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A Scrutiny of Nilima Sinha’s Mystery of the Falling Mountains Concerning Young Adult Fiction

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Abstract

*Young adult Literature or adolescent fiction is a recent trend that focuses on the experiences of teenagers. It undergoes both the physical and psychological growth of young adult protagonists throughout the novels. As a genre, it was rooted during the 1960s with the publication of *Seventeenth Summer*, a debut novel by Maureen Daly, *The Outsiders*, a bildungsroman by S.E. Hinton and a series of science fiction novels written by Robert A. Heinlein, which are popularly known as Heinlein Juveniles. In India, the pioneering authors are Dhan Gopal Mukherji, Ruskin Bond, Arup Kumar Dutta and Nilima Sinha. These writers primarily centered their works on coming-of-age issues. Nilima Sinha is one of the prominent authors of this genre. Some of her renowned works are *Chandipur Jewels*, *Vanishing Trick at Chandipur*, *S.O.S. From Munia* and *Adventure on the Golden Lake*. The present research paper is an attempt to give an exhaustive scrutiny of Nilima Sinha’s *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* from the perspective of Young Adult fiction.*

Key Words

Young Adult Fiction, Nilima Sinha, environment, ecology, mystery, mountains, conservation,

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A Scrutiny of Nilima Singh's Mystery of the Falling Mountains Concerning Young Adult Fiction
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Nilima Sinha's *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* was published in 2004. The novel is one of her groundbreaking works in young adult fiction. It was illustrated by Subir Roy. The book is set against a backdrop of environmental themes. The story typically revolves around young protagonists, their adventure, exploration, and investigation. They uncover a web of mysteries through friendship and teamwork which emphasizes the power of collaboration in overcoming difficulties. The novel highlights the importance of environmental conservation and the detrimental effects of human interference.

The book is divided into fifteen chapters. In the very first chapter, Sinha introduces the readers to her characters who are on a trip to Himachal Pradesh, the home state of Dipak, one of the protagonists. The three friends, Ajay, Rustom, and Dipak study in the same boarding school, and Richa, Ajay's sister is also accompanying the group. The following summer, Dipak invites all of them to his home. All three friends are waiting for Dipak to depart in the opening chapter titled 'The Long Wait.' Everyone tightens their belt for the journey but the long wait for Dipak seems tiresome. Richa asks, "Why hasn't Dipak come?" (Sinha 3) several times. Ajay is a voracious reader and has received a good collection of vocabulary which he likes to use. He is tall and is known for his style. Rustom on the other side is fair, chubby, and immaculate. His parents are over anxious to take his health so he is assisted by his bodyguard named Ahmed. As soon as Dipak arrives at the spot, everyone takes a sigh of relief. Dipak shares the information about the brake of his vehicle that made him late on their way. These young adults set all for the eerie but adventurous journey which has to be "through mist and darkness" (8). Nilima Sinha also introduces other characters apart from the protagonists. The minor characters also play an important role in developing the plot. Through the characters, Mr. Das, the owner of the neighboring farm, Shivnath, the contractor, Motilal, a shopkeeper, and Gopi, the gardener, Sinha explores the village lifestyle.

After the arrival of Dipak, the journey begins and as they move forward, "the winding road was veiled in fog so thick that nothing was visible beyond a few yards" (8). The sound of screeching and groaning comes out of the vehicle. Dipak assures all that the weather is unclear and foggy today and it is darkness too therefore it seems dangerous but "during the day everything looks harmless" (8). All of a sudden boulders from the roadside hills fall almost crashing them into pieces. The jeep swings to one side of the road which makes them horrified. They could not understand anything before they were crushed under the weight of each other. Richa fearfully utters, "[t]here was more to come. "Cr...rr...r...ash, roa...rrr," she heard

strange, unknown sounds she could not understand. She was pinned under the seat, her eyes shut in fear. The whole mountain seemed to be crushing down on them” (9). They somehow manage to push back the vehicle to the road and steer forward slowly from the bumpy road. No one dared to speak a single word. The silence rushes over the group for a while but the jeep gradually takes speed through darkness. Nilima Sinha has tried to describe the thrill of the adventure in such a subtle way that the readers feel like diving into the situation. She beautifully knits the adventure and thriller with the story.

The group goes for a trek that cuts along the sides of the hill and climbs steeply upwards. At first, the children hesitate to climb on the hills having seen the structure of the hill. But gradually they develop confidence, and decide to climb. The aura of a beautiful environment, “[t]he fragrant smell of the pines, the clear, fresh air and the cloudless sky” (17) inspires them to take a step on the difficult walk. They were tired and everyone wanted to lay down to rest. Ajay sits down on a boulder, Richa also questions, “[a]re we ever going to reach?” (18) To encourage the fellow travelers, Ajay recites a poem that he once has learned at school, “[a]ll right, travelers, let us carry on, however heavy the burden. Ours is not to wonder why, ours is just to do and die” (19). They all head up for their destination step by step. Soon, they reach home which is surrounded by a lush green garden, fruit trees and beautiful valleys. All become fascinated to see the beauty of nature. Sihna has portrayed the picture of Himachal Pradesh beautifully. The next morning welcomes them with a delicious “breakfast of puri, potato curry and glasses of fresh milk” (22). The author has also exposed so-called orthodox thoughts about girls that they are freely visiting their friend’s house. Mr. Hari Lall and his wife Pamela who have recently returned from America encounter a verandah making them surprised. When Mrs. Lall sees the friends together with a girl, she, the very next moment, says, “India has turned modern, eh? Girls freely visit their boyfriends.” (32)

Mrs. Lall creates a perception about Richa by adding her name to Dipak which they do not like. Ajay answers Mrs. Lall and talks about the acquaintance of their parents. Another mysterious incident takes place when everyone is on the bed. Richa stays on the top floor of the house. She notices thuck-thuck as if someone doing an act that produces sound in the dead of night. It causes Richa out of her dream. She remembers that she also heard this unfamiliar sound earlier at Motilal’s shop last night. She looks out of her window and begins to appreciate the beauty of moonlight. At the moment, sound comes once again from the garden gate. She questions.

“Who came at this time, when everyone slept? Footsteps stole along the path, then halted. Richa waited for the ring of the bell, the knock at the door, but there were no such sounds. Instead came cautious, hesitant footfalls, followed by strange scratching sounds and soft mysterious noises she could not understand. Silence again.”

Richa thinks that she is dreaming as there is no sound for a long time. When she hears the low growls of Moti, she is disturbed by it and therefore comes out of her quilt. On the other side of the house, Dipak utters “[h]ush, Moti, go to sleep!” (38). Then comes a loud crash and all the boys and Richa jumps off their beds and rushes out of their rooms. Richa hears the sound of someone’s footsteps and tries to look outside of her window quickly to recognize who is the intruder. But she couldn’t see that man in the dark moonlight except the shadow and outline of his body. Their dog Moti also tries to chase the man but cannot nab the intruder. The children discuss that who’s that man? Why did he come? And concludes that must be a thief who came to steal something. Mrs. Pant says that she does not keep any jewelry or cash in the house. Richa comes hurriedly to join the others and informs her observation through window. He was short and thin wearing a pair of white shoes. But unfortunately, those evidences are not enough. Everyone asks Mrs. Pant if she has any quarrel with someone. Mrs. Pant assures them that she has no any serious matter with anyone and they should not bother about it. The author explores the situation so dramatically that the readers stay connected with all the characters. She has used natural sounds in the story to give a feel to readers. The words such as, “Grr...bow-wow!” (47) the growling of Moti. Further, “Hmm” (35) when Richa mumbles and agrees with the question asked by Rustom about her tiredness.

Some people dislike Mrs. Pant’s family and they try to frighten them. Nobody knows who are they. The group of children and other characters remain confused till the end until the villain is revealed. In the last chapters of this novel, everyone concludes through the help of their observations and clues that Shivnath, a property dealer, and Gopi, a gardener of Srivatika are the two major conspirators. They used to threaten Dipak’s mother through handwritten letters in Hindi language saying that this was not a safe place for your family and to leave this place before it was too late. The children were unaware of these facts so they suspected sometimes Mr. Das, Hari Lall and his wife Pamela Lall, and others but later on they understood that they had good intentions for them.

Nilima Sinha’s craftsmanship of the stories is so captivating that the readers feel connected throughout her novel that the readers are capable of visualizing the

haphazard situations and experiencing the looming dangers. When Dipak chases Mr. Das suspecting him as an enemy, he is kidnapped and was taken into a cave that was searched recently by Shibu. At this moment everyone tries to look for Dipak but none can find out him therefore comes back home with disappointment. They go to sleep but feel disturbed as one of them is missing. Richa feels restless and intends to go out in search of Dipak. Shibu and Moti, the pet accompany her. As they come close to the area of intruders near the cave so they are also caught and prisoned. Now two other children, Ajay and Rustom leave for the search. When they reach near the place where Richa, Shibu and Moti are tightened with the rope closing their mouths with scarfs, Shibu fortunately finds a hatchet. Using the hatchet, Shibu cuts ropes and makes frees him, Richa and Moti. Richa shouts from inside and Ajay and Rustom recognize from another end. They instruct each other to reach at the cave, discovered by Shibu who conveys the information about Dipak's kidnapping. Ajay and Rustom reach to Dipak with a bit of hardship but it is not that much easy for Richa and Shibu to get to Dipak. The horrified darkness fell all around, nothing was visible, and they insisted Moti go ahead to lead them. Shibu holds the leash of the dog before it's lost in the darkness and Richa behind him. In this way after a long struggle, they reach Dipak and meet Ajay and Rustom. Richa hugs her brother Ajay instantly in excitement.

When Dipak is released by others, he at once tells everyone to move fast towards home to save them from fire because he had heard them discussing their house to be burned. Everybody rushes towards home immediately. Dipak reaches first at home, others are not habitual to walk on the mountains' path and, therefore reach late. They encounter Mr. Das who has just taken a seat to handle himself from the situation and inquire about Dipak and Mrs. Pant. Mr. Das tells them that they are trying to save some important letters and photographs. A mishap that just has occurred when Mr. Das comes and saves Mrs. Pant and Dipak from a big portion of the fire that is about to fall upon them. Dipak comes out with his father's photograph wearing an army dress and is followed by his mother. She consoles children not to worry as everything is well.

Through the novel, Nilima Sinha throws light on the destruction of nature, deforestation, blasts of the mountains, and construction of huge buildings, hotels, tunnels, roads, and railways in the name of development. All these kinds of activities disturb the ecological system. Through the characters, the author is concerned about the environment and tries to bring the message of living simply without exploiting nature. There should be sustainability in all aspects of development. The author

raises a voice against the illegal cutting of trees. The characters come across a waterfall that they find fully covered in huge logs. Dipak says that “[t]he logs are being floated downstream” (49). Sinha advocates for environmental conservation throughout the novel. Her description of mountains and their beautiful landscapes attracts the readers. The pale-yellow daisies, thick green grass, pine trees, and a waterfall become the pinnacle of the eyes of all friends.

Conclusion

Nilima Sinha is a pioneering author in the sphere of young adult literature in India. She hails from Hazaribagh, a city in the Indian state of Jharkhand. Her *Mystery of the Falling Mountains* can be considered an outstanding novel that has all the essential characteristics of young adult fiction. The author’s vivid description gradually unfolds the mystery behind all the occurrences in the novel. The characters are shown putting in lots of effort to reveal the truth. Their problem-solving skills and courage to get into the looming danger help them overcome the circumstances. The discovery of the conspirators and search for other clues by the adolescent characters display the act of using their wisdom throughout the novel. Sinha keeps her readers engaged so that they find themselves as if entering the story and observing all the incidents with their own eyes. On one hand, this is an action-packed gripping narrative that maintains thrilling suspense until the novel’s end. On the other hand, it also deals with the serious issues of mountainous regions, their fragile geography, ecology, and the exploitation of natural resources. The author spotlights illegal profit-making businesses in place of destroying Mother Nature.

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