:

This paper delves into the nexus of indigenous ecological knowledge for sustainable living in terms of environmental and social crisis in the world. Aligning to the quote “It is better to have less thunder in the mouth and more lightning in the hand” (Apache Tribe), the indigenous people required sustainable solution to their conflicts. The life of indigenous people is often disproportionately associated with culture and tradition of the society but their journey of life gets encountered due to some ecological changes. Even this community faces the threat of extinction. Due to colonization the life of the indigenous people and the culture designed by them faces hardship. Efforts have been undertaken to protect and preserve nature, recognizing environmental degradation as a critical issue, especially in the post-colonial context. In Allende's *City of the Beasts*, she vividly portrayed the life of indigenous community in Amazon rainforest that gets into trouble with the intrusion of expedition group and the group tried to abolish the people of mist. The Protagonist Kate embraces nature and revealed the gloomy side of the people of mist to the world. In the contemporary context, women take up the role of protecting both the environment and themselves. It is obvious that women are the guardian angels who built pathways to preserve, manage and sustain the environment in accordance with the native community. Though the native community is marginalized, their love for nature never faded, it ultimately strengthens their bond to their homeland with a clear intention to transform the valuable assets such as knowledge, wisdom, and the facts passed on to the successors. This paper intends to evaluate the framework of ecological principles of Indigenous People with reference to Allende's *City of the Beasts*. Further, the paper also focuses on culture, community practices, lands, holistic state, women and exploitation in line with equality and self-Identity.

Keywords: Indigenous, native, nature, environment, love. etc.,

Introduction:

“Compassion is a modern invention. Our society protects the weak, the poor, the sick. From the point of view of genetics, that is a terrible error. And that is why the human race is deteriorating” (Chapter 4, Page 55).

In contemporary life, the word compassion is often undervalued. In today’s fast-paced world, people are focused on bettering themselves and their lives. No one in this society has time to look at the welfare of others. Humanity’s essence is being misrepresented and often lead to be understood as a form of human antagonism.

In Isabel Allende’s *City of the Beasts*, the reality of the society is portrayed vividly by the author. She lucidly explained the issues going in the Amazon rainforest through her narration. It is an unusual novel, which shows the life of native people and their day-to-day struggles for their survival. She used a narrative genre characterized by its use of mythical elements in otherwise realistic fiction as an efficient tool to display the dark conceit of the Amazon rainforest to the world in an illusionary way. The fear of death obliges the expedition party, despite their planned looting of the forest’s treasure, to forgo their ambition. Allende’s amalgamation of real and magical elements prompts the audience to analyze the problem in the society and triggers them to question against it.

The rich diversity of life in rainforests is believed to include animals, species, plants and human. Numerous tribes with distinct languages continue to inhabit Amazon. The people live a life which is entirely different from westerns and their thoughts and cultures. The food, medicines and clothing come primarily from the forest, showcasing the deep connection between native Amazonians and their environment. For indigenous people, their dwelling place is very important. They practice sustainable living without inflicting harm on the plants and animals that inhabit the forest. Many people who are living away from forest wants to preserve those indigenous people and their culture as well as the forest. One of them is Isabel Allende who conveyed her motifs and consideration for forest through her writing.

This novel revolves around the journey of Alex and Nadia, who had created their own identities in their journey through Amazon. Through their journey they came across many strange persons who were the natives of rainforest. They discovered the fact that the native’s life was in risk. In order to help them, they joined hands with the tribes, those indigenous group also believed the young minds. Alex and Nadia know the fact that the knowledge from them will definitely benefit the world which was stated as, “We don’t know even ten percent of the medicinal properties they contain. As shamans and native healers disappear, we lose that knowledge forever” (77).

Indigenous people are self-sufficient in all aspects of life. The text explains that, “They were connected to nature the way a child is to its mother” (Allende,72). This deep

bond with the land motivated them to defend their place and way of life. They relied on their inner strength to face challenges and adversaries, believing this internal power to be divine and guide them toward their destiny.

The people of mist lived in harmony with the Amazon rainforest, which provided them with many natural treasures. As a result, they were able to heal themselves using medicines found in the forest and gather food for survival. At times, they even climbed the slippery waterfall mountain to protect their lives. They could not survive without the support of nature. Their ability to disappear into the air symbolized their deep unity with the natural world.

“They were naked, painted with stripes and spots, with feathers and leather thongs tied around their arms-silent, airy, motionless. Even though they were right beside him, they were difficult to see; they blended perfectly into nature, which made them invisible, like stealthy ghosts.” (Allende, 162)

From Isabel Allende’s perspective, the people of the mist lived amid abundant natural resources, much like women in western society who assume their freedom is assured, even as it is gradually eroded from them. But the life of both people of mist and women were being looted by a group like expeditions in *The City of the Beasts*. During the period in which the colonial system flourished, men gave it minimal attention, which led them to assert dominance over the opposite gender, overlooking the fact that women are capable of excelling in all fields. There are many female characters in the novel who are stubborn in their decision unlike ordinary women of the tribe. Kate, the age-old woman who brilliantly handled Ludovic Leblanc, whereas the later tried to surpasses the women and want to be recognized as the best. For whom, Kate gave a good punch whenever needed, “Like you, Professor, I have a bad back. I must have a personal assistant. I have hired Nadia Santos to carry my notebooks and fan me with a banana leaf.” (Allende, 114) Kate shared those words to professor when he opposed to her idea of adding the girl Nadia in the expedition group. Accounting to Mary Wollstonecraft, “In what does man’s pre-eminence over the brute creation consists? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than a whole, in Reason. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes. Consequently, the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue and humanity that distinguish the individual and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow.”

Superior reasoning capabilities of humans distinguish them from animal and other species. Although they possess emotions, these feelings must sometimes be set aside in critical situations for survival. Overcoming this internal conflict is a great struggle that

humans must face. Ultimately, the path to happiness and success is built upon the virtues and humanity that individuals uphold.

The value of human life is believed to be assessed in terms of economic, while the deterioration of community structures often accompanies societal advancement. Indigenous people are unaware about the fact regarding money which gives sophisticated living to the western people. They had no comfortable lodging but they lived concertedly. Indigenous ecology is a holistic view of the world which connects the people with land and nature. The knowledge towards their native is deep rooted within their soul. They keep themselves away from the western culture who reciprocate with earlier. Numerous materially driven minds failed to grasp the concise yet vital thought processes employed by natives to protect their survival.

“In the few seconds it took the soldiers to get organized and unholster their pistols, the tribe scattered. The women and children raced away like squirrels, disappearing into the undergrowth, and the men got off several arrows before they, too, fled.” (Allende, 354)

The people of mist, called the helicopters which was used by expedition group as “The Cannibal Bird”, which believed to bring the expected danger to the tribes. They used many such terms which seems to be strange, such as Walimai, The Shaman, The Rahakanariwa, Nahab, etc.,

Through the words of Allende, one can allude that forest is mere a living agent which has living entity. This has become evident with the mythological character the Beast, it echoes the pathos of the amazon rainforest which was being looted by the people of various geographics. Beast acted as a healing agent of nature. Further through the text it was evident that the tribes have very strong innate memory power, thus whatever it is, from medicine to nostalgia they store it in their brain rather than recording. It is evident with the following lines, “Once you told me that the Indians didn’t need writing because they have good memories. The Beasts are the tribe’s living memory.” (Allende, 389).

Allende’s work established a strong ground for the co-ordination of nature and woman. Women are the extended version of nature. In our society, women are worshiped as Gods, which was stated by Vandana Shiva as follows, “The violation of the Earth and the violation of women are connected” (*Ecofeminism* 38). In *City of the Beasts*, Allende dramatizes this dual violence through the capitalist intrusion into the Amazon and the silencing of indigenous voices. Yet through Nadia’s empathy and the people of the mist’s ecological wisdom, the novel offers what Shiva calls “a counter-culture to the culture of death,” one that reclaims care, reciprocity, and life-sustaining relationships (*Staying Alive* 45).

Westerns with their failure to capture Amazon rainforest came to a conclusion that the plant grown in a place is better to be retained in the same environment. Because it may lead to the destruction. “The failure to recognize human continuity with the rest of nature has been one of the most dangerous forms of delusion in Western thought.” (Plumwood). It was also mentioned by Allende in her work that, “They had lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years, like Adam and Eve in Paradise. Why, Padre Valdomero wondered, was it necessary to teach them the concept of sin?” (398)

Desertification of forest for multiple purpose is a great alarm which is to be taken into consideration for the expeditious solution. Desertification leads to reduction of crop production, fertility, planting and planning future endeavours of indigenous. Allende made an effort to teach the western through her pen with a literary style that integrates magical elements into realistic setting, treating magic as normal and natural one. She has drawn the attention of the world not directly but significantly by raising global awareness, uniting adventure with Ecology, pulling respect towards indigenous people and their culture, etc., She has successfully portrayed the facts by using literature and made a call of urgency to protect the rainforest from the clutch of deforestation. “Destroying rainforest for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal.” (E.O. Wilson).

Isabel Allende powerfully highlights the deep connection between indigenous communities and ecology, emphasizing sustainable living as a necessity rather than a choice. Through the blend of magical realism and realistic settings, Allende draws global attention to the alarming consequences of deforestation, desertification and exploitation of forests for economic gain. Indigenous knowledge systems, rooted in respect for nature, demonstrate how harmony with environment ensures fertility, balance, and continuity of life. By portraying forests as living entities and indigenous people as their protectors, Allende urges humanity to rethink its exploitative approach towards nature. The novel serves as a call of urgency to preserve rainforests, respect indigenous cultures and adopt sustainable practices for the survival of both humanity and the planet. Protecting nature, as Allende suggests, is not merely environmental responsibility but a moral and cultural necessity for a sustainable future.

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