

Searching for an Environmental Identity: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1996) by Kiran Desai

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Abstract: This paper analyses Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1996) from an ecocritical perspective, with the aim to highlight that contemporary Indian narratives in English still honour a conceptualisation of nature as a place in which one can find peaceful and spiritual solace and retreat. Moreover, Desai presents in this novel the themes of identity and alienation closely linked to the natural environment, which justifies an ecocritical reading of the novel in the light of concepts like "place," "dwelling," and "thinking" as explained by Heidegger ("Building Dwelling Thinking"). These become especially illustrated in the development of the main character, Sampath Chawla, who searches for his genuine identity in the midst of the hullabaloo caused by the clash between tradition and modernity, the local and the global in the postcolonial microcosm of Shahkot, a small northern Indian village. This analysis, therefore, proves how the aforementioned Heideggerian concepts become especially relevant when it comes to identifying what we think ("thinking") and, most specifically, what we are ("being") as related to the natural environment, which fully justifies an ecocritical lens.

Keywords: Globalisation; glocalisation; Indian literature in English; ecocriticism; intellectual transformation.

Summary: Introduction. Theoretical arguments. Analysis. Conclusion.

Resumen: El artículo analiza la novela de Kiran Desai, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1996), desde una perspectiva ecocrítica con el propósito de mostrar cómo la narrativa india contemporánea en inglés revela una conceptualización de la naturaleza como lugar de retiro y búsqueda espiritual. Además, Desai relaciona los conceptos de identidad y alienación con el entorno natural, lo que justifica una lectura de la novela a la luz de los conceptos heideggerianos de "lugar," "habitación" y "pensamiento" ("Construir Habitar Pensar"). Estos se ilustran especialmente a través del desarrollo del personaje principal, Sampath Chawla, que busca su identidad genuina en medio del alboroto que se produce en el choque entre tradición y modernidad, entre lo local y lo global en Shahkot, un pequeño pueblo del norte de India, que funciona como un microcosmos poscolonial. El análisis demuestra que conceptos como "lugar" y "habitación," cuando se trata de identificar lo que pensamos ("pensamiento") y lo que somos ("ser") resultan especialmente significativos, al tiempo que enriquecen el concepto de identidad en su relación con el entorno natural. Esto justifica la lectura ecocrítica de la novela.



Palabras clave: Globalización; glocalización; literatura india en inglés; ecocrítica; transformación intelectual.

Sumario: Introducción. Argumentación teórica. Análisis. Conclusión.

With the turn of the century and during the last decade, the development of ecocriticism as a theoretical approach to literary texts has settled and acquired new perspectives. Immersed as we are in the process of globalisation, it has been undoubtedly proven that environmentalism has become one of the main issues to be confronted globally (Ashcroft; Buell). Current social contexts and the technological race seem to have driven us apart from what are considered true human values and relationships, both among ourselves and with the environment. In spite of our constant claim about the importance of preserving the earth, a gradual movement of “robotisation” seems to have appeared, affecting our lives and our relationships from a domestic, cultural and ultimately global perspective. This movement has also affected environmental issues and seems to have turned us into individuals who tend to forget the importance of preserving our natural heritage, considering the earth’s main role in the development of human relationships in their different cultural contexts, as well as its importance to define our identities within those cultural ecosystems.

This seems to justify the use of an ecocritical approach to the literary text, since ecocriticism should provide the basis for interpreting, analysing and understanding a literary work if we consider the environmental crisis our world is going through, and in the hope for a better future. The analysis of the literary text, thus, “becomes a powerful tool, and provides the means to understand and re-establish a connection with our surroundings and nature, and with our truest and genuine selves” (Escobedo 6).

Indian literature in English, and postcolonial literature in general, have always shown their concern with the natural environment in the development of their narratives, with nature providing a main framework where characters establish their relationships with and among one another and with the place where they ultimately root their true identity. In Desai’s 1998 Best Task Prize winning novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1996), the game of relationships that is shaped between the main character, Sampath Chawla, and other characters, the environment

and himself, can be linked to concepts such as “place” and “dwelling” (Garrard 108–35; Heidegger 344–64) when it comes to recognising what we think and what we are. What Heidegger argues in his lecture “Building Dwelling Thinking,” presented at the Darmstadt Symposium on *Man and Space* in 1951 concerning the question of being, seems applicable for our purpose. The concepts of “building” and “dwelling,” their relationship and the kind of “thinking” that comes out of them, seem to enrich the postcolonial concept of identity represented in Desai’s novel. Therefore, my analysis aims to enhance the ecocritical reading of the novel by tackling the themes of alienation and identity represented in the development of the main character as ultimately related to Heidegger’s aforementioned concepts.

In *Hullabaloo and the Guava Orchard* (1996), the village of Shahkot stands as a microcosm where characters seem to be entangled in modernity and tradition. Desai presents the theme of alienation with humour and irony, but with serious concerns underlying the text, just as R. K. Narayan did in *The Guide* (2006), where direct traces of influence can be found.¹ Sampath, Desai’s main character, decides to voluntarily renounce and retire from the mundane world into the natural environment, just like Raju in *The Guide*, and both are raised by the community to the condition of Baba, a kind of hermit with religious connotations. In both cases we find similarities between the main characters, who need to escape from the pollution caused by the material world; as Sharma explains: “[t]he theme behind the novel seems satirical and folly literature where the protagonist due to lack of virtue reveals the vices of the society” (80). This also reminds us of Gautama Budha, who renounced reality in search of a spiritual life of peace and enlightenment in direct contact with Nature.

The novel, thus, presents a clear portrayal of how characters in a postcolonial environment can be negatively influenced by the invasion of new ways of life and thinking, shaking their identities to such an extent that the only way out is to search for an escape towards nature. A search that aims to find a redefinition of the self in close fusion with the environment, as we shall see in this analysis.

I will focus specifically on the main character, Sampath Chawla, who becomes a faithful image of the alienating effects that modernisation

¹ R. K. Narayan is one of the Founding Fathers of Indian writing in English, together with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

can cause on the inhabitants of a small Indian village, who find themselves struggling against new forces that drive them far from what they used to be and felt identified with. As V. R. Singh puts it, Desai, “highlights to comic proportions, the incongruous blending of the Eastern and Western modes of life and writes about the on-going social battles in the present-day India” (28).

Sampath stands as the epitome of this incongruity that drives him into a suffocating claustrophobia, and he is ultimately pushed into a search for his true identity in nature as a place to dwell; a search for freedom and, eventually, for his genuine identity. In Clark’s words, “one goes to ‘nature’ to recover one’s true ‘nature’” (31).

As humans who experience nature, we tend to feel identified with our environment and our surroundings. This is a necessary connection to define ourselves in terms of a condition as environmental beings belonging to a social landscape. This is the reason why place is such an important element in literature: apart from being the setting of any literary work, it also represents a space to which meaning has been attributed, where “place and society are fused as a unity” (64), as explained by Buell, and to which our self needs to be ascribed.

Setting directly connects with the need of a home to provide us with order and security, which takes us to the notion of “dwelling.” It “implies the feeling of belonging somewhere, the long-term imbrications of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work, establishing a relation of duty and responsibility with the earth” (Garrard 117).

In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, the narrative seems to clearly define the context where it is framed and which constitutes the main character’s background. Sampath belongs to a middle-class Indian family and the author presents an exaggerated portrayal of the Indian reality, “a magical tale of a world slightly gone mad” (Kavitharaj and Umadevi, “Ecocritical Study of Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*” 261), an imaginative satire. Sampath leads a life with which he does not feel identified, a life he describes as “a never-ending flow of misery” (Desai 43). He gets fed up with the hectic rhythm of the town as transformed by the invasion of modernity, and decides to escape and search for freedom in isolation and surrounded by the peace of nature, “longing for an imagined world which was deep within himself” (Kavitharaj and Umadevi, “Ecocritical Study of Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*” 263).

To be full human beings, we need to feel recognised as part of a particular environment, and so fulfil our need to belong somewhere. Mitchell Thomashow explains that “in the twenty-first century we face the prospect of multiple ecological and cultural diasporas, millions of migrants attempting to salvage their ecological and cultural integrity. In the twenty-first century, having a homeland will represent a profound privilege” (123). That very location holds some special ascribed meaning, a personal one, where we establish our roots and identity. Holding the promise of a renewed, authentic relation between humanity and the earth in a setting characterised by a cosmopolitan bioregionalism on which we can imprint our personal essence, we are confronted with the wilderness as “a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity” (Garrard 69–70). This might be why Sampath escapes to the orchard, where “His words, nature and atmosphere . . . made him Baba in his tree top hermitage” (Kavitharaj and Umadevi, “The Writing Style in Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*” 11).

However, in our current society the increasing impact of globalisation has brought about a heightened awareness of social and environmental problems that apparently require new conceptions of entitlement and belonging, with the difficulties that accompany the awareness of living among unshared values in a shared space. These ideas support Indian writer Arundhati Roy’s almost apocalyptic warning. As she says in *The Cost of Living* (1999):

Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire. The wind will spread the flames. When everything there is to burn has burned and the fires die, smoke will rise and shut out the sun. The earth will be enveloped in darkness. There will be no day. Only interminable night. Temperatures will drop to far below freezing and nuclear winter will set in. Water will turn into toxic ice. Radioactive fallout will seep through the earth and contaminate groundwater. Most living things, animal and vegetable, fish and fowl, will die. Only rats and cockroaches will breed and multiply and compete with foraging, relict humans for what little food there is. . . .What shall we do then? . . . Where shall we go? What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we breathe? (qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 53)

These ideas should make us think about the environmental rhetoric, which advocates for a “fitting together in a dynamic equilibrium of the human race with all the other things, organic and inorganic, that grace the outer layers of the planet earth” (Buell 46). Moreover, if we revisit the first law of ecology, where everything is connected to everything else, we find ourselves living in a mutual interconnected development of all of earth’s life systems (Escobedo 16).

In Desai’s novel we identify the need for transformation in order to survive the shake of modernity in a small village in India. Sampath Chawla seems to lack air in the suffocating world created by the coloniser and, moved by his eagerness to find freedom, he flees from the village of Shahkot and into a guava orchard, where he climbs a tree feeling the comforting gust of greenery and of pure air that surrounds him there. There, in the midst of nature, he seems to have found the place where he feels at ease with the world, the place that provides him with an apparently defined identity.

Let us go back to the concept of dwelling in order to explain how Sampath solves his inner dissatisfaction and alienation. This leads him to abandon his material life in search of an isolated place that would feed him with spiritual peace, ultimately trying to find his identity by feeling oneness in and with nature, as we shall prove.

In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Martin Heidegger sets up a relationship between the meaning and true essence of the notions of “building” and “dwelling,” and how in these connections human beings find a real sense of being linked to a specific place. He states that:

1. *Building* is really *dwelling*.
2. *Dwelling* is the manner in which mortals are on the earth.
3. *Building* as *dwelling* unfolds into the *building* that cultivates growing things and the *building* that erects buildings. (350; my emphasis)

He also argues that there is “a primal oneness” based on a fourfold perspective where our existence and our identity seem to lie: Earth, Sky, Divinities and Mortals. He states that “this simple oneness of the four we call ‘the fourfold’. Mortals *are* in the fourfold by *dwelling*” (353), but it is of the utmost importance to undertake our responsibility in the preservation of the natural essence of things, and we achieve this by understanding the basic character of dwelling which should be safeguarding. The way to safeguard the fourfold would be to stay with

things, because only by staying with things “would the fourfold stay within the fourfold (and) is accomplished at any time in simple unity” (353). Only in this way would our relationship with the environment secure the real essence of things, contributing thus to the preservation of the fourfold, which eventually should lead us to achieve freedom and peace.

The above explanation of concepts seems to connect clearly with the development of the main character in Desai’s novel. We can relate Sampath’s alienation with the anxiety to find an identity in a suitable “dwelling” as understood by Heidegger. He cannot find his being, he cannot explain his identity in the fourfold created by the postcolonial. The pillars that define him as a mortal in Shahkot do not find the equilibrium of dwelling, because the postcolonial “building” does not lodge the true Indian self, and thus Sampath is unable to find his true being. That is why he moves towards the natural environment, he looks for an open space to be left alone. Only there is he able to feel the silence that allows him to realise that the guava orchard and the tree become the “building” where he “dwells” and, thus, “becomes” and “is.” It is that place, the orchard, which matches the imagination of his desired life. His mind seems to be filled by the essence of nature. Thus, he thinks:

This was the way of riches and this was a king’s life, he thought . . . and he ached to swallow it whole, in one glorious mouthful that could become part of him forever. Oh, if he could exchange his life for his luxury of stillness, to be able to stay with his face held towards the afternoon like a sun flower and to learn all there was to know in the orchard: each small insect crawling by; the smell of the earth thick beneath the grass; the bristling of leaves; his way easy through the foliage; his tongue around every name. (51)

In this excerpt Sampath’s love for nature and his decision to search for the right place to find his genuine self become clear, as he tries to attain the equilibrium of “the primal oneness” (350), as Heidegger puts it.

We, therefore, infer that the clash between modernity and tradition, as represented through this postcolonial setting, a northern Indian village, affects the postcolonial individual so as to drive him towards the native environment, the guava orchard, in order to find a balance. At this point in the analysis, I find it necessary to refer to the concept of globalisation in close relationship with that of glocalisation, both closely related with

the ecocritical. In the novel this can be represented by Coca-Cola's return to India in 1993, because "since then, environmental activists have drawn repeated attention to the extreme draining of water resources by Coke's bottling plants located in rural and semi-urban regions in the country" (Fehskens 2), just like Shakhkot, the setting of Desai's novel.

It is therefore in the context of globalisation and glocalisation that we should place postcolonial ecocriticism, considering its diversity, since:

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard may seem to only develop a narrative around a brief *Times of India* item on a hermit climbing a tree, but it also suggests and illustrates ways in which localized literature set in the Global South operates allegorically as global literature dramatizing the effects of multinational capital on rural and semi-urban spaces. The novel's critique of globalization also reveals a subtle engagement with postcoloniality. (Fehskens 7–8)

From this standpoint, the postcolonial-ecocritical alliance shows the need for a broad understanding of the changing relationship among people, animals and the environment, depending on the different postcolonial contexts. Moreover, "the environmental imagination engages a set of aesthetic preferences for ecocriticism which is especially attentive to those forms of writing that highlight nature and natural elements (landscape, flora and fauna, and so forth) as self-standing agents" (Huggan and Tiffin 13), and that would be directly linked to specific cultural contexts. In the novel we find clear evidence of the damaging effects caused by globalisation, and thus we find Sampath observing how the beauty of the orchard is destroyed by "ugly advertisements" which "defaced the neighbouring trees," or "a smelly garbage heap spilled down the hillside behind the tea stall" that "grew larger every week" (Desai 181). This affects the relationships between the characters in the novel and the local, represented by the orchard, which seems to be in danger, becoming a capitalistic rather than a natural environment, which was identified with the true space of the local.

Therefore, we can also consider that postcolonial and glocal literature, from an ecocritical perspective, could be a means to react against globalisation, proving subtle implications of neocolonialism, as Timothy Clark states: "to many people, modern environmentalism can look like another form of colonialism" (129). It has been considered that

the novel epitomises an “allegory of globalization” which encodes “globalized forces to bear on a localized space, but it also imagines the possibilities of alternative structures of relation taking root—or in the case of this particular novel, taking flight” (Fehskens 7).

Desai’s novel may stand as a representative of the trends and interests of the so-called “globalised (or rather glocalised) generation” of Indian authors who write in English. This group of authors, who make up the last stage in the development of Indian Literature in English, are deeply committed to global issues, with ecology and the environment being leading concerns in the idea of India they portray. We could connect the environmental claim with the aforementioned possibility of considering modern environmentalism as a new form of neocolonialism. In her view of nature, Desai seems to touch what is implied in the concept of “urbanature”: “a complex web of interdependent interrelatedness” that connects “all human and nonhuman lives, as well as all animate and inanimate objects around those lives” (Nichols xiii). We will place Sampath Chawla in his relationship with the environment understood as “an integrated network of human and non-human agents” (Mukherjee 5). The text will then reveal itself as representative of an idea of India placed in the contemporary global, and of the Indian individuals who have become globalised (and glocalised) in a world system of increasing exploitation. The local space represented by the orchard in the novel seems to symbolise the resource crisis undergone by the nations in the global South, undoubtedly caused by western multinationals.

In this framework, Desai seems to restore a more romantic and pastoral relationship with the natural environment, setting up a symbiotic nexus with nature which nurtures in that “simple oneness of the fourfold” that, as Heidegger explains, “should give meaning to our thinking and being” (351). Craving for another world, Sampath finds a more lovable one in which he finds a sense for being which is directly linked to the most ancient Indian roots and mythological world. Sampath finds his dwelling in the guava orchard and there he becomes a hermit at the top of a guava tree. He is respected by the villagers for his austerity and simple life, which radically contrasts with the materialistic outlook of postcolonial Shahkot, where even his new situation is taken advantage of by his father, who makes commercial profit of his son’s popularity. But this will not last, since Earth, Sky, Divinities and Mortals have to be one fourfold, according to Heidegger, and thus the natural balance is broken once the initial purpose of Sampath is distorted. His being is shaken by

the invasion of the world he had left behind, and the natural equilibrium has to be restored. This is when the monkeys appear on scene. The image of the monkey stands as a representation of the sacred Hanumann in the Indian epic *Ramayana*, from which we also find direct influence, but the monkeys, at this point, seem to give evidence of the pollution of the glocal by global capitalism. In fact they can be interpreted, from a negative perspective, as corrupted politicians who play dirty games and finally end up developing an unquenchable interest for drinking alcohol. The place turns into a degraded environment. The essence that made the orchard the suitable dwelling for Sampath to find his true self seems to be lost and put in danger. The orchard starts reminding him of the place he aimed to move out of when he left Shakhkot, and it turns into a noisy, messy and untidy environment. The town life seems to have invaded and distorted the dwelling place where Sampath had found the fourfold.

The very title of the book, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, refers to the local space and the importance this acquires as the plot unfolds in the development of the character. Sampath, as we will see, stands as a personification of nature, shaping his being parallel to the caprices of natural elements. His mother, Mrs Chawla, can be labeled as “mother nature,” since she gives birth to her son in the middle of a severe drought and famine. The natural process goes hand in hand with Kulfi’s pregnancy, as “she grew bigger as it got worse . . . Kulfi . . . was so enormously large, she seemed to be claiming all the earth’s energy for herself, sapping it dry, leaving it withered, shrivelled and yellow” (Desai 3). As ecocriticism claims, nature takes the same role of procreation as women, they are the only ones able to accommodate life and bring all the necessary supplies for that life to become successful even in adverse circumstances. In the novel the moment of the protagonist’s birth arrives at the same time as the revival of nature, when both Mother Kulfi and Mother Nature are ready to be in labour. The monsoon coincides with her breaking of waters:

He kicked harder and harder . . . she felt her muscles contract as a clap of thunder echoed about her. Again, the thunder roared. Kulfi, soaking wet, opened her mouth wide and roared back . . . a mere two hours later, . . . the storm still raging, rain pouring through the windows that would not stay closed and flooding in beneath the doors, Sampath was born. (Desai 8–11)

When both events are in full swing, the boy is born “with a brown birthmark upon one cheek . . . as if he . . . had been discovered in the woods, like something alien and strange” (Desai 11–12). Here we perceive the confluence of that primal oneness that Heidegger explains, consisting of Earth and Sky, Divinities and Mortals. We do not know more about Sampath until he is twenty years old. The physical description Desai portrays draws a characteristic picture of a man “with spider-like legs and arms, thin and worried-looking, lay awake under a fan . . . , making as much noise as a gale” (14). Sampath is quite unhappy in the urban environment which surrounds him and which only causes stress and pollution in exchange. As ecocriticism claims, human beings usually feel dislocated when living in adverse environments. This alienation is personified in Sampath and reflected both in his mood and his attitude towards life: he does everything automatically, not following his inner instincts but the rules that society has imposed on him. He feels like an animal in a cage: “This was summer: the landscape offering up only a few shabby colours, the senses mostly overwhelmed just by dark and light in harsh opposition” (Desai 30). The relationship of “building” and “dwelling,” as explained by Heidegger, is clear here: Sampath does not dwell in an alien-built urban environment, and he cannot connect with his being, which seems to be disrupted, and therefore the result is a disordered and uncomfortable flow of thinking and upset behaviour.

With the change in the season, Sampath’s need for a total connection with nature becomes more evident, repeating to himself, as a mantra, “I want my freedom” (Desai 47). Garrard labels this feeling as “pastoral nostalgia” (37), a process by which every single natural element is idealised as an embodiment of nobility in a natural and green world. It is at this level when interconnections between human beings and nature take place in an attempt to reach a kind of paradise. Although this is a fake image, it is necessary for a release from the city with its crowding and pollution. This escape is what Sampath is looking for during his flight from the corruption and contamination of the city: “the bus thundered along on the road leaving Shahkot, the roar of its dirty engine filling the air”; in his mind there is only room for the thought “of snakes that leave the withered rags of their old skins behind and disappear into grass, . . . of insects that crack pods and clay shells, that struggle from the warm blindness of silk and membrane to be lost in enormous skies” (Desai 48). He has lost the harmonious perspective of the “primal oneness” present at the moment of his birth, he feels trapped and

alienated in a foreign environment, and his only desire is to find a way out, some way of escaping in search of freedom and peace.

The place he is leaving behind is chaotic, he does not dwell, and consequently he does not feel free, because freedom originates from protection against harm and danger, as Heidegger states: “to free actually means preserve and safeguard” (351). Therefore, Sampath engages himself in a desperate search for freedom, a place where he could dwell and feel identified with, and eventually be and exist in peace: “he thought of how he was leaving . . . a world that made its endless revolutions toward nothing. Now it did not matter any more. His heart was caught in a thrall of joy and fear” (48) and the hope of finding a new space where he can develop a congruent life is reflected in two images connected with animals and, at the same time, with nature. There is firstly the image of a snake changing its old, tattered clothes, which symbolises the past Sampath is willing and ready to leave behind. Change is presented in this image as a natural process which every living being is obliged to experience, a type of rite of passage to a new stage in life. Not only is his longing for freedom projected onto the snake’s image, but also onto those of the insects. Both Sampath and the insects are fighting an essential war to reach freedom with fear and hope for what is coming: “racing into the wilderness toward an old orchard visible far up the slope. He ran with a feeling of great urgency. Over bushes, through weeds” (Desai 48, 49).

As we have stated, one of the basic and principal concepts in ecocriticism is that of “wilderness,” understood as the purest representation of nature. Sampath is ready to become a new man, and the location he chooses is an orchard, a natural place isolated from the city where he can hear the birds singing. After fighting with the wild plants, “before him he saw a tree, an ancient tree, silence held between its branches like a prayer. He reached its base and feverishly, without pausing, he began to climb. He clawed his way from branch to branch.” He discovers an ancient tree which represents the best home he could ever have imagined. As he climbs the tree looking for his new life, “he disturbed dead leaves and insect carcasses and all the bits of dried-up debris that collect in a tree. It rained down about him as he clambered all the way to the top” (50); he knocks its previous inhabitants over, provoking a rain in which drops are dead nature components. This rain of the dead element symbolises both Sampath’s struggle for a place in the world of nature and the new life he is willing and ready to start living: “when he settled among the leaves—the very moment he did so—the

burgeoning of spirits that carried him so far away and so high up fell from him like a gust of wind that comes out of nowhere,” surrounded by the wilderness which provides him with peace and contentment (Desai 49–50).

This very place has now acquired a special meaning which turns into a valuable piece of land for Sampath, as “before his eyes, flitting and darting all about him, was a flock of parrots, a vivid jewel-green, chattering and shrieking in the highest spirits. This scene filled his whole mind and he wondered if he could ever get enough of it” (Desai 51). He can now define himself in terms of his relationship with this new environment, as he feels he is in the right place, since he starts feeling connected with everything that surrounds him. He seems to be almost about to find a place where to dwell, since “to dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free . . . each thing in its essence” (Heidegger 351). He starts giving sense to his duty on earth and thus dwelling acquires meaning “in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth” (351), and he feels the duty to preserve the dwelling he inhabits now. He is now in the focal point of Heidegger’s argument, since as a mortal in the orchard he achieves simple oneness of the fourfold, and “mortals are in the fourfold by *dwelling*” (352). He thus feels that he has “to save the earth, receive the sky as sky, await the divinities and ultimately initiate his essential being” (352), because “[in] saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling propriates as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold . . . to preserve means to take under care, to look after the fourfold in its essence” (353). However, his silence and peace will not last long, as “the watchman of the university research forest . . . brought the news that, in the old orchard outside Shahkot, someone had climbed a tree and had not yet come back down” (Desai 52–53).

Because of the halo of mystery and spirituality, and perhaps a more defined identity which the natural environment provides him with, the community raises him as a kind of guru, and as such he “gave what came to be known as *The Sermon in the Guava Tree*” (72), responding to people’s queries with charm and wit and showing unfathomable wisdom. At this point, Sampath is seen as a celebrity: it is fashionable to go to the orchard and spend some time there listening to the brand-new Baba. The atmosphere strikes visitors, and so does the natural surrounding of this bucolic location: “in that moment they too would like to be sitting like this, clean and pure, in such pleasant surroundings without their husbands

and wives and extended families” (Desai 73, 97). They somehow feel represented by Sampath, in an urge to give an answer to a general feeling of dislocation caused by the invasion and disruption of the once peaceful environment of their village. As we have previously stated, the text depicts an idea of India placed in the contemporary global, and of the Indian individuals who have become globalised (and glocalised) in a world system of increasing exploitation integrating “a network of human and non-human agents” (Mukherjee 5) that causes a negative impact on what they think and what they are, eventually losing a clear image of their true identity.

With the invasion of the orchard by the community, the essence of *dwelling* is disrupted. The place is also transformed by the capitalistic urge of Sampath’s father, Mr. Chawla. The balance of the fourfold is shaken. The orchard has changed its original form, even suffering from pollution. However, its taming process will bring negative consequences, for the destruction and corruption of the place will not go unpunished. If we define “pollution” as too much of something in the same place at the same time, almost collapsing the previous established order, this will definitely affect the orchard in the most unexpected ways, destroying the peaceful environment that characterised this sacred place: “the monkeys drew closer, extended their dirty wizened palms and nudged Sampath, at first gingerly, to see how he would react, and then with a great rude push once they decided he was not a threat” (Desai 107). Therefore, the natural balance has been broken and the “[f]undamental character of dwelling” (Heidegger 351) which lies in the preservation of the essential being has been destroyed.

Sampath’s reputation is improved, as not only does he have wisdom, but also unknown powers to control the wildest beasts that people from Shahkot know of: “clearly he has charmed the monkeys . . . the Baba has subdued the beasts” (Desai 107). Those very monkeys, that previously seemed to apparently break the balance of the guava orchard, can also be viewed here as Sampath’s most loyal supporters, since they are also the guardians of nature and, at the same time, of true love, as they want to preserve and defend nature against the aggressions she has to suffer by human hands: “when the monkeys . . . spotted this invasion of their territory, . . . they let out screams of outrage and bounded back into the tree to help Sampath defend their domain” (Desai 108, 117). Here we observe the necessary active connection that should exist between earth and mortals, and it is also implied that the notion of dwelling is linked to

the protective attitude of the monkeys, who seem to be in charge of preserving the real essence of the natural environment, according to Heidegger and contrary to a negative conception, as previously mentioned.

However, what made Sampath fall in love with the orchard were its primary characteristics, which had vanished following his family's establishment there, and the subsequent arrival of tourists and believers attracted by the Baba of Shahkot. The former solitary and noiseless place has become a hot spot of people coming and going every day, and he realises "how much had changed since he had first arrived in the orchard such a short time back," gradually becoming "more and more like all he hoped he had left behind for ever" (Desai 181), veiling his true identity.

Its genuine essence has been lost, and, therefore, Sampath has been driven apart from the identity he seemed to have defined when he first arrived at the place. Consequently, "he would have to escape. But how? He recognized the old feeling of being caught in a trap" (Desai 181–82). His disrupted self aims for freedom and he is ready to fight for it by searching for the true essence of nature and, hence, for true identity.

The orchard has, at this point, become like Shahkot. The sacred place became a kind of huge market with all its natural charm shadowed by overpopulation. Even "the monkeys bounded off into the university forest, tired of the noise people were making" (Desai 131). Being obliged to live in this atmosphere of chaos and stress, Sampath is as light and weak as the lightest element of nature, since his mental weakness makes him vulnerable when living in a community. As everything gets more alarming, Sampath's link with nature gets tighter, especially when "he could not feel the trunk of his body any more, but his senses were not numbed. They grew sharper and he was acutely aware of every tiny sound, every scent and rustle in the night" (Desai 142). His senses turn into those of a natural predator, since he could distinguish "the stirrings of a mouse in the grass, the wings of a faraway bat, the beckoning scent that drew the insects to hover and buzz somewhere beyond the orchard" (Desai 131, 203). As the plot unfolds, Desai seems to claim the importance of preserving nature in its true original state; Sampath, as a personification of nature, feels the aggression experienced by the natural landscape; he seems to lose his ability to maintain clear and coherent thinking and so seems to be deterred from his hope of finding a place where he can dwell in peaceful freedom, since, as Heidegger explains,

authentic preservation involves leaving “something beforehand in its own essence” (351).

Sampath’s attachment to nature reaches its climax at the very end of the story. Under such stress, he ends up turning into a real natural element, a guava fruit, because “[d]welling preserves the fourfold by bringing the essence of the fourfold into things” (Heidegger 353). We find here the urgent need to recover the balance of the primal oneness in a desperate search for a renewed identity. He becomes completely convinced of the need to restore his essential being in order to achieve freedom and peace:

They looked here. They looked there. Up and down the guava tree. In the neighbouring trees. In the bushes. Behind the rocks. They stared up into the branches again and again, into the undisturbed composition of leaves and fruit bobbing up and down. Its painfully empty cot. But wait! Upon the cot lay a guava, a single guava that was much, much bigger than the others: rounder, star-based, weathered. . . It was surrounded by the silver langurs, who stared at it with their intent charcoal faces. On one side was a brown mark, rather like a birthmark . . . ‘Wait,’ shrieked Ammaji. ‘Give me that fruit. Wait! Sampath! Sampath!’ . . . The sound of a tempest filled the air as the monkeys jumped over the wall into the university research forest, the tree tops churning as if a whirlwind were passing through, the monkeys’ path into the mountains traced by a silver trembling through the pines, by a shivering of branches and foliage. The forest birds flew up and scattered in alarm, their cries mingling with the voices down below, the air full of red and blue and black satin, the golden and brass feathers of pheasants and peacocks, woodpeckers and bulbuls. (Desai 207–08)

This beautiful description of the moment when Sampath fuses with nature gives us relief. Sampath has finally managed to find a place to dwell because he has returned to the equilibrium inherent to the fourfold, which he achieves by becoming a guava fruit. Only by staying in things is simple unity achieved. As Heidegger explains, “[t]hings themselves secure the fourfold (Earth and Sky, Mortals and Divinities) only when they themselves as things are let be in their essence” (353). Sampath’s transformation into a guava fruit gathers the actual essence of Heidegger’s argument that “the thing gathers the fourfold” (355), and it is there where he ultimately finds his true self. Maybe implying the triumph of the local and the natural over the global and the capitalistic yearning.

We can conclude by emphasising that Sampath becomes a romantic personification of nature. He is a clear representation of the harmful effects that the aggression to the natural landscape can cause on individuals who find themselves alienated in environments destroyed by the forces that support new forms of neocolonialism. We clearly have seen this in the development of the character as the plot unfolds. He was born with the arrival of the monsoon and became a young unsuccessful man in life. His teenage years can be compared to the cycle of hibernation that some animals and plants experience in their lives. During these years, Sampath tried to find his true self, but the setting in which he moved was not the most suitable one, as explained above, and he was unable to find his way. It is during the awakening period that he decides to move on. We can also establish a comparison between his maturing process and the ripening of a fruit. To acquire their perfect state of development, both Sampath and the fruit need to grow from a tree, a natural element that provides all the necessary elements to become a perfect product, a perfect being with a transformed and a genuine identity, an environmental identity, as it were.

In his search for freedom and peace, Sampath chooses a guava tree in the middle of an orchard, far away from his home place but close enough to suffer from a constant avalanche of people looking forward to seeing the new sacred figure of the region. The resemblance between the orchard and Paradise is obvious, as both are natural places unspoiled by man, with their own order in their characteristic wilderness. He is only able to reach happiness when integrated into nature, but also loneliness. The mass arrival of people in the orchard corrupts this innocent place and Sampath's spirits begin to disappear as the orchard loses its purity. This sacred place is polluted by the human ambition of power and the orchard becomes a crowded place in which Sampath is unable to lead a peaceful life, here representing the effects of globalisation on the postcolonial environment.

The climax of the novel comes with Sampath turning into a guava, the fruit of the tree he has been dwelling in for so long, which reflects the extremely close relationship between Sampath and nature, where he finally resides. He becomes part of the orchard's ecosystem, first as a mortal living at the top of the guava tree, and then as the very fruit of that tree, the thing, thus proving Heidegger's argument that we only achieve *dwelling* when we *are* in the real essence of things. However, his ambition reaches further as he imagines himself living in the wilderness

he sees from his tree. Monkeys, which at first seemed irrelevant from the perspective of Heidegger's argument, play an important role in the story as they take Sampath, now as a guava, "up into the wilderness, up to the shoulder of the highest mountain" (Desai 209), thus fulfilling his ultimate wish: to become a real part of the landscape and to experience nature from the inside in its purest way. That is, he finds, in the real essence of nature, his freedom and his being, and therefore his genuine identity, in Heidegger's words: "primal oneness" (350).

Desai seems to advise readers that we should understand nature as the idyllic and true place to turn to, in an attempt to escape from our hectic daily lives, from pollution and industrialisation. She emphasises, then, a pastoral view of nature. In this escapism, we should realise that we, as active elements in the order of things, have the duty to commune with and within nature, and we should engage in the preservation of the environment as active agents of a new era. Thus, Indian writing in English becomes part of the globalising process as a tool to achieve new models of thought and argument in favour of environmental issues. Indian postcolonial (or rather global) ecocriticism, as a literary approach, plays an important role within this crucial intellectual transformation, as this analysis has proved.

Ecocriticism in Desai's narrative seems to emphasise the romantic view of nature searching for the security of belonging to a place, thus highlighting the importance of the concept of glocalisation. This is actually used by postcolonial writers in general, who aim to reconcile experiences of dislocation: any human being as inhabitant of the global context feels the need to fulfil the desire to belong somewhere. This issue has been developed by many diasporic postcolonial writers and, as we have proven, an ecocritical approach backed up by Heidegger's notion of dwelling provides a new path towards the achievement of renewed forms of identity in the postcolonial, or rather global/glocal, context.

Finally, it could be said that the interpretation of a contemporary literary work through an ecocritical lens helps western readers realise the importance of looking to different cultures, as has been shown, and reaffirms the need to (re)read postcolonial texts in the light of new approaches that will help us recover lost universal values of existence and coexistence in the current world. Therefore, postcolonial and globalised literatures can be now recognised as an intercultural/transnational bridge.

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