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A Symbolic Representation of Environmental Exploitation in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in Guava Orchard*

Abstract

This paper attempts to conceptualize the affiliation of nature and women as textualized by Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in Guava Orchard* (1998). Nature imagery in this novel allows the reader to investigate how nature is used literally or metaphorically in literary texts and how human condition is transcribed through the evocation of natural icons. An eco-feminist study of this novel explores the unexplored realms of female psyche. An eco-critical study substantiates the concept that nature and women are rapidly being subordinated in the

name of culture now a days, so ecological balance as well as women liberation are essential prerequisites for holistic life.

Keywords: Nature, Eco-Criticism, Women, Ecology, Eco-Feminism

There is a distinct class of Indian women novelists whose writings have a significant reflection of nature imagery. Kiran Desai falls into this category renowned for incorporating elements of nature to express the tacit emotions of their characters. Her writings can be seen as a tool to correlate human psyche with the natural icons in an engaging manner. Kiran Desai, an Indian origin-American author, is brought up here till the age of fourteen and then moved to England. After staying for a short-time in England, she moves with her family to America. She spends a span 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. Evidently she 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, Kiran Desai portrays human life in the arena of nature where they provide a glimpse of nature. In her novel they trace the inclination of characters towards nature. The symbolism of nature is very well represented in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Here, she contends that if man wants an inclusive and contented growth, he cannot view himself as alienated from the natural surroundings. He should rather examine himself as a member of the whole biological framework. She shows that if the existence of nature and its surroundings is to prolong, man cannot keep on overpowering his surroundings, he should figure out how to live in harmony with them. The novel opens with a distressing dearth and drought that leads to an extreme rise in temperature and people are suffer due to the deficiency of water resources. The

explanation refers to is the volcanic explosion in Tierra del Fuego. The 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 whoever 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" (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. Kiran 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 was born in a humble family and inherits the culture of a small village; Shahkot 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 Shahkot can be regarded 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 does not 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. Kiran 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 eco-feminist 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 manoeuvred 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 eco-feminism 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 de-familiarized mindset 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. 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" (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 alienated entity with respect to nature and woman.

From the eco-feminist 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” (54). He upholds that climbing the trees is an attribute of monkeys. According to him, the superiority 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” (47) says Val Plumwood in *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. 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" (*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* 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 Ruether, in *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, asserts that "women's and nature's liberation are a joint project" (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. By method for their dissatisfactions, Kiran Desai infers that individuals ought to live with nature in amicability as opposed to uncontrolled misuse of nature and its allies.

Kiran Desai efficiently portrays the consequences of environmental or natural catastrophes on society. It represents the tribulations created due to man's intrusion upon the normal array of the involved entities and reveals that the affinity amongst humans and animals is stronger than that of human vis-a-vis human. A comprehensive study of Kiran

Desai has made it conspicuous that *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* has the element of nature imagery profoundly infused in it. Her fiction elicits the connection of nature with human mindset and especially women to an extent which is notable for its incisiveness. In short, it can be asserted that she has presented appreciably the case of eco-feminism in her fiction.

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