

AN ECOCRITICAL APPRISAL OF KIRAN DESAI'S HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD

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Abstract: Environmental declination has become a global problem. Man's existence is at the verge of danger due to deteriorating environment. Literature plays a prominent part in surfacing environmental problem. Kiran Desai is a renowned name in the field of eco literature. The present paper is an attempt to high light the multiferous environmental issues and the reasons behind them. An Ecocritical study of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* explores multiple ecocritical issues like global warming, wild life conservation, commercialisation of nature, importance of intrinsic value rather than instrumental value, equity of human and non human world, man's anthropocentric attitude and man nature relationship. The prime cause of environmental degradation is man's separation from nature. Man is weaving a death trap for himself by destroying nature. Desai conveys the message that the time has come when man should be alert over the issue of the environment degeneration. We can have the ecological harmony only if we develop the sense of regard and respect for nature.

Key Words: Instrumental value, Intrinsic value, Anthropocentrism.

Introduction

Literature is incomplete without nature's description. Nature occupies a distinguished place in most of the literary works. There has always been an intimate bonding between literature and nature. The difference is that the earlier works of literature expressed nature in its majestic form. By the passage of time nature's beauteous form from the literary canvas started to vanish. The reason behind the dry presentation of nature is environmental degradation. The literary personalities started to miss the prosperous form of nature in their surroundings. Their concern for nature's diminishing shape emerged a new genre in the form of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism explores, analyses and interprets the relationship between literature and environment. William Rueckert is the first man who coined the term "Ecocriticism in 1978 in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." The earlier ecocritical study was focused on nature writing and on romantic literature. Now the scope and area of ecocritical study has been widened. According to Garrard the interest of the ecocritics is shifting to the "Studies of popular scientific writing, film, TV, art, architecture and other cultural artefacts such as theme parks, zoos, and shopping malls . . .

attention is increasingly given to the broad range of cultural processes and products in which, and through which the complex negotiations of nature and culture take place”(5).

Today environmental degradation is posing a great threat to human existence. Our biosphere has been suffering with environmental issues like acid rain, ozone layer depletion, global warming, air pollution, water pollution, land degradation, unpredicted climatic fluctuation, floods, cyclones, draught, deforestation, soil contamination and so on. These environmental issues are adversely affecting living organisms. The prime reason behind ecological degradation is man's anthropocentric attitude. Day by day man is disintegrated from nature. In the blind race of commercialisation, he has become inert and passive towards nature. In chasing the material prosperity, man is mercilessly exploiting nature. He is marching on the suicidal path by destructing nature. Our technological upliftments are withdrawing ourselves from nature. We have no time to observe the wealth of nature. Ecocritical study draws attention of the public towards environmentally oriented issues in a work of literature. Camilo Gomides expresses concern of ecocriticism in the operational definition as, “The field of inquiry that analysis and promotes the work of art that “raises moral questions about human interaction with nature, while also motivating audiences’ to live within a limit that will be binding over generations” (16).

Kiran Desai is an eco vibrant writer. Her novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) is an environmentally oriented novel. Indeed ecocriticism is the study of any environmentally oriented text to know and understand the relationship between man and the environment. This novel throws light on the relationship between nature and man. In this novel, the natural landscape has not been used just a passive frame work or as a decorative piece but has been used as a living character to influence the events of the novel. An ecocritical novel highlights the ecological problem and the role of ecology in the novel. Ecocriticism studies the environmental issues depicted in the work of literature as well as views the different issues in the text with the ecocritical lens. An attempt is made in this research paper to analyze Kiran Desai's maiden novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* with an ecocritical perspective.

Global Warming

Global warming is one of the most important environmental issues raised by Kiran Desai in her debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Global warming implies the rise in the temperature of the Earth and its surroundings. The scientific research has proved that the temperature of the earth is increasing day by day. Desai opens the novel by spotting the issue of global warming. The novel opens with focussing on the heat wave and ferocious summer. It highlights the tough living conditions of the people due to the delayed arrival of the monsoon. The opening passage describes the hot summer days. “That summer the heat had enveloped the whole of Shahkot in a murky yellow haze” (Desai 1). People are restless

due to heavy heat. They seek to know the causes behind the extraordinary heat. The news papers are revealing various reasons behind the terrific climatic condition. The local news paper finds out the different reasons behind the abnormal heat. It is because of a volcano disruption in Tierra del Fuego. The volcanic ash was thrown up due to the explosion of a volcano that warmed the whole atmosphere. Desai throws light that the human created activities also accounts for global warming. The news paper report shows that the excessive heat of this summer is the result of “*molecular movement observed in the polar ice-caps* (Desai 1).

Kiran Desai is deeply concerned with the issue of the climatic disorder. The primary cause of global warming is the heat that is produced through the burning of fossil fuels that increase the volume of the green house gases in the atmosphere. “Shahkot boasted some of the highest temperatures in the country” (Desai 1). The intensity of the summer can be understood by the fact that the persons from every walk of life participate to find out the solution. Several comic and serious solutions are suggested to attract monsoon cloud by Mr. R.K. Chawla, the army and Vermaji. Mr.Chawla’s proposal was to grow tree at a huge scale, the army proposal was to scatter the clouds by employing planes and Varmaji proposed the use of an immense large fan. Kiran Desai describes various methods used by people to get rid of the excessive heat. It was the month of September, but the monsoon did not arrive.

The heat and lack of rain collectively produce the terrible condition of drought. The prices have risen. “Nobody would buy the scraggy chickens sitting in cages outside the meat shop” (Desai 3). Smaller and smaller portions of rice and lentils are distributed by the ration shop all the time. The condition of Shahkot gets so worst that famine-relief camps are set up by the Red Cross to the west of Shahkot. Thus, Desai raises the issue of climatic disorder in a comic and satiric way that causes famine, hunger and diseases. She warns that our planet is exceedingly warming due to human activities which are posing a threat to our survival.

Man- Nature Relationship

Ecocriticism condemns the literature that depicts human kind as separate from nature. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is the eco oriented novel of Kiran Desai. Nature is an integral part of man’s life. It influences man and inspires him to live ecologically. “Man and Nature, mind and the external world, are geared together and in unison complete the motive principle of the universe. They act and react upon each other, ‘so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure” (Read 126-27). Nature provides us the education of life and without nature life is worthless.

The setting of the novel is Shahkot and a guava orchard, near Shahkot. Fed up of the hectic town life and after his suspension of the post office job, Sampath, the protagonist takes refuge on a big guava tree in an orchard situated at the outskirts of Shahkot. Sampath is a nature lover boy. He feels oneness with nature. Sampath who has been considered as nothing

for good in his town life suddenly becomes a wise man, a man of unfathomed wisdom. He becomes a tree baba. Nature influences his over all personality. Since Sampath has the flair of penetrating into the deep meanings of nature, he understands the messages of nature. He opens himself entirely before nature. Bill Devall and George Sessions remark “Deep ecological sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the non human world” (67). The identification of the finite into an infinite whole and the realisation of “self” into larger “Self” is the ultimate premise of ecosophy. As Sampath climbs on a guava tree “a wave of peace and contentment overtook him” (50). The world of nature offers him a serene sooth comfort where all the tensions of this unintelligible world are lightened. His body gets weightless and he becomes a living soul. His merging into nature opens the windows of his intellect to the vast horizon of the wholeness of the world. “How important this had become to him. Here, sitting not too high and not too low, he had seen the world in absolute clarity for the first time. . . . He felt weightless here” (Desai 142-43).

Oneness with nature provides Sampath confidence. Thoreau in his *Walden* rightly postulates, “The most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any nature object” (94). In the biosphere, everything is interlinked with everything. Sampath feels this connectivity. He thinks of the way in which the monkeys, birds and insects interweave their lives with his. Sampath’s alliance with the natural landscape has an ennobling impact on his personality. In his new abode, Sampath discovers all that the treasures; liberty, space solace, solitude and most crucial Nature. The company of nature transforms him entirely. Like a profound philosopher, he delivers sermons. His small sentences are richly packed with worldly wisdom. Desai describes Sampath’s communion with nature in a symbolical way. In the midst of terrific hullabaloo, Sampath gets disappeared and there lies a much bigger guava on his empty cot in place of him, having a brown mark like the birthmark of Sampath.

Deep Ecology and Freedom of Sampath

The deep ecological concept reflects the fact that every entity of the biosphere has the right to flourish in its own inimitable way. Every organism has an equal right to live on the earth irrespective of its instrumental value. Martin Heidegger’s ecophilosophical statement that to ‘be’ is not to exist, but to ‘show up’ or be disclosed, proves very true in Sampath’s cases. He does not want just to exist in this world. On the contrary, he wants to disclose what resides within him. He longs to expose his real identity and versatility. Sampath’s soul gets crumpled under the materialistic rules and regulations. He longs to live life in accordance to his own wisdom. He has been proved a confirmed failure in every field by the worldly people. He wants free space, open sky and fresh air. He hates his life. He feels the material world as a prison and himself as a prisoner. He yearns for freedom. He considers his life a never ending flow of misery. He craves for individual freedom and identity. When

Sampath has been offered an egg by Kulfi, he denies, "I want my freedom" ((Desai, 47). Sampath's taking refuge on the guava tree is the culmination of his long cherished desire of getting freedom. Sampath feels a unique pleasure in the world of freedom. He is elevated as a wise man, who solves the doubts and problems of people. He becomes famous as tree baba and then monkey baba as a band of monkeys join Sampath in the guava orchard.

Unfortunately his blissful companionship with nature can not continue. Once the monkeys get some bottles of wine in the bag of a devotee. From then they develop a taste for liquor and become alcoholic. Things get out of control. They start to spoil the quietness of the orchard and of Shahkot by attacking people in search of wine. The whole atmosphere of the orchard changes with emerging the issue of monkey. The decision of trapping the monkeys is taken by the government authority. Sampath does not want the removal of monkeys from the guava orchard. He thinks that he will not be able to live without the monkeys. All the fun in his life will be disappeared as the monkeys are removed from there. Eventually, he succeeds in getting freedom from all hullabaloo as he disappears from the guava tree at the day of the monkey trapping expedition. At the end of the novel, his vanishing from the guava tree is emblematic of his attaining freedom through the path of spiritual satisfaction. Thus the novel describes man's craving to escape from the rigid real world to his flexible fantasy world of freedom, space, peace and solace.

Commoditisation and Commercialisation of Nature and Ecological Deterioration:

The commercialisation of nature and human is one of the chief causes of environmental declination. In this novel, Kiran Desai depicts that how the commercialisation of nature and of circumstances defaces the beautiful orchard and surroundings. Mr. R.K. Chawla, the father of Sampath works as the head clerk in the Reserve bank of Shahkot. Sampath father is a man of commercial thinking. He is a man of materialistic mind. He decides to earn money from Sampath's sainthood. He shifts his family to the guava orchard. He makes arrangement of all types of town comfort in the jungle.

The tranquil atmosphere of the orchard begins to deteriorate. Mr. Chawla makes all arrangement for the comfort of his family in the orchard. He manages the arrangement of water, electricity and T.V. He buys a refrigerator and scutter. The orchard seems to resemble a town. Soon the silence of the orchard begins to break and the crowd of people start to visit the guava orchard to meet Sampath and have his blessings. He manages a small cart to sell flower, garlands, fruits and incense. Sampath's grandmother, "Ammaji had been put into sole charge of a tea stall" (Desai 92). Thus, a market is established near the dwelling of the 'Tree Baba' and everything from toothpaste to coconut and bread to biscuits is available in this market. Thus, Mr. Chawla reaps the economic profits out of his son's sainthood.

Advertisement of the dentist, tailors, Campa Cola, Limca, Fanta, Goldspot, Ayurvedic, and Talcum powder are hung colourfully on the neighbouring street providing a town touch to the natural landscape. "Ugly advertisement defaced the neighbouring trees" (Desai 181). Behind Ammaji's tea stall a smelly garbage heap spills down and grows larger every week. Desai raises the issue of environmental contamination through Sampath who thinks "why didn't they take their advertising, their noise and dirt, their cars and buses and trucks... and leave him to his peace and quiet" (Desai 181-82).

One of the principles of the Arne Naess's Deep Ecology states that the recent intrusion of man in the world of nature has been increased too much and the condition is going worse to worst. Kiran Desai highlights that man himself is responsible for nature's degradation. Mr. Chawla's commercial mentality becomes the cause of disrupting the ecological balance in the orchard. His money minded tendency becomes the cause of declining the natural landscape. Desai depicts the picture of the natural destruction during monkey removing expedition. "Wretched army boys. . . . Thudding across gardens and trampling flowers, they ran through private property and left trails through flowerbeds and vegetable fields . . . it was like the approach of an earthquake" (Desai 183).

Conclusion

Nature is a powerful and significant symbol of the fantastic world, which is desperately longed by man but is also degraded by him. The incidents of the novel happen in the anthropocentric background. Kiran Desai reflects the helplessness of human beings before nature. She describes nature as a constant parallel to human character and things. The novel commences with the description of an extremely hot atmosphere of Shahkot. Several efforts of bringing rain prove invain. Eventually, this other world of nature proves its superiority despite efforts made by scholarly humans to conquer it. Thus, the anthropocentric claim of man's superiority over nature proves wrong. Desai focuses on the sober and soothing influence of nature on man. She advocates nature's healing impact on the wounded soul through the intellectual transformation of the protagonist. She accentuates that man's inner happiness and true freedom is possible in the sublime world of nature. Nature provides a spiritual elevation to the spirit of man. Desai states strong statements throughout the novel regarding man's interference with the world of nature. The universal message that the novel conveys is that the destruction of nature will ultimately leads to the destruction of men.

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