

# Biophilia in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo* in the Guava Orchard

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## Abstract

*This article explores biophilic consciousness in Kiran Desai's novel, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard, from the perspective of Eco-criticism. The prime concern of this study goes to present the prevalence of biophilia representing through its main character, Sampath Chawla who escapes from the modern sense of materialism and human's relationship with nature and others species, and comes up to the lap of nature where he gets complete happiness. Nature provides what he dreams to achieve in life. The orchard provides him shelter, animals become his friends, and nature provides him knowledge, freedom and peace putting forward the urgent need of maintaining harmonious relation between human, animals and nature. His dream of being a part of nature and its preserver gets symbolically fulfilled as he lives in the orchard with the monkeys, refusing every offer of his family. The study shows ultimate freedom, joy and happiness come from blending of human life with the nature suggesting us to go and enjoy carefully utilizing the nature. The researchers have employed eco-criticism and the eco-critics like Edward O. Wilson, Richard Kerridge and Chryll Glotfelty to form ecological ground for the analysis of the text showing much concern for perseverance, protection and promotion of the nature.*

**Key words:** Biophilia, Eco-criticism, Consciousness, Degradation, materialism, ecology

## Introduction

The term 'biophilia' suggests love for other species or developing compassion to other beings. It also refers to the affinity of human beings to other life forms. Human possesses an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life. 'Bio' means life and 'philia' means friendly feeling towards other species. In this regard, Edward O. Wilson defines biophilia as "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (5). For him, loving to other creatures is an innate tendency which is a life process. Developing compassion towards other beings goes on without stopping. Biophilia, thus, refers innate emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. Within the framework of evolutionary logic Wilson supports his claims with the possibility of phylogenetic comparison and compares human behavior with the behavior of our closet living animal relatives- chimpanzee, apes, primates and old-world monkeys.

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Different scholars have expressed different opinions regarding animal rights. Talking about animal rights Greg Garrard says, “Animal rights are extended to all animals from a position of superiority that remains axiomatic” (146). For him, animal liberationists generally draw the line of moral consideration at boundary of feeling. In the same way, Keller David says, “biophilic design is not about greening our building or simply increasing their aesthetic appeal through inserting trees and shrubs. Much more, it is about humanity’s place in nature and the natural world’s place in human society...” (4). He claims that biophilic design is about humanity’s place into the natural world setting of human society rather than greening human’s building with trees and shrub. Biophilic design as the relationship between humankind and nature can be one of respect and lover rather than domination. The outcome can be rich, satisfying, and lastingly successful, but only if both partners are modified by their association so as to become better adapted to each other. With our knowledge and sense of responsibility, we create new environments that are ecologically rewarding. This process of reciprocal adaptation occurs through minor changes in the people and their environment, but a more conscious process of design can also take place. Relationship between man and nature is a mutual respect and love without dominating, exploiting with the outcome of richness and satisfaction to each other having responsibility to create a new ecological environment in which changes take place in the process of reciprocal adaptation.

### **Sampath’s Intimacy to Other Species**

Right from the beginning of the novel, the author Kiran Desai puts forward the environmental issues like temperature rise, deforestation, excessive draught and so on giving her readers an insight of dreadful results due to the carelessness of human beings towards the nature. She attempts to draw the references from the public opinions as well as quotes some of the lines from the newspaper. She employs one of the characters Mr. Chawala to report an incident as, “The problem lies in the currents off the West African coastline and the unexplained molecular movement observed in the polar ice-caps. Iraq attempts to steal monsoon by deliberately creating low pressure over desert provinces and deflecting winds from India” (*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* 1). The events and circumstances proceed challenging modern man’s rigorous mechanistic and routine life that yields material sophistication but with no result of bliss, harmony and spiritual prosperity, as represented by Sampath Chawala in this novel. Sampath, a dissatisfied character from his mechanic routine life, escapes from his job and mechanic and rigid human society, goes to the guava orchard to find peace and enjoy making friendship with monkeys. Sampath’s father advises him about a better job but he does not pay any attention to his father’s advice. At last, he works at the post office where he spends hours alone; unsatisfied and feels meaningless. Thus, he escapes from the materialistic world and finds himself in a beautiful guava orchard in the distance because as he says, “I want my freedom” (47). He climbs up a beautiful guava tree and decides to stay there. He forgets the physical world and wants

to go never back to home. He feels glad, devoted and close to the nature. The monkeys seem to be very happy in the guava tree with Sampath. They behave like a man with him in a proper manner. He becomes impressed by seeing their nature. Away from human society and system, “this orchard matched something he had imagined all his life: myriad green-skinned globes growing sweet-sour and marvelous upon a hillside with enough trees to fill the eye and enough fruit to scent the air” (50).

Many of today’s rules for treating nature/other species result from the long history of friendly connection with the nature. The intimacy has now been reduced and at the same time the way we view the value of other species has now been greatly changed all but due to the short period of mechanization of our environment. The following lines of the novel present Sampath’s preference of life with the nature and other species like monkeys in the guava orchard:

And now they were getting rid of his favorite company in the orchard! Didn’t they know how fond he was of the monkeys? And didn’t they know how little he cared for all of *them*? Why didn’t they take their advertising ... little minds and leave him to his peace and quiet, to his beloved monkeys, to his beautiful landscape that was being so dirtily and shoddily defaced? (181-2)

Sampath shows his true love, kind and compassion to the monkeys by shaping their language and culture. He feels peace and calm with them, and feels one with them in natural world. Though the people of modern society try to remove them, he does miracle deed to protect them.

Wilson’s biophilia concept deals with innate human tendencies to get various convictions about other species in general. These psychological mechanisms reflect the technologic possibilities of humanity in prehistoric times, and were in mostly formed in an era when human interaction with other species and the environment was in large part direct and frequent. A significant transformation in the utilization of ecosystems in human evolutionary has been taking place over the last several centuries. Wilson forwards his thought that the genetic base of humans could not fully adapt to cultural changes sufficiently and many psychological mechanisms are functionless. Animals are our first-hand sources to learn new things in our daily life; they teach us knowledge, love and experience from their daily behavior. That is why we human beings should treat them in a proper way with love. Animals are entitled to live in which it is open to their attachments to others, to love and care for others.

Human existence can be at stake without the presence of nature and other tiny creatures so human beings should make a good balance with the nature and its creatures. Nature is a determining factor for human beings so for the better human existence, human beings have to protect the nature and its creatures. Human beings possess an innate tendency

to search a good connection with the nature and various members of the ecosystem of the world environment. The author, here, is more concerned in arousing biophilic awareness, and evoking the readers in the inevitability of creating balance between human being and nature, between human and other tiny creatures of the nature and existence of human being and natural world.

People of today's modern societies have been victimized by technocratic, rigorous and materialistic system of life. The novel attempts to revive harmony, meaning and happiness in life with an appeal for the protection and conservation of environment. It is also an appeal for human beings to become aware for their own protection. In this regards, Andras Takacs Santa considers environmental concern as "an environmental attitude. Attitude consists of cognitive dimension and affective dimension" (26). He claims that without cognitive and affective dimension, environmental attitude cannot be meaningful and perfect demanding for the positive attitude towards the natural world. Since human beings are on the verge of gradual ecological degradation, they are facing severe effects on their life. It has created tension with the environmental needs in the face of modern economic and technological world. The author seems in arousing biophilia awareness, and evoking the readers in the inevitability of creating balance between human beings other creatures and the natural world.

The novel has received numerous comments across the world. Kavitharaj K quotes, "the most appealing voice of the new generation . . . any other novelist" (261). He focuses on the voice of new generation by reading Desai's novel in which he finds out fresh ideas, funny and delicious ideas rather than other novels. Sunita Singh puts her opinion about the novel as a "supremely funny and engaging . . . hullabaloo of Indian life" (270). She mentions happiness, engagement, delight and celebration of the hullabaloo of Indian life. Debalina Sengupta comments, "It reflects upon the alternate realities of life, nature, animal world and finally man as the supreme power who gains the perception of looking beyond the realities of everyday life" (280). For her nature is all pervasive. Nothing can go without it. It is the most powerful asset for all life and human society. In ancient times, there used to be harmonious relationship between man and nature, and in the current time too there is the need of the same practice. In the novel, the Shahkotians exist apart from the ecosystem whereas Sampath is almost fully merged in the ecosystem when he sees himself as a part of nature. When Shahkotians exist in isolation from nature by bringing technology into it, he tries to preserve nature. For Debalina Sengupta the novel "apparently seems . . . but it critiques the real world of humans . . . mix of fantasy and magic"(280). Nature, in this book is representative of the fantastic world which is constantly desired by man. However, the nature has been massively misused. Men try to find out the solution to the nature's degradation but nothing works. This shows the supremacy/power of the nature which is highlighted as a symbol of power.

The novel goes on leading with the thematic idea that is the destruction of the nature finally leads to the destruction of man. According to Bhoomika Thakur, Desai is a renowned environment conscious writer who tries to show the harmful effect of urbanization on the environment. Bhoomika mentions Desai's "approach is eco-centric and eco-critic. She has also focused the environment of east-west encounter, racial prejudice . . . changing reasons charmingly" (694). However, Desai begins the novel with the ugly form of nature due to human carelessness and moves toward the major character, Sampath, whose ecological awareness and desire to fall into the nature makes the readers to embody compassion towards the nature and its protection. Unlike the modern human science and development, he does not overpower the nature but surrenders to it. Fernandez finds that Desai presents nature as the ultimate source to find solace and peace in human life as he says, "if man is to be complete and content, he cannot continue to view himself as existing apart from the natural world . . . the natural world is to survive, man cannot continue to overpower his surroundings, he must learn to live in harmony with them" (188). Though various scholars have interpreted the novel from various perspectives, such as fantastic realism, magical realism and environmental outlook, none of them have interpreted it sufficiently through eco-critical outlook.

In this way, the above mentioned critics have given multiple views to the novel, but the issues of human responsible to the natural disaster, human mutual relation with nature and its other forms of life and human connection to nature has been yet abandoned, the gap, which is fulfilled by the research. Eco-criticism theory is known as eco-poetics, green studies and environmental literary criticism. Eco-critics investigate the underlying ecological values and examine human perception of wilderness and how it has changed throughout history. It mainly highlights whether current environmental issues are accurately represented in popular culture and modern literature. According to Chryll Glotfelty, "eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (19). It makes us easy to take eco-criticism as the study of relationship between literature and environment physically just as Feminism studies about language and literature from a gender-conscious view and Marxism studies about the modes of production and economic class. In the same way, Richard Kerridge says that "The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as response to environmental crisis" (5). For him, eco-criticism finds out to examine, explore and experiment the environmental crisis in terms of coherence and usefulness on the basis of response. Garrard regards Eco-criticism as "the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history" (5).

In the course of development, humans have come across the consumption process of the biotic and the biotic factors of the nature. When it comes to the point of exploitation, humans have already faced the problems of nature degradation. Since the world turned into the era of industrialization, the conditions like population growth, deforestation, pollution, global warming, ozone layer depletion, natural disasters (draught, heavy rain fall, tsunami, landslides, soil erosion etc.), desertification, rapid urbanization, energy crisis, food scarcity and diseases increased deteriorating the world's environment. Plant and animal species are now in crisis due to the lack of shelter, food and health. Carbon related gases are increasing in the world environment; which creates green-house effect resulting the global warming. Scientists have already announced that global environment is getting hotter and hotter every year. This has caused several effects to the world's biotic and biotic factors.

## **Conclusion**

Human's exploitation of the nature in the modern times has enforced people to rethink on the human-nature relation, and divert ways from seizing the nature to its reverence. Eco-criticism as an approach to 'back to nature' has emerged as a newly developed tool to analyze literary texts in relation to ecology. As eco-criticism studies the relationship between man and nature, animals as part of nature and human beings and stresses on the harmonious relation between man, animals and nature, my endeavor remains to analyze the novel from this perspective.

The novel begins with the degraded ecological condition of Shahkot due to the human exploitation of nature drawing the readers' attention towards the urgent need to establish harmonious human-nature relation through the main character, Sampath. Desai is raising the issue of nature protection for the harmonious existence of human and nature. She is calling for taking action consciously and carefully before things go wrong. Humankind has been victimized by alienation, hopelessness and meaninglessness resulted with the postmodern achievements of scientific inventions, new technologies and capitalism. They are entrapped with civilization and attraction for materialism that has made their life full of familial and social restrictions and confinement. In the name of materialism, progress and prosperity, their real desire has become suppressed. Sampath's praise of nature and its beauty, his defending of animals, his sense of friendship with the monkeys and the feeling of being at home in the lap of nature show Desai as a writer who emphasizes on the human and nature harmony which cannot be separated from each other. Human beings can get opportunities to learn boundless from animals and other species to lead themselves healthy, happy and meaningful life.

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