
Ecological Perception in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*

Dr. Divya Das S P

Associate Professor, Dept. of English, HPPC Govt First Grade College, Challakere, Chitradurga District

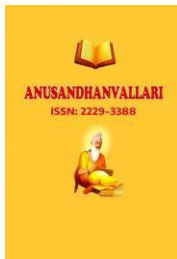
Abstract: One of the most influential, successful, and prolific Native American authors today is Louise Erdrich. *Love Medicine*, which depicts the life of Chippewa Indians living on reservations and demonstrates the irreparable and catastrophic impact that white people have had on Indian tribes, is considered to be her most emblematic work. Native Americans endured great suffering and the living conditions on reservations were severely damaged, but they never gave up. Instead, they banded together and made the most of their intimate connection to nature to restore the balance between men and women and between man and nature. This essay examines the interconnected and unbreakable bond between traditional Indians and their lands to highlight Native Americans' ecological consciousness and provoke discussion of the current ecological catastrophe.

Keywords: Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, ecological consciousness, nature, harmony

Louise debut book, *Love Medicine*, is the one that most significantly adds to her renown among the aforementioned works. She earned the National Work Critics Award for the book that was released in 1984. *Love Medicine* speaks frequently about home, being exiled from and returning to one's country, identity, and survival. It reflects the life of Chippewa Indians in the Turtle Mountain Reservation. The book is organized as a series of 18 interconnected stories with a wide variety of individuals from the four families, the Kashpaws, the Lamartines, the Pillagers, and the Morrisseys who reside on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota. *Love Medicine* illustrates Erdrich's thorough understanding of Indian customs via the realistic depiction of the family sagas of four generations of Indians. It also highlights the critical role that the local environment and geography play in the development of the main characters' identities. It highlights the striking distinctions between how Native Americans and Europeans understand nature.

Native Americans, who were the first people to live in North America, faced discrimination for centuries until being awarded citizenship in 1924. They had long before developed their magnificent civilizations and customs while coexisting peacefully with nature on the continent before the arrival of the Europeans. However, scholarly research on their way of life and their connections with the natural world has only recently been available, coinciding with the growth of ecological literature. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, researchers in other nations began studying love medicine. The attention of local and international experts has been drawn to the ecological wisdom of love medicine. A thorough and organized study of *Love Medicine* is still required, though. Based on prior research, this essay seeks to reflect on Native American living conditions and explain *Love Medicine's* ecological ideas. In this essay, the author will examine the environmental degradation brought on by white prejudice in reservations as well as the indissoluble bonds between traditional Indians and their ancestral territories. This essay will illuminate Native American ecological knowledge and prompt readers to consider the fundamental causes of the ecological problem in contemporary civilization. This study seeks to learn from and share the ecological knowledge of the Native people via its exploration of another culture while also raising awareness of the need of preserving ecological balance.

Native Americans saw land as having immense significance and value, serving as a bridge between their tribes and extended families. They do not view land as a commodity, but rather as an essential component of their way of life and a representation of the big natural world (Allen, 1991). This sense of belonging stems from this relationship with the land. However, things have drastically changed since the white arrived. Indian



tribes were subjected to chaos by unwanted intruders. By creating a series of laws and treaties for their gain, the Europeans pushed the Indians from their ancestral lands. A white-dominated administration has long oppressed and discriminated against Native Americans. They have to work hard to survive in a hostile environment. Without understanding the losses and suffering that Native Americans endured throughout the colonial era, it is hard for us to properly comprehend *Love Medicine*.

Native Americans were compelled to relocate from the lush east to the desolate west after the American government implemented the Indian Removal Act in 1830. To expand their religion, the white people want greater territory. They desired to possess the power over nature. Native Americans, however, saw the wedding land differently. It is more than simply a location to build their houses and a source of food for them. The Europeans sought all legal means to take land from the American Indians because they detested their way of life and how they used their property. Then the American government extended its hands to the Great Prairie and built the railway, leaving the Native Americans with only a limited area of territory known as “the reserves.” Lulu laments their poor circumstances while living under the control of the white government in *Love Medicine*, “How many times did we move? The Chippewa had started off way on the other side of the five great lakes. How we were shoved out on this lonesome knob of prairie my grandmother used to tell. It is too long a story to get into now” (Erdrich, 1993, p.282). Native Americans endured great suffering as a result of losing their land, wealth, culture, and even their independence. They even rebelled against the American government, but their resistance was inconsequential in light of the government's overwhelming might. Also, their demise is inescapable.

The Dawes General Allotment Act, passed in 1871, regulated the distribution of land to American Indians and altered their traditional economic structure. But the U.S. government's covert motivation for passing this legislation was to deceive the Indians into giving up more territory. The white people maintained the remaining agricultural land for sale after dispersing the lands that the U.S. government intended to grant to the American Indians. Ironically, those lands ultimately ended up in the possession of white people. Additionally, the act's execution has resulted in the collapse of Indian society as a whole. According to history, the United States government stripped Native Americans of around 90 million acres, or almost two-thirds of their total holdings, between 1887 and 1934, when the Allotment Act was ultimately put into force. The white government encroaches on Native Americans' land while reaping huge financial rewards from doing so. More actions similar to those mentioned above exist, however, the reality is very different from what appears to be in the interests of American Indians. Behind those policies is fraud. The American government has little interest in aiding American Indians. Their goodwill is all a front. The white people's policies have done nothing but harm to the reserve. The land policy in reservations is a farce, according to Erdrich, who says this in *Love Medicine*. In actuality, this approach is to blame for the loss of land in the reserve and, ultimately, for their loss of housing.

Before the arrival of the white man, the Indian reserve was pastoral, attractive, and serene; nevertheless, white policy ruins the environment and undermines the beauty of nature. In the reservation, industry and mines take the place of farmers and grasslands. The lush lands in the reservation become desolate after giving way to companies or mines, and the fields and air are severely contaminated. The quality of life in the reservation is steadily declining. The way of life on a reserve is vividly described by Erdrich. When Albertine learns of June's passing in *Love Medicine*, she goes back to the reserve and narrates the lovely sight. “all along the highway that early summer the land was beautiful. The sky stretched bare. Tattered silver windbreaks bounded flat, plowed fields that the government had paid to lie fallow” (Louise, 1993, p. 11). But when she approaches the area and takes in its wild, dilapidated vistas, she alters her tone:

“At the end of the big farms and the blowing fields was the reservation. ...Even in the distance you could sense hills from their opposites—pits, dried sloughs, ditches of cattails, potholes, and then the water. There would be water in the hills when there wasn’t any on the plains, the highway narrowed off and tangled, then turned to gravel with ruts, holes, and blue alfalfa bunching in the ditches. Small hills reared up. Dogs leaped from nowhere and ran themselves out fiercely. The dust hung thick”. (Louise, 1993, p. 11)

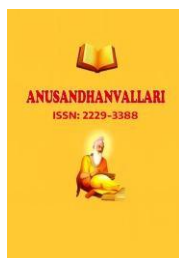
The depiction paints a clear picture of how Native Americans’ living conditions have gotten worse. The reservation’s terrain has deteriorated and grown desolate. The reserve is like hell in comparison to the outside world.

Native Americans have traditionally believed that nature should be venerated. Every living thing on earth is interconnected. Humans are not an exception to the rule that all creatures are simply the same spirits in various guises. For instance, when an American Indian kills a bear, he will beg the beast’s forgiveness by crying and kissing its head. He will refer to the bear as his brother. The animals and landscapes cohabit in many of the American Indians’ myths in a way that suggests they are relatives of people. Or to put it another way, everything in nature is a member of a large family. For instance, the sun and earth are frequently referred to as parents. In *Love Medicine*, Erdrich imagines a future in which traditional Native Americans coexist peacefully with wildlife.

For instance, Lulu is raised by the traditional tribal hunter Nanapush. Lulu was a little girl then, “buried my face in the cloth of his rough shirt, and breathed the woods smoke and dried ink, the trapper’s musk and sun heated dryness of his old man’s skin” (Erdrich, 1993, p. 69). Under the influence of Nanapush, Lulu develops her sincere love for animals and nature. What’s more, guided by those principles, Lulu often teaches the young generation the traditional idea about the animals of their ancestors. When Lulu sees the picture of the buffalo, she reminds the young people to remember: “The four-legged people, once they helped us two-legged” (Erdrich, 1993, p. 307). That is what she tries to instill into the minds of the young generation of her tribe. Native Americans’ extensive pre-hunt ceremonies demonstrate their reverence for the animals. They consider animals to be their nourishment, supplied by a forgiving god. So before they go hunting, they will fast, dance, and chant charms (Wang, 2014). In *Love Medicine*, Hector remembers how he felt while going hunting in the woods with Eli.

Alone in the woods, checking the trapline, I find a wounded animal that hasn’t died well, or worse, it’s still living, so that I have to put it out of its misery. Sometimes it’s only a big bird I only winged. When I do what I have to do, my throat swelled closed sometimes. I touch the suffering bodies like they were killed saints I should handle with gentle reverence”. (Erdrich, 1993, p. 66)

The notion that animals may be destroyed is prevalent in the west. They do not have many rights. They are to be killed and trained. Western literature also reflects this mindset. Much literature written by white people describes the practice of killing wild animals for entertainment and to display courage. While this type of conduct is completely conceited and cruel from the viewpoint of American Indians. White people’s unquenchable greed compels them to slaughter more animals than the earth can sustain, upsetting the natural balance in the area. The hunting behavior of traditional American Indians is far more forgiving and restrained than this. These two hunting modes stand for two separate ideas. The white population is insatiably greedy and believes in money and material possessions. They see nature as being hostile to people. Many of their catchphrases, such as “conquering nature,” reflect this. Native Americans, however, hold that every living thing, including plants, animals, and even rocks, has a spirit that should be honored.

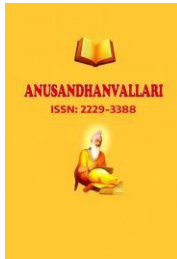


Due to their distinctive way of life and emphasis on harmony, Native Americans have drawn the attention of a large number of academics. Their way of living appears to be the solution to our environmental issues. Many modern writers have found inspiration from their knowledge of how to live in peace with nature. Numerous scholars are currently looking into the topics of ecology, ecological wisdom, and coexistence with nature. People are advocating environmentally friendly technology as they become more and more aware of the intrinsic link between themselves and everything else in the world. The previous resource-intensive development methods of Europe and North America are no longer acceptable. Because environmental issues are getting worse and worse, people must abandon their traditional way of life. *Love Medicine* is another manifestation of this phenomenon in contemporary life. We could discover a fresh approach to the global environmental dilemma by investigating the Native Americans' ecological conscience. Native Americans have a different perspective on nature than Euro-Americans. The wilderness is something the Europeans believe they must conquer. When they arrive in America, they are mentally opposed to this new environment since they have never been there before.

American Indians, however, have always respected nature. Instead of battling nature, they live in peace with it. They understand that it is preferable to work with nature than to go against it, as the white people did. Their myriad rites and rituals in their daily life show their regard for nature. Native Americans relied on agriculture, fishing, and hunting for a very long period. They interacted with nature in every aspect of their everyday lives. They have developed a society that is in tune with nature in this way. Their culture and the natural world are intertwined. They get their inspiration and creations from nature. And their culture is a part of nature because of the respect for nature demonstrated in their everyday routines. The main distinction between traditional American Indians and contemporary people, in their eyes, is that they have a deep love and respect for nature that manifests itself in their daily routines, whereas we just know it by heart. They are skilled at coexisting peacefully with the natural world. Numerous characters in the book, including Lulu, Marie, Nector, and Lipsha, become lost in white society. They are unsure of their identity and place in the world. They only discover their place and inner serenity after they get back to the reserve.

Even though the tribal group is being oppressed by the white people, the peace within it becomes stronger. Lulu and Marie are Lipsha's primary caregivers. He becomes uncertain about his belief when his magic touch fails. As a result of Lulu and Marie's guidance, he comes to understand that his tribal roots are at the reservation and that the true power of love medicine rests in the love and tolerance passed down through the generations within their tribe. He returns his mother's spirit home at the novel's conclusion and forgives his mother June for leaving him. His enchanted touch returns as well. Lulu also assists Moses in regaining his capacity for speaking, walking, and living. Every time Lulu visits the island, she makes every effort to assist Moses in regaining the capacity to live a regular life. And with Lulu's assistance, Moses regains his voice and rejoins society as a regular person with no communication issues.

In reality, women in the book begin to play a bigger and bigger part in the family and the community, like Marie. In the reserve, Marie is an excellent mother who manages everything by herself. She works hard to support her family financially. Later on, she even gives Nector financial help. It is impossible to dismiss her contributions to Nector's success. In the book's conclusion, women and men start coexisting peacefully and start supporting and respecting one another. They also understand the value of their traditional culture and the necessity of respect, care, and love for the community's prosperity. The focus of Erdrich's writings, which is frequently stressed, is the restoration of harmony between humans and the environment and among community members. Native Americans believe that people live within the context of their families, communities, and tribes, completely expressing the spirit of their culture, which emphasizes peaceful coexistence with both.



Environmental disaster is a serious problem facing the entire planet. Humans have recently been subjected to several extraordinary natural disasters. Our planet has been severely contaminated. Our way of life is getting worse. People start to understand that the advancement of civilization is dependent on a healthy relationship with nature. Many authors and literary critics are aware of the ecological catastrophe and are attempting to learn from Native Americans' ecological knowledge, who are renowned for their simple yet peaceful way of life. According to the author's findings, Native Americans' ecological knowledge should be respected and used effectively. One should remember that safeguarding the environment is of utmost importance to combat the present environmental disaster.

Work cited

- [1] Beidler, Peter G. and Gay Barton. *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1999.
- [2] Burdick, Debra A. *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine, The Beet Queen, and Tracks: An Annotated Survey of Criticism through 1994*. American Indian Culture and Research Journal 20.3 (1996): 137-66.
- [3] Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: Harper Perennial. 1993. Print.
- [4] Wang Fa-de, ZhangMinglan. *An Interpretation of the Animal Ethics in Louise Erdrich's Novels*. Journal of Jiangxi Science &Technology Normal University (4), 124-128. 2014. Print.