



**Nature Imagery and Environmental Exploitation in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo*
*in the Guava Orchard***

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Abstract

Kiran Desai is the voice of a younger generation of Indian writers who write in English, many of whom live in self exile. She was honored with the Betty Trask Award for her debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* at the age of only twenty seven. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* presents a fictitious small town called Shakhkot in North India. The central character, Sampath Chawla is compelled in to being a holy man inspite of himself. The novel depicts the aftermath of ecological or natural disasters on culture and civilization. It portrays the problems generated due to man's encroachment upon the natural order of things and demonstrates that the affinity amongst humans and animals is stronger than human vis a vis human.

Keywords: Feminism, Eco-Feminism, Culture, Civilization.

There is a distinct class of Indian women novelists whose writings have a significant reflection of nature imagery. Anita Desai and Kiran Desai fall into the aforementioned category renowned for incorporating elements of nature to express the tacit emotions of their characters. The writings of both these writers can be seen as a tool to correlate human psyche with the natural icons in an engaging manner.

Kiran Desai is an Indian origin-American author and was born in 1971 in New Delhi. She was brought up here till the age of fourteen and then shifted to England. After residing for a short time in England, she moved with her family to the United States, where she completed her school education in Massachusetts. Afterwards Desai joined Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University for further learning of literary skills. She spent a period of two years to complete her maiden novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) in which she portrayed the natural and peculiar characters in an effective manner and got it published in 1998. The novel comes out to be a major success in literary field, bagging the prestigious Betty Trask Award. Her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, was completed in a protracted period of eight years and got published in 2006. Unveiling the subject of postcolonial confrontations, the novel was awarded the 2006 Man Booker Prize, and Desai became the youngest female writer to achieve this honour. It is evident from her background that she acquired this writing ability from her mother, Anita Mazumdar Desai and is likewise a striking writer who has also been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize three times. Clearly Desai got artistic legacies from her parents and acquired the conventions of Indian writing.

Nature is transcendent and humans, being an integral part of nature are reliant on it in every sphere of life. As literary works get an impression from real life situations, writers portray human life in the arena of nature where they provide a glimpse of nature. In their works they trace the inclination of characters towards nature. The symbolism of nature is very well represented in Kiran Desai's debut novel of entitled, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Here, the author contends that if man wants an inclusive and contented growth, he can not view himself as alienated from the natural surroundings. He should rather examine himself as a member of the whole biological framework. Desai shows that if the existence of nature and its surroundings is to prolong, man can not keep on overpowering his surroundings, he should figure out how to live in harmony with them.

The novel starts with a dreadful dearth and drought that leads to an immense rise in temperature and people are suffer because of the deficiency of water resources. The explanation referred to is the volcanic explosion in Tia Del Fuego.

Problems have been located in the cumulus that have become overly heated; read Mr Chawla from the newspaper. 'It is all a result of volcanic ash thrown up in the latest spurt of activity in Tierra del Fuego.' And a little later he reported to whomever might be listening: 'The problem lies in the currents off the West African coastline and the unexplained molecular movement observed in the polar ice-caps. (Desai, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* 1)

In the initial part of the novel the author projects a situation where nature supports life and also responds to the misuse and oppression of its inherent resources. Nature like woman nourishes man but because of man's indiscriminate activities, nature manifests her anger in the form of "starvation" and "drought". The novel is basically a quest by the hero for his identity who acknowledges it amidst nature, not by enslaving her but by living in congruity with "her". Desai attempts to transport her main characters Sampath and Kulfi (Sampath's mother) into environs which they find identical with their ideology and customs. But a new meaning of liberation can emerge only after the demolition of previous social norms. The protagonist, Sampath is born in a humble family and inherits the culture of a small village, Shakhhot that supports man's overwhelming right to subdue nature. The Shahkotians shows homology with the colonial masters who wield supremacy on the oppressed classes (nature or underprivileged man or woman) in accordance with their economic vision. They seem to set the 'order' of the natural landscape and even curb the individual freedom of Sampath. The natural resources including the landscape and ecological surroundings of the village Shahkhot can be considered as the 'exploited and subjugated ones and the 'Shahkotians' as the exploiters. The natural landscape is identical with the female who is considered as a resource to be exploited. Shahkotians convey an androcentric image flexing the authority to abuse the natural assets. Kiran Desai illustrates that this ideology is disastrous for humans. Later in the novel the protagonist Sampath runs away to the hills far from the city, to discover his selfhood. It symbolises man's desire to seek synchronization with nature. He resides in nature's bounty and doesn't disturb its ecological equilibrium and then enjoys it to the fullest. However, the vanquishing of nature by Sampath is in contrast to the actions of the so called cultured, Shahkotians not only take advantage of nature but also disagree with the more primordial natural alliance observed in the Guava Orchard. This conflict takes a new turn when Sampath abandons the society and integrates himself with nature

in the Guava Orchard. Desai thus reveals that for the survival of nature and its allies, man must adapt to reside in synchronization with them. Thus, the guava orchard symbolizes the background where the narrative of Sampath appears and the author's appreciation of ecological obligation is demonstrated efficiently.

However, for a better understanding of the relationship between humans and their ecological surroundings and to observe human estrangement from nature, the ecofeminist concepts have been located in the novel. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* portrays two types of patriarchal ideologies which link women with nature. Firstly, the Indian social structure is regulated by a customary patriarchal system. In this male dominating organization, women are not entitled to any authority and are constrained and subjugated. Sampath's mother Kulfi for example, she is a character who is not only maneuvered but also materialistically evaluated by the patriarchal philosophy even during marriage. Also, her husband Mr. Chawla (Sampath's father) prefers to overlook Kulfi as he believes it is impracticable to converse with her in a civilized manner. Kulfi's odd temperament has been associated with the wild nature, which is placed in inferior position. In a similar way, from the postcolonial perspective, the intrusion of commercialization as a consequence of patriarchal colonialism leads to man's uncontrolled oppression of nature. The same, Mr. Chawla attempts to exploit the prospect of gaining profits from the orchard. Hence, in the male dominating social structure of India, women as well as nature are slotted in a similar condition and considered as not only marginalized but also vulnerable. The central assertion of the theory of ecofeminism claims that the androcentric, materialistic vision founded on binary perspectives validates masculine authority, which causes coercion to nature and women, considering them as the besmirched others. In the present novel also, the groups who are the policy makers and presume control, belong to the male dominating community. Take for instance, Mr. Chawla, whose apathetic attitude bespeaks of his callous unconcern towards women in his life as well as his alienation from the natural world.

In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, the relationship between women and nature is evidently exposed. Human estrangement from nature originates primarily due to Man's detachment from and unfriendliness with the natural surroundings. In this background Mr. Chawla's isolation from nature derives from his estranged and defamiliarized mind-set towards woman. He is unsuccessful in restraining Kulfi and Sampath and the capricious dislocation of the

monkeys also affirms man's control over other beings. Similarly in the context of the non-patriarchal wilderness, women appear to be detached from male-dominating social order but interconnect with nature. Additionally the theory defining the origin of the universe considers that nature has affinity with the female temperament portraying it as a fostering mother: "a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered planned universe". (Merchant 77). In this novel too, Kulfi is symbolic of nature, and one can observe her feminine perspective to nature. At the very first instance, Kulfi's obsession for food and cuisines establish this liaison. Being entrusted with the duties of a nurturer she makes available for Sampath suppers with items from nature and its surroundings: "She cooked only for Sampath, leaving Ammaji to cater to the rest of the family, for his was the only judgment Kulfi trusted" (Desai, *HGO* 78). Kulfi displays correlation with the natural elements including land and natural food products as well as her maternal attachment with Sampath which reinforces Sampath's relationship both with her and nature. The other side of the coin of discriminatory binary divisions puts Mr. Chawla as a symbol of estranged/alienated entity with respect to nature and woman. The seemingly cynical activities of his wife pertaining to her latest culinary skills evokes an abhorrence in his mind, connoting a humiliation of females in androcentric, dualistic ideology which opposes women's sense of space and liberty. This binary approach which always gives a privileged position to man considers the economic or other vested reasons for man's association with nature as well as with women. Both are considered substandard and resources to be exploited and controlled by man. The notion of this materialistic philosophy alienates man from both nature and woman. This simultaneous defamiliarization is evident in the relationship of Mr. Chawla with his wife as well as his apathetic attitude towards nature.

This self-styled rational androcentric ideology wields a malevolent effect on women by disregarding her as well as assuming her ignorant. In the present novel, Verma Ji, the head of the Biology Division at the Lady Chatterjee University portrays this dominating rational ideology. In managing the offenses of the monkeys' offenses, he is not interested in demonstrating the strategy to his wife since he can't relate to his better half, seeing her answer in an infantile manner when he makes an effort to communicate rational quests to her. The alienation and estrangement from woman is the central reason for the masculine antagonism to nature. From the ecofeminist perspective, male centric oppression of women is equivalent to man-made

exploitation of nature. The symbolism of Mr. Chawla as a capitalist defines him as a practical opportunist who manipulates a lucrative religious business. The guava orchard, relinquished for a long time in the wild, is by all accounts pointless for a practical opportunist like him. He considers the orchard as an undervalued and inferior entity with no commercial value. When Sampath absconds from his home and in a fluky drive ascends up a guava tree, Mr Chawla is enraged because Sampath disgraces his identity: “What are you doing up there? shouted Mr Chawla. Get down at once” (Desai, *HGO* 54). He upholds that climbing the trees is an attribute of monkeys. According to him, the superiority/subjectiveness imparted to the patriarchal society should not be hindered by the inferior/objective nature. The non-human species/animals are an inherent element of nature, and they denote a dominion that is not easy to be tamed by rational authority. Therefore, his anxiety towards this tree-dwelling episode arises due to untamed temperament of nature. In this dualism, Mr Chawla emerges as a materialistic ecologist, and nature as an object. Due to this inert and mechanistic attitude towards nature and its assets, he is incapable of relating with the orchard, observes the actions of his son as, “less rational and as closer to the sphere of nature, and especially as closer to animality” (Plumwood 47). Mr Chawla considers land as a personal asset to be capitalized so he plans to open a financial credit scheme in the name of constructing a temple, dealing in stocks and shares and making huge profits out of them. It leads to confrontation with nature also and this desire to exploit the natural landscape estranges him from the whole ecosystem. This rational perspective for nature and the male-centric, materialistic idea of the global human population supports the enslavement of nature. It is evident that this philosophy of oppressing and exploiting nature has its origin in capitalism and scientific development.

As an opportunistic environmentalist, Mr. Chawla fails to comprehend Sampath’s decision as there is no advantage in staying on a tree. On the other hand, as a rational patriarch, he shows that he is, unequipped for appreciating the relationship between nature and humans. Mr Chawla’s estrangement from nature is further heightened by his impassive state of mind towards Sampath: “he [Mr. Chawla] did not listen or look too carefully any more” (Desai, *HGO* 91). He instantly cancels his plan of returning to Shahkot seeing a chance to craft great wealth in the guava orchard. However, his family accepts the orchard as their “long-lost home” although Mr Chawla feels no connection with it. At the point when confronting the attack of the monkeys,

Mr. Chawla arranges to manufacture Sampath a legitimate asylum in the orchard. This asylum formed of concrete, demonstrates an alienation from the wild nature. This nonchalant ideology represents Mr Chawla's detachment from the environment, and prompts his own estrangement from the land.

Ecofeminist, Rosemary Radford Reuther, asserts that "women's and nature's liberation are a joint project" (Tong 247). Take an example of Pinky (Sampath's sister) who does not show any sympathy with her brother considering him as weird. She undergoes a sense of embarrassment due to his orchard dwelling episode. However, the clash with the real world forces Pinky to reconsider Sampath's adverse dilemma:

She had looked up at his feet dangling from the cot and realized that they must surely have his upon a similar vein in the state of things. . . . Now, she felt, she too understood the dreadfulness of life recognized the need to be by herself with sadness, and from this moment of realization onwards, she spent hours sitting under Sampath's tree.... (Desai, *HGO* 110)

This radical change in her attitude towards Sampath awakens her identification towards the orchard, a type of resolution with nature. In this way, she eventually gets liberation from the customary restraints and endures in her love for nature

Lastly, the author through the failures of his patriarch/rationalist characters gives the message that alienation leads to an unharmonious relationship between man and nature. Take an instance of the spy, who as a supporter of scientific knowledge, also experiences the divergence between these dualistic contrasts that is, masculine rationality and feminine inclination to nature. Assuming that Sampath's blessedness has a link with Kulfi's pot, the spy pokes into the mystery by endeavoring to gather a portion of her food. However, Kulfi catches him red-handed and "cracked him over the head with a broom" (Desai, *HGO* 104). Alongwith, the spy follows Pinky to uncover Sampath's mystery. He is likewise harmed by Pinky, who takes note of his pestering and "speared around her ruthlessly with her hairpin, giving the spy such a jab" (Desai, *HGO* 112). Both episodes verify the discordance between humans and nature. Considering Mr Chawla and the spy as subjugators who want to have control over the environment, Aldo Leopold claims that the captors are bound to be damned, in the end "self-defeated" (240). In the instances of Mr

Chawla and the spy, their yearning for commanding nature results in disappointment. By method for their dissatisfactions, Desai infers that individuals ought to live with nature in amicability as opposed to uncontrolled misuse of nature and its allies.

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