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Eco Consciousness in Dr. Daisaku Ikeda's Short Stories

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‘Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see’

- John W. Whitehead.

Abstract

The relationship between man and the environment is of mutual dependence. They are one indivisible entity. Man can develop his life only by living in harmony with the natural environment. The harmonious co-existence of man and nature is imperative. Unfortunately in this age of science and technology, human beings have failed to understand their inevitable dependence on nature. Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, expresses the intrinsic value of nature through his short stories to children. By sensitizing children to environmental issues, Dr. Ikeda tries to rechannel and amplify their energy toward a revolution that can bring peace and harmony to the entire world. In his opinion, the eco-consciousness in children can invoke spirituality in them and that can lead to the cessation of man-made disasters. The best way to solve the environmental crisis is to teach the coming generations about the fundamental value of nature. Dr. Ikeda's stories are bundled with elements that make children happy as well as thoughtful.

Keywords: Indivisible Entity, Harmonious Co-existence, Sensitizing, Eco-consciousness, Spirituality

The relationship between man and the environment is of mutual dependence. They are one indivisible entity. Man can develop his life only by living in harmony with the natural environment. The harmonious co-existence of man and nature is imperative. Unfortunately in this age of science and technology, human beings have failed to understand their inevitable dependence on nature. Unmindful of the consequences, man has destructed this world for his selfish means. Due to this the present century faces alarming environmental disturbances. The main reason for this is the lack of interaction with nature. The growth of industries, advancement of science, modern lifestyle, and search for better living conditions has distanced man from nature. Troubled planet now requires healers to sensitize people on environmental issues. Literature encourages man to establish harmony with nature. Many writers have created a new environmental sensibility through their writing. Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, a celebrated writer of children's books, has written many stories for children with ecological relevance. The short stories of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda like *The Snow Country Prince*, *The Fire Flies Glow*, *Kanta and the deer*, and *The Cherry Tree* written for children focus on environmental issues and the contribution children can make to change the world.

Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, the world-renowned poet, educator, Buddhist philosopher, peace builder, prolific writer, founder of several cultural, educational and peace research institutions around the world, a past recipient of the United Nations Peace Award expresses the intrinsic value of nature through his short stories. His short stories originally written in Japanese are

translated into many European and Asian languages. Spurred by a growing environmental crisis, Dr. Ikeda delineates the prominence of nature in all his writings. According to him an affable relationship with nature can make the world peaceful and the only way to stop disasters is to bring about a kind of revolution in every individual. As children are one-third of our population and all of our future, Dr. Ikeda firmly believes that the revolution within children will be effective and will transform this world. His stories gravitate towards this idea.

By sensitizing children to environmental issues, Dr. Ikeda tries to rechannel and amplify their energy toward a revolution that can bring peace and harmony to the entire world. In his opinion, the eco-consciousness in children can invoke spirituality in them and that can lead to the cessation of man-made disasters. The spirituality within them can bring a tremendous change in their outlook. Dr. Ikeda opines that ‘The external desertification of the planet corresponds precisely with the spiritual desertification.’ Children are enlightened about the contribution of nature and the necessity to preserve it. Dr. Ikeda’s enumeration of the inherent worth of nature in his stories is laudable. The conditions and presuppositions under which nature can be re-established are explored in his stories.

Eco-criticism explores the relationship between humans and the environment. The sustained growth of flora and fauna is the concept that occupies a prominent place in this criticism. This concept is dealt in the stories Dr. Ikeda. He strongly believes that ‘Buddha hood exists in all things in this universe, both sentient and insentient. This includes land or the environment which consists of insentient beings like trees and rocks.’ Preservation of trees, animals and birds has gained ground in his stories.

In the story ‘The Cherry Tree’ conservation of trees is highlighted. The children who have lost their home and their father to the war try to preserve the gnarled, aged Cherry tree which hasn’t blossomed in years. By caring for the tree and shielding it from the worst of winter’s blows, they begin to come to terms with their loss. The blossoming of the Cherry tree induces hope in them. The value and the significance of other creatures and the importance of universal compassion are brought out when the old man in the

story says “winter’s coming”, said the old man. “I must take care of her. Trees feel the cold too you know. If it snows she could die” (4)

Kanta, a small boy saves a little fawn from a group of hunters when he sojourns to snow-capped mountains in the story ‘Kanta and the deer’. He finds a replica of himself in this little fawn, which has lost everyone in life. He names the fawn ‘Poi Yuku’. The little fawn instills courage and dispels the feelings of powerlessness in Kanta. He learns that love for another can make one brave and self-reliant. Dr. Ikeda ardently believes that children can infer valuable lessons from nature. Conservation of animals, an important step to stabilize the environment is stressed in this story.

“Fire Flies Glow” is a short story set against the backdrop of a war between China and Japan. It vividly depicts the ordeal of a family, how they cope with it and derive strength and hope from the lives of tiny glowing fireflies. Uncaring their troubles children grow tiny fireflies with the hope that it will bring back peace. The flight of the fireflies symbolizes the establishment of peace.

In the story “The Snow Country Prince”, children ‘Mariko’ and ‘Kazuo’ feed the swans which seek shelter from the cold breeze of winter. The swans are saved from the cruel wolves and the bitter cold. Enthused by the words of the snow prince, children show love and compassion to the birds. Birds, an integral part of our eco-system is saved by the children. In the process of saving they surmise the value of perseverance.

Conclusion

Depletion of natural resources can cause a severe damage to the lives on the earth. It is the fundamental responsibility of every human being to preserve nature. The best way to solve the environmental crisis is to teach the coming generations about the fundamental value of nature. Dr. Ikeda’s stories are bundled with elements that make children happy as well as thoughtful. He strongly believes that children are a powerful force and teaching them about nature will be an important move to mend the environmental crisis. Realization of the environmental value can remake this world. He tells children ‘you are the people who will create a peaceful society in future’

(63, TFFG). Dr. Daisaku Ikeda makes the point clear, when he says

“I was 21 when I joined Mr. Toda’s publishing company, and one of my first tasks was editing a boys’ magazine. I often spoke with writers and illustrators about creating a magazine that would bring hope and inspiration to children. At that time, there was a very popular children’s story writer named Sohachi Yamaoka. I realized what a busy man he was, but I eagerly asked him to write a novel for our magazine. “Children are the messengers of the future,” I said. “We want to give them courage and nurture their sense of justice, of right and wrong.” He smiled and nodded in agreement, saying, “I’ll do it. You’ve won me over with your enthusiasm.”

Stories of Dr.Daisaku Ikeda stand testimony to Walt Disney’s words that ‘Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children’. The wealth

of sympathy, kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child is unlocked by his stories.

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