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ENVIRONMENT AS AN ENTITY OF ESCAPISM IN KIRAN DESAI'S "HULLABALOO IN  
THE GUAVA ORCHARD"

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to highlight the representation of nature, the effect of nature in the lives of the characters, the actions of the humans and the reactions of nature and the spiritual presence of nature in the mortal lives of man in Kiran Desai's novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. The novel is analysed with the viewpoint of Barry Commoner's first law, Everything is connected to everything else.

**Key words:** Nature, Hullabaloo, Alienation

Eco criticism is an umbrella term which branches out into various literary approaches. This made it quite a herculean task for critics to define it in absolute terms. Lawrence Buell, an Eco critic, mentions about it as an increasingly heterogeneous movement. This justifies the fact that both literature and nature are subjects which constantly undergo alterations. Just as how feminist criticism observes literature and language from a gender-centric point of view, eco-criticism takes up an earth-centric approach to literature. Eco-Criticism is one of the most pre-dominant critical analyses of the present era. On a critical standpoint, it has one foot in literature and the other on land. The term Ecology was introduced by a German Biologist, Ernst Heinrich Haeckel. It was derived from the term 'oekologie' which refers to the relation of the animal both to its organic as well as its inorganic environment. The word 'eco' from ecology originates from the Greek term 'oikos' meaning house. This substantiates that ecology refers to the relationship between organisms and its environment.

Despite its emergence in the early 1960s with the publication of *The Silent Spring*, the eco-critical movement gained momentum only by 1990s. It was only during this period that the term Eco criticism, which was coined by William Reuckert in 1978 in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment on Eco criticism*.

Kiran Desai, an Indian American author was born on 3rd September 1971 in Chandigarh, India. She is the daughter of the most renowned Indian writer Anita Desai and Ashvin Desai, a businessman. She wrote her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* in the year 1998 which won her the Betty Trask prize in the same year. This novel has also received accolades from Salman Rushdie as 'Lush and intensely imagined'. Her second novel was *The Inheritance of Loss*. This novel won the Man Booker prize in 2006 and was nominated for the Orange broadband prize for fiction in 2007. The Contemporary writers of Kiran Desai are Arvind Adiga, Jeet Thayil, Amit Chaudri, Jhumpa Lahiri, R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh, whose

novel *The Hungry Tide* can be studied Eco critically. Desai's fictions focus on the themes of isolation, cultural clashes, dislocation and banishment which are presented in the broad viewpoint of globalisation.

Kiran Desai in an interview with Catherine McWeeney which was published in *Bold Type* 2000, says that the inspiration for this novel is from a real life story:

"I started with a very small idea, really. I'd read a story in *The Times of India* and heard about a character from many people, a man who was a very famous hermit in India who really did climb up a tree, who lived in a tree for many, many years until he died. He died last year I believe. So I began to wonder that it was about someone like this who would do something as extreme as to spend his life in a tree. So it started really with that character, and then the story built up around it" (Desai).

The novel of Kiran Desai which has been chosen for study is *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. The title of the novel itself is Eco connected. The word 'hullabaloo' means 'a commotion'. Some of the Eco critical elements in this novel are analysed. The setting of the novel is in a small town, Shakhkot where the weather is unbearably hot. Many people suggest a variety of probable solutions. The Shakhotians are worried about the uncertainty of the immediate monsoon. The unendurable heat and draught dishearten the local people. At this time of famine in Shakhkot, Kulfi a 21 year old woman just married to Mr. Chawla becomes pregnant. By late September the heat and lack of rain combine to produce terrible disaster. The condition becomes worse to such an extent that relief camps are set up by the Red Cross Society in the west region of Shakhkot. The ration shop fails to distribute adequate amount of rice and lentils, and the prices of essential commodities rise higher. During the period of pregnancy, she is as enormously large as she is changed into a subject of oddity. She becomes more and more obsessed with the idea of food. This weird and freakish activity can be read as the forewarnings of something quite alarming for the baby. And this, no doubt, is an instance of a mystic deed:

... all of a sudden a shadow fell across the sun and magically, as quickly as a winter's day tumbles into smoky evening and then night, the white-lit afternoon deepened into the colour of old parchment as the sky darkened...The air thinned and stirred in a breeze that brought goose bumps out upon her arms. 'Look!' Kulfi shouted. 'Here comes the rain!' (Desai 9).

Kulfi is the first person to predict the coming of rain. She in this way can be associated with nature. The implicit connection between the rain and Kulfi is best understood when one finds Kulfi enjoying the rain in the following manner, 'stretched out further still, and further until the rain took up all the space inside her head' (10). She throws herself into the rain, fully drenched, enjoying herself against the warning of precaution. The rain continues and Sampath is born:

The storm still raging, rain pouring through windows that would not stay closed and flooding in beneath the doors, Sampath was born. As his face, with a brown birthmark upon one cheek, appeared to the cheers of his family, there was a roaring overhead that almost split their eardrums, followed by a vast crash in the street outside (Desai 11).

Sampath's birth and the birthmark on his face are taken as a sign of the spiritual identity of a holy character. Rain has a religious association in the Hindu society. When seen from a cultural point of view, it may be said that Sampath's birth preceded by rain is a means of salvation for the famine cursed land. So they name him Sampath which means 'Good fortune'. The urge for tranquillity is found to have taken a firm hold of him as he finds this material life to be a prison he had been born into, and all he craves for is nothing but freedom. Sampath inherits eccentricity from his mother's side which persuades him to go away from the 'hullabaloo' or the cry of the everyday life, and consequently he takes refuge in a guava orchard; which characterises his eccentricity as a tool of resisting the substantial pettiness of dull existence. Sampath is portrayed throughout the text in relation to the natural elements, "Twenty years later, in the very same house and in the very same room, Sampath Chawla, with spider-like legs and arms, thin and worried-looking, lay awake under a fan" (Desai 14).

When Sampath fails to get any government job, his father criticises him as a cross between potatoes and mankind. At the Post Office, Sampath spends hours alone, reading letters and by doing so, he learns a

great deal about the personal lives of people and their secrets. Sampath becomes drunk and is dismissed after disrobing and mooning those gathered for his boss' daughter's wedding. His father asks him to hunt for other jobs. Sampath has other thoughts and resolves to escape. For Sampath, the cultured world of mankind is too limiting and lacks the pleasure of experimentation or doing something new. He feels bitter at heart and thinks that his surroundings are harmful to his mental health. He realizes that he can live the life of blissful harmony only by escaping from the civilized world of men.

On leaving the buildings far behind, he feels the freshness of greenery. Soon he leaps from the window of the bus and runs towards an old orchard visible far up the slope. Finally he climbs up a guava tree and settles among the leaves. In the branches of the tree he experiences calm and contentment, "Yes, he was in the right place at last" (Desai 51). To Sampath, a life in the orchard is a pile of massive happiness, he feels himself much closer to Nature itself, and decides to spend all his life in plenty of its bountifulness:

Concealed in the branches of the tree he had climbed, Sampath felt his breathing slow and a wave of peace and contentment overtook him...The warmth nuzzled against his cheek like the muzzle of an animal . . . This was the way of riches and this was a king's life, he thought . . . (Desai 51).

The character of Sampath thus undergoes a complete change from an inactive, unhappy young man, he is transformed into a 'Baba' or 'Hermit' of extraordinary wisdom. He does not pay heed to any one, neither to his family members appealing several times to come back, nor to the woman brought before him for a supposed marriage. For Kulfi, through her son, she could see a reflection of herself. The response of Sampath to people's queries brings out his wisdom and magnetism. His maxims like phrases not only astonish the simple people but also puzzle them. This, he acquires when he reads personal letters at the post office. With Sampath's hermit life, one thing that also runs corresponding is Kulfi's desire to cook food for her son. Sampath's piety brings in her a new eagerness for cooking, with varieties of ingredients, spices, meats and natural herbs. She discovers in the orchard a special kind of peace. She cooks outdoors in the sunshine under the massive sky. While cooking she realizes that she is on the rim of something enormous. All round her is a landscape she understands intensely, she understands it as she understands her son, she knows why he is sitting on a tree, because, it is the right place for him. The cinema monkey (so named for their harassment of female moviegoers) which initially troubles people in the bazaar stays calm when they see Sampath taking refuge in their tree. He loves monkeys, their company, their pranks and feels absolutely at home when they play around him. Sampath calls the monkeys by various affectionate names and shows his special affection for them. The reason that he is called a 'Monkey Baba' is because of his deep affection for the monkeys in the orchard:

Look at that monkey. Gentle as anything! The Baba has subdued the beasts. . . The behaviour of the monkeys was just another proclamation of Sampath's authenticity. He was an endless source of wonder. He had even cast his spell upon the wild beasts of the market (Desai 108-109).

Monkeys get drunk up and become more violent and aggressive. Sampath's tree was smacked in the chaos. He was thrown here and there. People started thinking about strategies to capture the monkeys. Two camps of followers were formed. One was of the view that monkeys should be removed to save the tree-baba and divine atmosphere of orchard. Other group was against Sampath who thought that tree-baba has intruded in the kingdom of animals and mislead them from their home. Some suggested convincing Sampath to get down from the tree, because they believe that Sampath is the idol of the monkeys and if he leaves the orchard then the monkeys will not find any motivation to continue the destructive work. But Sampath is firm and his reply shows his deep attachment with nature:

I am not going to live anywhere but in this tree, said Sampath. 'And the monkeys are not drunk right now. They are only playing.' When his father had gone he realized his heart was thumping. He could not get the horrible thought out of his mind. Leave his tree? Never. Never ever, he thought, his body trembling with indignation (Desai 127).

The problem that arises is that without the monkeys, Sampath had no existence. He actually wanted, a life surrounded with monkeys in that peacefulness of the guava orchard, but it was no longer there. His mental peace was fading with his physical health also. The extraordinary meals cooked by his mother bring about a permanent sickness and inactivity in him. Kulfi's excitement for preparing a new meal, with the flesh of monkey, brings a new energy in her cooking. Everything was set, the Brigadier and others chose the last day of April as the day of implementation, when everything will be controlled in order, and Kulfi prepared her cauldron so that a monkey will directly fall from the tree and will be cooked there helplessly. The story ends with Sampath's vanishing, and the failed efforts to trap and kill the monkeys. Symbolically a man gets cooked instead of a monkey, reflecting how our evil wishes turn upon us. At the end, only a guava is left with a brown birthmark stain, which is also taken away by the cinema monkey.

Wait,' shrieked Ammaji. 'Give me that fruit. Wait! Sampath! Sampath!' But the Cinema Monkey picked up the fruit himself before anybody had time to move and, calm-eyed and wise, holding it close to his chest, with the other monkeys following in a band; he leapt from the guava tree's branches and bounded away (Desai 208).

This novel can be analysed with the point of view of Barry Commoner's first law, 'Everything is connected to everything else'. This is evident when the drunken monkeys create a hullabaloo in the orchard which affects the people of Shahkot, Sampath the 'monkey-baba' as well as the Guava Orchard. Thus, everything is connected to everything else.

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