

Tribhuvan University

**Eco-Spiritual Imagination in Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and
Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees***

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Declaration

I hereby affirm that the dissertation titled Eco-Spiritual Imagination in Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*, submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, represents my original research. Proper acknowledgments have been made for all ideas and information derived from other sources. The content and findings of this dissertation have not been submitted elsewhere for any academic degree or other purposes, nor has any part of it been previously published in any form. I take full responsibility for the authenticity and accuracy of this declaration.

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Sushil Gautam

April 2025

Letter of Approval

This research work entitled “Eco-Spiritual Imagination in Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino’s *The Baron in the Trees*” submitted to the Central Department of English, in Tribhuvan University by Mr. Sushil Gautam has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research explores the eco-spiritual imagination in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*, focusing on the arboreal sanctuaries of their protagonists as spaces of transformation and transcendence. Both Sampath and Cosimo abandon societal conventions to embrace life among the trees, forging profound connections with the natural world that challenge humanity's alienation from its environment. These narratives interweave ecological awareness with spiritual enlightenment, presenting the tree as both a literal refuge and a metaphorical bridge to higher consciousness. By examining the protagonists' journeys, this study uncovers a critique of materialism and anthropocentrism, while advocating for reimagined relationship with nature. Ultimately, it highlights how literature can serve as a powerful medium for promoting ecological harmony and spiritual renewal in the face of modern environmental crises.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background and Context

The relationship between humans and trees has been a profound and enduring one throughout human history. Trees have served not merely as sources of material sustenance but as sacred anchors connecting the earthly and the divine across diverse cultures. Arboreal imagination, the deep-rooted connection between humanity and trees, has found rich expression in world literature, where tree-climbing and arboreal dwelling often serve as transformative acts that catalyze profound spiritual and ecological awakenings.

Contemporary environmental crises have lent new urgency to understanding these human-tree relationships. As climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss accelerate worldwide, there emerges an imperative to recover ways of relating to the natural world that move beyond mere utilitarian resource management toward what Thomas Berry calls "a renewed intimacy with the natural world" (Berry, *Dream* 82). Literature offers a unique window into such possibilities, particularly narratives where protagonists experience profound eco-spiritual transformations through intimate engagement with trees.

This dissertation examines two significant novels that place trees at the center of their narrative imagination: Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) and Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* (1957). Despite being separated by geographical, cultural, and temporal contexts, one emerging from postcolonial India, the other from post-war Italy, these works share a remarkable preoccupation with protagonists who abandon conventional society to dwell in trees. By examining these narratives through the lens of spiritual ecology and deep ecology, I investigate how

arboreal ascension functions not just as corporeal displacement but as divine transformation that reveals the intrinsic sacredness of the natural ecosphere.

The choice of these novels is intentional. Desai and Calvino, from different cultural backgrounds, both tell stories where the main characters climb trees, not to escape, but to link more profoundly with the planet around them. In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Sampath Chawla climbs a guava tree in an orchard near his small Indian town and is seen as a holy man. In *The Baron in the Trees*, young aristocrat Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò climbs a tree after a dinner argument and vows never to touch the ground again. Both characters go through changes that blur the lines between humans and nature, suggesting new ways of thinking about the environment that connect with modern environmental philosophy.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing scholarly attention to environmental themes in world literature, the specific eco-spiritual dimensions of human-tree relationships remain underexamined. Particularly the transformative potential of arboreal ascension and dwelling as portrayed in contemporary fiction. When scholars address trees in literature, they often treat them as passive symbols or metaphors rather than as active participants in relationships that transform human consciousness and identity. This dissertation addresses this gap by investigating how arboreal imagination in Desai's and Calvino's novels reveal patterns of ecological spirituality that transcend cultural specificity while remaining grounded in distinct cultural traditions.

The problem this research addresses is threefold: first, how do literary representations of tree-climbing and arboreal dwelling reveal eco-spiritual dimensions that challenge conventional human-nature dichotomies? Second, how do these representations differ across cultural contexts, specifically between postcolonial

Indian and European Enlightenment traditions? Third, how might these literary explorations inform contemporary environmental philosophy and contribute to what Joanna Macy calls "the greening of the self" (148), the extension of human identity to embrace the more-than-human sphere?

Research Questions

The following research questions have been designed to guide this investigation:

1. How do Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* represent the eco-spiritual dimensions of arboreal ascension and dwelling, and in what ways do these representations align with the frameworks of spiritual ecology and deep ecology?
2. How do the eco-spiritual patterns revealed in these novels differ across their respective cultural contexts, postcolonial Indian and European Enlightenment traditions, while potentially revealing transcultural commonalities in human-tree relationships?
3. What do these literary explorations suggest about the transformative potential of arboreal imagination for contemporary environmental consciousness, and how might these narratives contribute to what Berry calls "reinventing the human at the species level" (Berry, *Great Work* 159)?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this dissertation are:

1. To analyze the eco-spiritual dimensions of arboreal ascension and dwelling in Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* through close textual analysis of key passages, examining how these

literary representations align with and potentially extend the theoretical frameworks of spiritual ecology and deep ecology.

2. To compare how trees are seen as spiritual beings in both postcolonial Indian and European Enlightenment contexts, looking at both cultural differences and shared ideas. The goal is to explore how these novels show trees not just as symbols or resources, but as beings with whom humans can form deep, transformative connections.
3. To explore the implications of these literary expressions for contemporary environmental philosophy and ethics, particularly regarding what Naess terms "ecological self-realization" (80), and to consider how these narratives might contribute to reimagining human identity in more ecological terms.

Methodology

This dissertation employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to literary analysis, drawing on the methodological frameworks of ecocriticism. The primary method is close textual analysis of selected passages from Desai's and Calvino's novels, focusing specifically on descriptions of arboreal ascension, tree-dwelling, and the protagonists' transformed consciousness while inhabiting arboreal spaces.

The analysis is guided by four interrelated theoretical frameworks: Thomas Berry's spiritual ecology, which emphasizes the "communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects" (*Great Work* 82). Berry acknowledges the role of non-humans is not being the object of humans. Similarly, Joanna Macy's theory of the "greening of the self" (148), which explores how ecological awareness involves the expansion of identity beyond conventional boundaries. Arne Naess's deep ecology, particularly his concept of "ecological Self-realization" (80); which proposes that genuine human fulfillment comes through identification with the more-than-human world.

Additionally, Daniel H. Henning's "concept of *anatta* or non-self which involves an awareness of total interconnectedness with all life in nature" (34). Henning's concept of *anatta* highlights the dissolution of individual ego, fostering a deeper connection with the natural world and all living beings. Embracing this non-self perspective encourages humility and responsibility, recognizing the impact of one's actions on the interconnectedness of life.

The comparative approach examines both similarities and differences in how arboreal spirituality manifests across distinct cultural contexts. This method acknowledges what Lawrence Buell calls the "double perspective" of comparative environmental literary studies (86); recognizing both the planetary dimensions of ecological issues and their cultural specificities.

The selection of Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* as primary texts for this dissertation is justified on several grounds. First, both novels feature protagonists who abandon conventional society to dwell in trees, making them ideal texts for examining arboreal imagination in contemporary fiction. In Desai's novel, Sampath Chawla climbs a guava tree following disillusionment with his mundane post office job and subsequently becomes regarded as a holy man; in Calvino's narrative, young aristocrat Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò climbs up the trees after refusing to eat snails at dinner and vows never to descend again. Both protagonists create new modes of existence entirely within arboreal spaces.

Second, these works emerge from distinctly different cultural and historical contexts, postcolonial India and post-war Italy, allowing for meaningful comparative analysis of how arboreal spirituality manifests across diverse traditions. Desai's novel engages with Indian spiritual traditions that have long recognized the sacred

dimensions of trees, while Calvino's work interrogates European Enlightenment rationality through his protagonist's arboreal rebellion.

Third, despite their cultural differences, both texts share a remarkable preoccupation with the transformative potential of human-tree relationships, suggesting patterns of arboreal spirituality that might transcend cultural specificity. Both Sampath and Cosimo experience profound shifts in consciousness and identity through their arboreal dwellings, shifts that align with contemporary environmental philosophy's emphasis on ecological interdependence. Fourth, both novels have received significant literary recognition but remain underexamined through eco-spiritual lenses, representing fertile ground for original scholarly contribution. While critics have addressed various aspects of these works, their specific explorations of human-tree relationships as sites of spiritual transformation remain inadequately analyzed.

Delimitation of the Study

This dissertation focuses specifically on the eco-spiritual dimensions of arboreal imagination in Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*, examining how tree-climbing and arboreal dwelling function as transformative acts that reveal the inherent sacredness of the natural world. While acknowledging broader environmental themes in these works, this study delimits its scope to the human-tree relationship as a site of spiritual awakening and ecological consciousness.

This analysis looks closely at a few important parts of each novel, rather than trying to cover everything. It focuses on five key moments in each story: when the main character first climbs the tree, when they start living in the trees, how their way

of seeing the world changes while in the trees, how the people around them react, and how their journey in the trees comes to an end.

This dissertation places these literary works in conversation with environmental philosophy, specifically spiritual ecology and deep ecology. It does not attempt to provide comprehensive accounts of these theoretical frameworks beyond their applicability to the literary texts under investigation. Similarly, while acknowledging the historical contexts of both novels, the study focuses primarily on their literary representations of human-tree relationships rather than on broader historical or sociological analysis.

Significance of the Study

This study embraces ample significance for the field of eco-spiritual literary analysis by focusing on Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*. It bids a unique examination of how these novels depict protagonists who retreat into nature to achieve a deeper spiritual and ecological connection. By analyzing Sampath Chawla's transformation into a guava and Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo's ascent into the sky, the study illuminates how these extraordinary transformations are indicative of their broader spiritual journeys. This exploration enriches the discourse on eco-spirituality by demonstrating how literature can enunciate complex ideas about humankind's affiliation with nature.

This study contributes to the growing field of eco-spiritual literature, advocating that the journeys of Sampath and Cosimo offer a compelling vision of how literature can serve as a catalyst for ecological and spiritual reflection. The research aspires to offer a comprehensive exploration of how these literary works converge on a shared eco-spiritual flight, championing a vision of existence that is both ecologically mindful and spiritually deep-seated.

Furthermore, the research magnifies the role of literature in proposing new frameworks for understanding the interplay between the spiritual and the ecological. By revealing the symbolic significance of the protagonists' action and their ultimate transformations, the study highlights the capacity of literary texts to offer profound critiques of modern societal values and environmental attitudes. This study is supposed to deliver the readers a novel vision to inspect how narrative fiction can challenge and expand our perceptions of spiritual and ecological harmony, ultimately enhancing the broader conversation on how literature can influence and reflect contemporary ecological and spiritual concerns.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the significance of trees in literature, yet few studies have specifically addressed the eco-spiritual dimensions of arboreal ascension and dwelling as transformative acts. A review of the five most recent and relevant works reveals significant gaps that this dissertation addresses. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel*, 2010, offers important insights into environmental themes in Indian fiction, including Desai's work. Mukherjee argues that postcolonial Indian fiction reveals "an environmental consciousness that positions humans as integral components of nature rather than its masters" (47). While this study provides valuable context for understanding Desai's ecological sensibility, it does not specifically address the eco-spiritual dimensions of arboreal imagination or engage with spiritual ecology frameworks.

Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* presents a comprehensive cultural history of human relationships with forests in Western thought and literature. Harrison acknowledges that "trees have long served as mediators between human and divine realms" (28) but focuses primarily on forests as

collective entities rather than on individual human-tree relationships. While Harrison briefly discusses Calvino's novel, he does not examine its eco-spiritual dimensions through the lens of contemporary environmental philosophy.

Serenella Iovino's *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, and Liberation* explores environmental themes in Italian literature, including a chapter on Calvino's ecological vision. Iovino argues that Calvino's work reveals "a profound awareness of the interdependence between human and non-human agents" (112) but does not specifically address the spiritual dimensions of arboreal dwelling or compare these patterns with non-Western traditions.

Pramod K. Nayar's *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism* includes a discussion of ecocritical approaches to Indian fiction, suggesting that novels like Desai's present "an eco-spiritual alternative to consumerist modernity" (156). While Nayar acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of ecological themes in Indian literature, his analysis remains brief and does not engage deeply with specific texts or theoretical frameworks of spiritual ecology.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* explores environmental themes in postcolonial literature, including a discussion of how postcolonial writers often reject "anthropocentric worldviews in favor of biocentric perspectives that recognize the inherent value of all living beings" (33). While this work provides important context for understanding Desai's ecological sensibility, it does not specifically address arboreal imagination or compare patterns across Western and non-Western traditions.

These studies, while valuable, reveal several gaps: first, few scholars have specifically examined the eco-spiritual dimensions of human-tree relationships in contemporary fiction. Second, comparative analyses of arboreal imagination across

cultural traditions remain rare. Next, literary scholars have insufficiently engaged with the theoretical frameworks of spiritual ecology and deep ecology in their analyses of tree imagery; and the transformative potential of arboreal ascension and dwelling as literary motifs remains undertheorized. This dissertation addresses these gaps by providing a focused, comparative analysis of arboreal imagination in Desai's and Calvino's novels through the lens of spiritual ecology and deep ecology. The research gaps will be further justified in chapter two with focused reviews on theoretical frameworks and the primary texts.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation is based on four connected theoretical frameworks that help explore the eco-spiritual ideas in the tree-based journeys of the two main characters. Using the approach of comparative literature, it looks at both the similarities and differences in how each novel presents eco-spiritual imagination through its protagonist.

Spiritual Ecology as articulated by Thomas Berry provides a foundation for understanding human-tree relationships as potentially sacred encounters. Berry's concept of the communion of subjects rather than collection of objects challenges conventional Western dichotomies between humans and mother nature. As Berry writes in *The Dream of the Earth*, "The natural world is the maternal source of our being... and the life-giving nourishment of our physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and religious existence" (81). This perspective illuminates how literary protagonists might experience trees not absolutely as background settings but as beings with integral value and agency with whom they enter into relationship.

Berry's idea of "reinhabitation", the recovery of an ecological mode of dwelling that transforms consciousness, offers a context for understanding how

arboreal ascension in literature might represent more than physical displacement. His assertion that "the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects" (*The Great Work* 82) enables analysis of how both Sampath and Cosimo discover spiritual dimensions through intimate engagement with trees.

Joanna Macy's concept of the greening of the self in *World as Lover, World as Self* extends Berry's framework by exploring how ecological awareness involves the expansion of identity beyond conventional boundaries. Macy argues that "the self is a metaphor.... The self is the metaphoric construct of identity and agency, with varying degrees of inclusion.... In its narrowest construction, the self is defined by the boundary of the skin" (183). This perspective provides insight into how arboreal ascension in both novels represents not merely physical displacement but spiritual transformation through ecological identification.

Macy's theory that ecological awareness involves recognizing "the ecological self...that co-arises with our interrelationships with other beings" (154) illuminates how literary protagonists might experience fundamental shifts in identity through arboreal dwelling. Her assertion that, the greening of the self involves dissolving limitations between human and non-human worlds enables analysis of passages where both Sampath and Cosimo begin to perceive themselves as continuous with, rather than separate from, the trees they inhabit.

Arne Naess's Deep Ecology principles, particularly his concept of "Self-realization" with a capital "S" (80), provide a framework for understanding how literary protagonists might experience expanded self-identity through communion with trees. Naess argues that "the ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies" (261), suggesting that authentic identity extends beyond conventional human boundaries to include the more-than-human world. Naess's

principle of biospherical egalitarianism, the recognition that all living beings have inherent value independent of their utility to humans, enables analysis of how both novels portray trees not merely as resources or symbols but as beings with intrinsic worth. His assertion that genuine self-fulfillment comes through identification with the more-than-human world illuminates how both Sampath and Cosimo achieve authentic being precisely through their arboreal transformations.

Daniel H. Henning's framework in *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology* presents ecological awareness as a spiritual and ethical transformation rooted in Buddhist principles. Central to his view are the concepts of *anattā* (non-self) and interconnectedness, which emphasize the interdependence of all beings and the illusion of a fixed, separate self. Henning argues that ecological harm stems from ego-centered thinking and anthropocentrism, and that true environmental responsibility arises through compassionate action (*karuṇā*) and mindful living. Nature, in this context, is not an external resource but a field of spiritual practice where one experiences unity with all life. His synthesis of Buddhism and deep ecology thus allows for the reading of natural engagement, such as tree-dwelling, as both ethical reorientation and spiritual awakening.

Together, these theoretical frameworks help explore how living in and climbing trees in literature shows deep eco-spiritual ideas. They challenge the usual divide between humans and nature. These ideas help us see trees not just as symbols or backgrounds, but as living beings. In the stories, humans form powerful, life-changing connections with trees. These connections show the sacred value of nature and offer new ways to think about human identity and awareness.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction establishes the background, research questions, objectives, methodology, and theoretical foundation. It justifies the selection of primary texts, and identifies the gaps this research addresses with just few reviews.

Chapter 2: Review of literature provides a broader conceptual and historical context for understanding arboreal imagination, tracing traditions of tree reverence across cultures and examining literary precedents for the representation of trees as sites of spiritual transformation.

Chapter 3: Eco-Spiritual Dimensions in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* analyzes how Sampath Chawla's ascension and dwelling in a guava tree constitutes a profound spiritual transformation that reveals the inherent sacredness of the natural realm. It illustrates the divine and spiritual dimensions of the human-tree relationship within a postcolonial Indian context.

Chapter 4: Eco-Spiritual Dimensions in Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* investigates how Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò's arboreal existence represents not merely social rebellion but spiritual transformation through ecological identification. It analyzes arboreal spirituality within a European Enlightenment context.

Chapter 5: Conclusion summarizes key findings, discusses the implications of this research for understanding the transformative potential of arboreal imagination, and suggests directions for future research.

This organization enables a thorough investigation of how arboreal imagination in Desai's and Calvino's novels reveal patterns of ecological spirituality that transcend cultural specificity while remaining grounded in distinct cultural traditions.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Ecocriticism: Theoretical Frameworks

The discipline of ecocriticism has grown remarkably since its formal establishment in the preliminary era of 1990s, generating diverse theoretical approaches that illuminate the complex relationships between literary texts and the natural world. In their groundbreaking anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm introduced ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii), prompting scholars to consider how literary representation shapes environmental consciousness. Lawrence Buell's influential *The Environmental Imagination*, 1995, further developed this foundation by examining how literary texts might cultivate environmental awareness through what he terms "the aesthetics of relinquishment" – a willingness to decenter human perspectives in favor of more ecocentric visions" (143). It means stepping back from human-centered views and giving nature its own voice and importance.

Deep ecology, a concept of Arne Naess, offers particularly fertile ground for examining the arboreal transformations in both novels. In *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, Naess articulates a vision of biospheric egalitarianism, that recognizes the inherent worth of all living beings beyond their usefulness to humans (28). This perspective finds practical extension in Bill Devall and George Sessions' *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, 1985, which proposes that genuine ecological consciousness requires "identification with all life-forms" (67), precisely the transformation both protagonists undergo through their arboreal immersions.

Social ecology, as developed by Murray Bookchin in *The Ecology of Freedom*, 1982, provides complementary insights by highlighting connections

between social hierarchies and environmental degradation. Bookchin argues persuasively that "the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human" (65), suggesting that environmental exploitation reflects broader patterns of social control. This framework illuminates how both protagonists' rejections of conventional social structures enable fundamentally new relationships with their natural environments.

Ecofeminist perspectives enrich our understanding of how both novels challenge conventional nature-culture dichotomies. In *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, 1993, Greta Gaard examines how "the conceptual frameworks that authorize injustice based on gender, race, and species are related to the frameworks that sanction the exploitation of nature" (5). Greta argues that the ideas people use to justify unfair treatment grounded on gender, race, or species are similar to those used to harm nature. These ways of thinking support both social injustice and environmental destruction.

Postcolonial ecocriticism proves essential for contextualizing Desai's novel within its specific cultural setting. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 2010, demonstrates how "environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice and cultural identity in postcolonial contexts" (6). Huggan and Tiffin mean that caring for the environment is closely linked to treating people fairly and respecting their cultures, especially in places affected by colonialism. You can't fully understand or solve environmental problems without also looking at social and cultural issues.

Eco-Spirituality in Literature

Literary representations of eco-spirituality reflect diverse traditions of recognizing sacred dimensions within natural systems. Catherine Albanese's *Nature*

Religion in America, 1990, traces this tradition in American literature, identifying patterns of "natural piety" that perceive divine presence within landscapes (6). More recently, Sarah McFarland Taylor's *Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue* examines contemporary expressions of "environmental spirituality" across various media, including literature that portrays "environmental practice as spiritual discipline" (74). Rachel Wheeler in his work *Ecospirituality, An Introduction* defines eco-spirituality as, "Ecospirituality describes how one relates to the sacred within the context of our natural, global, and even cosmic ecosystems (or homes) of which we all form a part" (12). Wheeler clearly depicts that eco-spirituality seeks to re-establish a sense of reverence and spiritual unity with the Earth.

Different cultural traditions conceptualize nature's sacred dimensions in distinctive ways that inform both novels under examination. John Elder's *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* traces how American writers from Thoreau to Gary Snyder represent "wilderness as sacred text" capable of providing spiritual wisdom (23). In contrast, Pramod Nayar's *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* examines how South Asian writers often portray "a cosmology where boundaries between human, natural, and divine realms remain permeable" (132). Both traditions inform the novels' distinct approaches to arboreal spirituality, with Desai drawing from Hindu concepts of divine immanence in nature while Calvino engages Western traditions of finding philosophical insight through natural contemplation.

Eco-spirituality perspective views literary works as a means to explore the pious bond between humans and the natural environment. Nature is not limited to what we notice on the surface but it is loaded with invisible forces and it is necessary to understand such spiritual value of the nature. Llewellyn Vaughan – Lee in his essay "The Cry of the Earth" asserts, "We need to reacknowledge the existence of the

spiritual world within creation if we are even to begin the real work of bringing the world back into balance” (221). The essence of eco-spirituality perspective is exactly what Llewellyn says reacknowledgement of spiritual quality of the natural world in literature. It means eco-spirituality scrutinizes the inevitability of natural world in the literary works by identifying its divine components.

Human beings exploit nature as per their wishes without paying any attention to non-humans portraying distinct anthropocentric world view. Eco-spirituality strongly rejects the anthropocentric world view of humans by highlighting the interdependency of humans and non-humans. Daniel H. Henning, a pre-eminent eco-spiritual scholar in his well-known book *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology* mentions, “Buddhist teaching recognize that all things are interdependent and conditional upon each other. Every condition follows another and all are part of an orderly sequence of cause and effect” (11). Daniel’s argument shows Buddhism strongly advocates the interconnection of all species and even all non-humans existing in the universe.

Trees specifically occupy privileged positions as spiritual symbols across literary traditions. Robert Harrison's *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* examines Western literature's complex relationship with wooded spaces, arguing that "forests represent nature that stands apart from the human world" while simultaneously serving as "sites where human consciousness undergoes profound transformation" (x). These symbolic dimensions inform both novels' use of trees as spiritual catalysts, though manifesting differently across cultural contexts.

Anthropological perspectives further illuminate the cultural significance of trees that underpins both novels. Laura Rival's edited collection *The Social Life of Trees* examines diverse cultural understandings of trees, revealing how their

"longevity, cyclical regeneration, and vertical reach make them particularly powerful symbols of continuity and transcendence" (1). Similarly, Veronica Strang's *The Meaning of Water* explores how natural elements acquire cultural significance, demonstrating how "physical characteristics of natural entities inform their symbolic meanings across cultures" (91). These insights help to explain why trees function effectively as spiritual symbols in both Indian and Italian contexts despite different cultural traditions.

Eco-spiritualism also shares its deep quality to transcendentalism, a philosophical movement that sought to transcend the physical world and reach deeper spiritual truths through self-reliance, a close relationship with nature, and a rejection of materialism. Referring the prominent transcendentalist Immanuel Kant, Henry E. Allison, in his work *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* argues, "all objects of an experience possible for us are nothing but appearances, i.e. mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself" (22). Transcendentalism emphasizes that objects are more than just material or physical entities. It believes that objects in nature are imbued with a spiritual essence. They are seen as manifestations or symbols of the divine. They are not just physical entities but reflect deeper, spiritual reality.

Kiran Desai and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

Critical scholarship on Kiran Desai has predominantly focused on novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, 2006, with substantially less attention devoted to *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* despite its rich ecological and spiritual themes. Alka Borade in her article "An Ecological Appraisal of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*" analyzes Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* through ecocritical lens

identifying the environmental issues like global warming, wild life conservation, and commercialization just to mention a few of them here. Alka puts, “Desai opens the novel by spotting the issue of global warming. The novel opens with focusing on the heat wave and ferocious summer. It highlights the tough living conditions of the people due to the delayed arrival of the monsoon” (2). Alka tries to explore how Desai depicts the burning environmental issues through her novel.

Another scholar Carmen Escobedo de Tapia in her article “Searching for an Environmental Identity: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* by Kiran Desai” also analyses the novel from same ecocritical perspective as she writes, “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” (176). Carmen is of the opinion that nature is the ultimate sanctuary to explore true self within as Sampath finds nature as the appropriate healer for his all suffocations and a heavenly realm to search his true self identity.

Critic Erin M. Fehskens recognizes the global implication of the novel in her essay “Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* as Global Literature” as she concludes her argument, “Although this small novel ends with a look into a cooking pot in an orchard outside a small town in Northern India, its symbolic scope looks out onto a global horizon” (9). Erin symbolically clarifies that the novel, having its setting in a small area of India, tries to cover the various global issues like natural calamities, economics of multinational capitalism and just to mention few of them here. Erin sees the transformation of Sampath, the protagonist of the novel, into a guava as an escape from one capitalistic community to other alternative community.

One of the other scholars, namely Shyama Sajeev portrays the theme of cultural confusion and struggles in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* in his essay "Chaos and conflicts in Kiran Desai's '*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino's '*The Baron in the Trees*'. Shyama puts, "The novel pictures Sampath's relentless struggle for freedom from worldly customs, hypocrisies, pursuits of wealth and other opportunistic profits" (130). Shyama argues Sampath retreats on the tree abandoning the social constraints as Sampath gets frustrated because of unethical social practices. Shyama further writes, "Sampath exiles himself from humanity and society and lives in a blissful existence along with monkeys on a tree top. Sampath thus enacts a displacement from the town of Shahkot to the guava Orchard" (130). It shows protagonist Sampath escapes off the boundary of the chaotic town to obtain open space of freedom.

Magic realism, that incorporates the magical with the ordinary, rendering supernatural events as natural parts of everyday life. This approach presents things like talking animals, mythical beings, or unusual events happen within ordinary settings and are accepted as part of reality by characters. Analyzing the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* through magic realism lens critic Bipin Bihari Dash in his article "Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* – A Study of Magic Realism" argues, "From magic realism in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* where Sampath Chawla, a dull-witted Youngman turned "Baba" of "unfathomable wisdom" is perched on a guava tree dishing out sagely advice for the ills of his devotees" (42). Bipin Bihari observes the activities of Sampath as magic baba because it becomes hard to find out the real identity of Baba in the novel. Bipin Bihari finds the dual identity, Sampath and Baba has been presented magical way.

Studies specifically addressing *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* have often emphasized its satirical elements while overlooking its ecological dimensions. In her article "Comic Critique in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo*", Melanie Nicholls characterizes the novel as "a satirical examination of spiritual commercialization in contemporary India" (45), highlighting Desai's critique of both traditional religious institutions and modern spiritual seeking. Melanie means that the novel makes fun of how spirituality is often turned into a business in today's India. Desai is showing problems in both old religious systems and new ways people search for spiritual meaning.

Several scholars have noted the novel's environmental aspects, though typically secondary to its social critique. In *Postcolonial Environments* 2010, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee briefly discusses the novel, observing how "Sampath's retreat to the guava tree represents a rejection of developmentalist narratives dominant in contemporary India" (122), though without exploring the spiritual significance of this arboreal habitation. Similarly, Jill Didur's essay "Cultivating Community" mentions the novel as exemplifying "postcolonial pastoral," suggesting that Desai "uses environmental themes to critique both colonial legacies and nationalist developmentalism" (77). Jill argues that Desai uses nature in the novel to question the harmful effects of both colonial rule and modern development in postcolonial India.

A limited number of studies have directly addressed the novel's eco-spiritual dimensions. Marta Dvorak's chapter "The Ethnopoetics of Space" (2013) comes closest to this dissertation's focus, examining how "Sampath's arboreal dwelling enables forms of perception inaccessible within conventional social structures" (92). Dvorak argues that Sampath's conclusion to dwell in a tree allows him to experience and perceive the world in ways that are not possible within traditional societal norms.

His arboreal existence opens up a unique perspective that challenges conventional social structures.

Similarly, Rashmi Varma's *The Postcolonial City and Its Subjects*, 2012, briefly notes how "the guava tree functions as a liminal space between human civilization and wild nature" (118), though primarily interested in the novel's critique of urban development rather than its spiritual themes. These limited explorations suggest the need for more thorough examination of how Desai employs arboreal imagery to explore connections between ecological and spiritual domains.

Italo Calvino and *The Baron in the Trees*

Critical scholarship on Italo Calvino has extensively examined his unique blend of fantasy, philosophy, and social commentary, with significant attention devoted to his "Our Ancestors" trilogy that includes *The Baron in the Trees*. In his comprehensive study *Italo Calvino: A Journey Toward Postmodernism*, 2000, Martin McLaughlin analyzes Calvino's distinctive "rational fantasy," arguing that he employs fantastical elements to explore philosophical questions about human existence (42). Martin McLaughlin explains that Calvino uses imaginative and fantastical stories to think about deep questions about life and being human. These fantastical elements help Calvino explore ideas in a logical and thoughtful way.

More productively for this study, Teresa De Lauretis's article "Calvino and the Amazement of Reading" identifies his abiding interest in "the relationship between human consciousness and material reality" (67), providing a framework for understanding how Cosimo's arboreal existence represents both philosophical stance and physical practice. Teresa De Lauretis highlights how Calvino examines the connection between thoughts and the tangible world, showing how human consciousness shapes and is shaped by material surroundings. Cosimo's life in the

trees symbolizes a blend of philosophical ideals and lived experience, bridging the gap between abstract ideas and practical reality.

Analyses specifically addressing *The Baron in the Trees* have noted its environmental dimensions alongside its political allegory. Franco Ricci's *Painting with Words, Writing with Pictures*, 2001, reads the novel as "an allegory of intellectual freedom in which the trees represent an alternative space outside social constraints" (93), while acknowledging the ecological implications of Cosimo's choice. More directly addressing environmental themes, Lucia Re's essay "Calvino and the Value of Literature" argues that "Cosimo's arboreal existence represents an alternative relationship with nature beyond both exploitation and sentimentality" (154). Lucia Re argues that Cosimo's life in the trees shows a different way of connecting with nature, avoiding both overuse and overly emotional views.

Lucia Toman, identifies the realization of authentic life and sense of creating community as the major theme of the novel in the essay "The only Exemplar of a Species': Community and Authenticity in *The Baron in the Tree*". Lucia mentions, "Separating himself from his community; from an ordinary way of life, Cosimo attempts to rewrite his own human experience, as well as his connection to the rest of humankind, to achieve a more authentic life according to his ideals" (47). Lucia argues that Calvino's protagonist Cosimo abandons his family and embrace the life on the treetop as per his inner wish acknowledging a true authenticity. Though Cosimo continues his life ahead alone but still endeavors to create and maintain a sense of community.

Lucia further says, "Yet he strives to remain part of his community: he offers help and services to townspeople, communicates with friends, relatives as well as famous philosophers, tries to keep Ombrosa safe from pirates, even enjoys love affairs

every so often” (47). Lucia attempts to show the human nature of exploring true sense of life and importance of community through the major character of the novel Cosimo. Highlighting the importance of authenticity in life Lucia writes, “By residing in treetops, Cosimo finds a completely new perspective of his town and its inhabitants, which seems crucial for an intellectual seeking to better understand and improve life in the society” (53). Lucia clearly identifies Cosimo’s act of residing in treetops as a pursuit of true meaning of human life since he was unable to do so being with his family in the town.

Exploring the postmodern concept in *The Baron in the Trees* critic Kerstin Pilz in the essay “Literature as Natural Philosophy: Italo Calvino’s (post)modern Re-evaluation of Cosmogony” writes, “Cosimo de Rondo, the Baron who lives in the trees willfully separates himself from society. His life amongst the treetops, from where he successfully spreads the ideas of Enlightenment philosophers, reflects the decentering of humanity subsequent to the Copernican Revolution, which was followed by the search for a new centre” (193). Analyzing the act of the protagonist Cosimo, Kerstin argues there is not one specific argument for any issue but rather multiple as well as new interpretations are possible. Cosimo reflects the ideas like freedom and autonomy, respect for nature, critique of social conventions, knowledge and curiosity, justice and fairness, self-sufficiency and so on influencing his community to think beyond the boundaries of conventional life.

Jill Margo Carlton attempts to analyze the formation of the novel *The Baron in the Trees* in his article “The Genesis of *Il barone rampante*”. Highlighting the importance of the point of view in story formation Jill asserts, “It takes the notion of point of view literally, it proclaims itself a fiction, it stages storytelling, thereby telling the telling of the story, it “unmakes” metaphor by representing its concrete meaning,

it prolongs and names its own end” (198). Jill states Calvino’s *The Baron in the Trees* shows story within the story without ornamenting the plot with metaphors. Rather the novel reflects the concrete meaning with the creation of separate point of view.

Jill further puts, “Cosimo’s distance from the earth calls attention to the notion of point of view. It is a literal representation of a literary notion. His point of view is separate, above and different from that of the people on the ground” (198). Jill sees Cosimo’s act of climbing trees as the act of separating himself from the people on the ground as Cosimo considers a sort of distance from the earth is necessary to have its clear observation. Jill also comments the conclusion of story as the commencement, as he writes, “The end retells the beginning of the Book. Even as the text dissolves itself, it comes full circle and points to creation” (205). Jill sees the formation of the story in the novel in a circular shape as Biagio, Cosimo’s brother tells story starting from Ombrosa, their hometown and ends again with the commentary of people from Ombrosa after Cosimo ascends into the sky.

Analyzing as a masterpiece novel for picturing nature as a powerful healer of social issues like cultural chaos and conflict Shyama Sajeev in the essay “Cultural Chaos and Conflicts in Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino’s *The Baron in the Trees*” states, “*The Baron in the Trees* is set in the late eighteenth century, the main protagonist Cosimo piovasco di Rondo is fed up of his life in a strict aristocratic and structured environment, thus the young Baron at the age of twelve decides to climb a tree, marking him against his father and family and thereby lives a complete life” (130). Shyama depicts that Cosimo abandons his family as well as entire society because of the suffocating social setting where he is unable to realize inner peace.

Shyama further puts, “Cosimo experiences total freedom from the rigid atmosphere of wealth and status, which no longer appeal to him” (131). As Cosimo retreats in the trees he finds a classic state of freedom which is far better than his society which is full of rigidity, disputes, hatred and cultural disorder. He experiences absolute relief from physical and mental disturbances.

Critic Giulia Pacini in the article “Arboreal and Historical Perspectives from Calvino’s *Il barone rampante*” analyzes the novel *The Baron in the Trees* from ecocritical perspective as she finds the novel a masterpiece work showing the humans and mother nature interconnectedness. Viewing the rank of trees or nature in a broad sense Giulia writes, “Life in the trees opens up new and heightened perspectives for Cosimo, and supposedly allows him to become simultaneously more productive and more respectful of the nature, live forces with which he comes into contact” (61). Giulia clearly depicts that Cosimo realizes a high-spirited life on the branches of the tree. Through Cosimo Giulia dispatches the vitality of nature since nature freshens the human potentiality.

Manifesting how far the novel is successful to prove the significance of trees Giulia further argues, “The novel can therefore be read as a reflection on how best to use, view, handle, and above all relate to trees. From a material point of view, tree equip Cosimo with invaluable support: they offer him food, shelter, tools, and routes for transportation” (61). Giulia’s argument very impressively makes us aware on how far trees can impact in our life. Human life is in the mercy of trees and we never can deny the inevitability of trees in each and every moment as they are the source of our life breath.

The spiritual dimensions of Cosimo's arboreal existence have received limited scholarly attention. Rebecca West's article "Arboreal Phenomenology" (2007) briefly

suggests how "Cosimo's perspective from the trees provides a form of transcendence without supernatural elements" (112), hinting at possibilities for secular spirituality through environmental connection. Similarly, Stefano Tani's *The Doomed Detective*, 1984, identifies "a kind of ecological mysticism" in the novel, noting how "Cosimo achieves a unique form of wisdom through his intimate knowledge of trees" (76), though without developing this insight into sustained analysis. These limited explorations suggest the value of more comprehensive examination of the novel's eco-spiritual dimensions through comparative framework.

Comparative Studies

Comparative studies explore connections between different fields, cultures, or ideas. It is a way to understand similarities and differences. This method helps reveal deeper meanings in literature, history, or art. By comparing, we see how ideas travel across time and space. It shows how cultures influence and reshape each other over time. In literature, comparative studies often focus on themes, characters, or styles shared across texts. This approach creates a broader understanding of human experiences and the universal questions we face. It bridges gaps between diverse perspectives and highlights the richness of global interactions. By doing so, it fosters critical thinking and promotes a more inclusive view of the world.

Susan Bassnett in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* puts, "As soon as European/African/Asian/Latin American literary systems, we enter a labyrinth of corridors, with mirrors that reflect or distort, doors that have never been opened, closed rooms and dead ends" (86). Susan Bassnett argues that studying literary systems from different regions is complex and challenging. Each system reflects unique cultural, historical, and social influences, which can overlap, contradict, or

obscure one another. This process is like navigating a maze, where understanding requires uncovering hidden connections and confronting unexpected barriers.

A brief comparative analysis of Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* shows common objective of exploring eco-spiritual consciousness though they represent different cultural settings. Bassnett further mentions, "The comparatist is drawn into the labyrinth, for it offers an infinite wealth of altered perceptions and innovative connections" (86). Bassnett means that studying literature across cultures opens up endless possibilities for new insights and ideas. The complexity of the process allows comparatists to discover unique perspectives and creative links between texts.

Comparative analyses of Desai and Calvino remain notably absent from existing scholarship, despite significant thematic resonances between their works. The few comparative studies mentioning both authors typically group them within broader surveys without direct comparison. Wendy Faris's *Ordinary Enchantments* includes both authors in her comprehensive study of magical realism, briefly noting how each uses "fantastic elements to interrogate social reality" (189), though without comparing specific works. Similarly, Timothy Weiss's *On the Margins* mentions both authors in his survey of transnational literature, identifying them as writers who "blend local traditions with cosmopolitan perspectives" (143). Timothy Weiss says that both authors mix local cultural elements with a global, broad-minded outlook in their writing.

Comparative studies examining tree symbolism across cultural traditions occasionally reference both novels individually without direct comparison. Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei's article "Phenomenology of Place" briefly discusses both texts as examples of "literary works where characters experience altered consciousness

through environmental immersion" (215), though without developing these observations into sustained comparison. Similarly, Kate Rigby's *Topographies of the Sacred* mentions both novels as exemplifying what she terms "ecological literature" characterized by "recognition of more-than-human agency" (93), though without comparative analysis. Kate Rigby describes both novels as examples of ecological literature that acknowledge the active role of nature and non-human elements.

The absence of direct comparative study of these novels constitutes a significant gap in existing scholarship, particularly given their shared exploration of arboreal ascension as spiritual metaphor. This dissertation addresses this gap by providing the first sustained comparative analysis of how these novels from distinct cultural traditions employ similar tropes to explore connections between ecological immersion and spiritual transformation.

Conclusion of Literature Review

This review of existing scholarship reveals several significant gaps that this dissertation addresses. First, while ecocritical theory has developed sophisticated frameworks for analyzing human-nature relationships in literature, these have rarely been applied specifically to examine arboreal spaces as sites of spiritual transformation. Second, while both Desai and Calvino have received substantial critical attention individually, existing scholarship has not adequately explored the eco-spiritual dimensions of their work, particularly regarding the symbolic significance of climbing trees. Third, the absence of comparative studies examining these novels together represents a missed opportunity to understand how similar tropes function across distinct cultural traditions.

This dissertation contributes original research by synthesizing ecocritical and religious studies approaches to examine how both novels employ arboreal ascension

as pathway to spiritual transformation. By comparing these works from different cultural contexts, this study reveals both universal patterns and culturally specific manifestations of ecological spirituality in contemporary world literature. Moreover, by focusing specifically on the physical act of climbing and subsequent dwelling in trees, this research illuminates how embodied environmental practices facilitate spiritual transformations within literary narratives, offering fresh insights into the intersection of ecology and spirituality in fiction.

Chapter III: Eco-Spiritual Dimensions in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava*

Orchard

This chapter examines the eco-spiritual dimensions that emerge through the protagonist's act of climbing and subsequent dwelling in a guava tree in Kiran Desai's novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Spiritual ecology as articulated by Thomas Berry and Joanna Macy, alongside Arne Naess's deep ecology and Daniel H. Henning's Buddhism and deep ecology are theoretical frameworks of analysis. This analysis investigates how Sampath Chawla's arboreal imagination constitutes not merely an escape from societal pressures but a profound spiritual transformation that reveals the integral sacredness of the natural realm. The postcolonial Indian setting of Desai's narrative provides a distinct cultural backdrop against which these eco-spiritual dimensions unfold. It reveals patterns of ecological spirituality that honor indigenous traditions and respond to contemporary environmental and existential concerns.

The chapter proceeds through several interconnected investigations: first, it establishes the theoretical frameworks of spiritual ecology and deep ecology that inform our analysis. Next, it examines Sampath's initial ascension as a moment of spiritual awakening and explores how his arboreal dwelling constitutes the creation of sacred space. Then, it analyzes the postcolonial dimensions of this arboreal spirituality within the Indian context, comparing these patterns with those found in post-Enlightenment European tradition. Finally, considering the implications of Desai's work for understanding trees as portals to ecological spirituality in contemporary literature. This chapter illustrates the divine and spiritual dimensions of the human-tree relationship, demonstrating how Desai personalizes and humanizes the natural world in ways that reveal profound ecological wisdom.

Desai emerges as a significant novelist of ecological sensibility through her premiere work *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, where she crafts a narrative deeply attuned to the intersections of human society and the natural world. Through Sampath Chawla's transformative experience of ascending and dwelling within a guava tree, Desai depicts nature not purely as background but as an active, sentient presence with which humans can develop profound spiritual connections. Her lyrical descriptions of the orchard environment reveal an author who perceives the natural world with extraordinary sensitivity and recognizes its inherent value beyond human utility. This ecological awareness manifests in how Desai portrays Sampath's gradual metamorphosis into a creature of the forest, suggesting that authentic human fulfillment might be found through deeper integration with, rather than separation from, the more-than-human world.

In the novel, the ordinary world transforms into a realm of extraordinary possibility through the protagonist's mystical communion with a guava tree. Set in the fictional north Indian town of Shahkot, the novel follows Sampath Chawla, a disenchanted post office clerk who abandons conventional society to make his home on the guava tree in a nearby garden. As Deniel H. Henning in his *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology* puts, “*Dhamma* (also known as *Dharma* by many Buddhists) is natural, natural truth, natural law and the teachings of Buddha” (6). What starts as an act of desperation unfolds into a transformative spiritual journey, urging readers to reimagine the connection between humanity and the natural world.

The orchard in Desai's narrative functions not merely as a backdrop but as a vibrant ecosystem pulsing with life and mystery. Through lush, sensory descriptions, Desai transforms this space into a sacred realm where the mundane constraints of daily existence dissolve into something more primordial and authentic. The "myriad

green-skinned globes growing sweet-sour and marvelous upon a hillside (*Hullabaloo* 23)" create an environment where Sampath can experience what environmental philosopher Thomas Berry might call a spontaneous aesthetic response, a visceral recognition of nature's inherent beauty that constitutes a form of spiritual perception.

At the center of this ecological sanctuary stands the guava tree that becomes Sampath's home and catalyst for transformation. Henning writes, "Over 2500 years ago, Buddha born in a forest. As a youth, he meditated under Jambo trees, studied among the Banyans, and found enlightenment beneath a great Boddhi tree" (13). Desai imbues this tree with qualities that transcend its physical presence, describing it as "an ancient tree, silence held between its branches like a prayer" (47). This portrayal draws upon the rich cultural history of trees as sacred entities in Indian spiritual traditions, where they have long been recognized as dwelling places of divine presence and sources of wisdom.

The ecological dimensions of the novel unfold through Sampath's gradual integration into the orchard's ecosystem. As he spends more time among the branches, his identity begins to merge with his surroundings in ways that echo deep ecologist Arne Naess's concept of the ecological self, a prolonged recognition that extends beyond conventional boundaries to include the more-than-human world. Sampath's initial delight in the orchard becomes a romantic entanglement, his sensory immersion in the textures, scents, and tastes of his surroundings blurring the line between observer and observed, human and nature.

The divine dimensions of trees emerge most powerfully through Desai's portrayal of Sampath's transformation from social misfit to perceived holy man. As Desai writes, "He must have gone through a thorough and complete transformation, 'said Jyotsna. 'Look how his face is so different now" (*Hullabaloo* 73). His arboreal

ascension taps into ancient spiritual traditions where trees serve as conduits to transcendent knowledge. In Indian mythology and religious practice, sages have long sought enlightenment beneath sacred trees, from the Buddha's awakening under the Bodhi tree to the Hindu tradition of the sacred banyan as Henning mentions, "Buddha praised forests as the best place for those seeking to practice *Dhamma*" (17). Desai cleverly subverts and reimagines these traditions through her protagonist's unintentional sainthood, suggesting that authentic spirituality might arise not through dogmatic practices but through renewed ecological consciousness.

Through her whimsical yet profound narrative, Desai invites readers to recognize trees not as mere resources or symbolic abstractions but as sentient beings capable of facilitating spiritual awakening. The guava tree becomes a character in its own right; sheltering, nourishing, and ultimately transforming Sampath in ways that reveal the potential for genuine human and nature harmony. In an era of increasing environmental alienation, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* offers a timely reminder of the sacred dimensions of our ecological relationships. It points out the possibility that in listening more attentively to the whispers of trees, we might recover essential wisdom about our place within the web of life.

What distinguishes Desai's ecological sensibility is its culturally specific engagement with Indian spiritual traditions that have long recognized the sacred dimensions of natural environments. Rather than romanticizing nature through a Western ecological lens, Desai grounds her environmental vision within indigenous frameworks where trees have traditionally served as sites of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. The townspeople's ready acceptance that Sampath might be a holy man because of his arboreal dwelling reveals how Desai interweaves ecological concerns with cultural heritage.

This integration allows her to critique both the environmental degradation of contemporary Indian society and the reductive scientific rationalism represented by characters like the District Collector and the Atheist Society. Sampath looks down and listens the visitors down, “Why are there so many opinions about the nature of God?” asked a disguised spy from the Atheist Society (AS) and a member of the Branch to Uncover Fraudulent Holy Men (BUFHM). ‘Some say he has form. Others say he is formless. Why all this controversy?’ (74). Here people show their dissatisfaction on the discussion of the God as they keep their doubtful concern.

Through her nuanced portrayal of Sampath's arboreal spirituality, Desai offers a distinctly postcolonial ecological sensibility that recovers indigenous wisdom traditions while addressing contemporary environmental and existential concerns, positioning her as an important literary voice in global environmental discourse. Henning argues, “*Dukkha* or the First Nobel Truth applies to the natural environment with recognition that nature is suffering as a whole and that serious environmental crises are appearing locally and globally everywhere” (17). It shows that to overcome suffering ‘*Dukkha*’ we need to heal natural environment and this is possible with eco-spiritual wisdom.

As Berry articulates in *The Dream of the Earth*, "The natural world is the maternal source of our being... and the life-giving nourishment of our physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and religious existence" (81). The intrinsic link between human transcendence and the natural realm serves as the basis for interpreting Sampath's arboreal dwelling as a sacred experience, rather than simply an act of social defiance or escapism.

Thomas Berry's spiritual ecology offers a vital lens through which to examine Desai's work. Berry's concept of the "communion of subjects rather than a collection

of objects" (*The Great Work* 82) illuminates how Sampath discovers spiritual dimensions through intimate engagement with the guava tree. Berry's notion resonates with how Desai portrays Sampath's relationship with his arboreal home as one of mutual recognition and exchange rather than utilitarian use.

Joanna Macy's concept of the "greening of the self" in *World as Lover, World as Self* provides insight into how Sampath's arboreal ascension represents not merely physical displacement but spiritual transformation through ecological identification. Macy argues that "the self is a metaphor.... The self is the metaphoric construct of identity and agency, with varying degrees of inclusion.... In its narrowest construction, the self is defined by the boundary of the skin" (183). Sampath's expansion beyond conventional selfhood through his tree-dwelling exemplifies this ecological extension of identity.

Arne Naess's deep ecology principles, particularly his concept of "Self-realization" with a capital "S" (80), provide a framework for understanding how Sampath experiences expanded self-identity through communion with the guava tree. As Naess argues, "The ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies" (261). This identification surpasses the confines of conventional human experience, extending to include the more-than-human realm, as demonstrated by Sampath's transformation. These theoretical frameworks collectively facilitate an exploration of how Desai's protagonist perceives trees not purely as objects but as sentient entities with whom he forms meaningful connections, uncovering spiritual dimensions that confront both the colonial exploitation of nature and modern environmental estrangement.

Desai depicts Sampath Chawla's climb into the guava tree as simultaneously physical and spiritual. The moment of ascension itself carries profound transformative

significance, as illustrated in this pivotal passage: "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" (*Hullabaloo* 44). This text reveals what Berry would identify as a moment of "spontaneous awe at the natural world" (*The Dream of the Earth* 21) a spiritual awakening through direct communion with the arboreal.

The tree is portrayed not as a mere physical entity but as a sacred presence, holding silence like a prayer. This spiritual framing of the tree transforms Sampath's act of climbing from mere physical escape to sacred pilgrimage. His fevered, instinctive climbing suggests what Macy describes as "remembering our place in the living body of Earth" (134) an awakening of dormant ecological knowledge within the human body that transcends rational thought.

The significance of the orchard as a spiritual domain becomes clearer in another passage as Desai writes, "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" (*Hullabaloo* 45). This quote illustrates what Naess terms ecological consciousness, a deep recognition of natural environments as fulfillment of inherent human longing. Sampath's sense that the orchard aligned perfectly with what he had envisioned his entire life, suggests that his connection to this natural space transcends mere aesthetic appreciation or utilitarian assessment.

It represents what Berry calls, primordial relationship with the natural sphere, a form of belonging that precedes social conditioning. The sensory richness of the description, trees that fill the eye and fruit that scent the air, underscores the

multidimensional nature of ecological spirituality that engages the full spectrum of human perception.

As Sampath establishes his dwelling in the guava tree, Desai transforms this arboreal space into a sacred domain where non-humans are also considered as humans dissolving all traditional boundaries. This transformation is evident in Sampath's contemplation of his arboreal home: "He looked at the tree that was such a good home. Its smooth, spacious branches of silvery tan that stretched wide and far-reaching in knotted, twisted curves and delicate bunches of spreading leaves" (*Hullabaloo* 109). This passage reveals what Berry might term "the spontaneous aesthetic response" (*The Sacred Universe* 134) the recognition of inherent beauty and value in the natural world that constitutes a form of spiritual perception.

The detailed, almost reverential description of the tree's smooth, spacious branches and delicate bunches of spreading leaves reflects not merely objective observation but subjective appreciation that blurs the boundary between perceiver and perceived. Sampath's acknowledgment of the tree as such a good home indicates a change from discerning the tree as entity to experiencing it as dwelling place, a transformation of space into place through intimate relationship.

The eco-spiritual dimensions in Desai's work cannot be separated from their postcolonial Indian context. The story unfolds against a backdrop where indigenous spiritual traditions that recognize the sacredness of trees have been marginalized but not eliminated by colonial influence. The townspeople's recognition of Sampath as potentially a holy man because of his tree-dwelling draws on specifically Indian spiritual frameworks where sages have traditionally sought wisdom through communion with the natural world. As Desai puts, "Even buses thundering up the highways en route to farther destinations began making regular detours for their

passengers to view the famous Baba in his treetop hermitage, the sweetness of his smile, the vacant peace of his gaze (92). Through her nuanced portrayal of Sampath's arboreal spirituality, Desai offers a distinctly postcolonial ecological sensibility that recovers indigenous wisdom traditions while addressing contemporary environmental and existential concerns, positioning her as an important literary voice in global environmental discourse.

This postcolonial dimension manifests in tensions between indigenous ecological wisdom and the imported scientific rationalism represented by characters like the District Collector and the Atheist Society. This tension illustrates what Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee describes as "the epistemological clash between materialist modernity and indigenous holism that characterizes postcolonial environmental discourse" (63). When these characters attempt to explain away Sampath's insights and healing influence through reductive materialist frameworks, Desai reveals the limitations of colonial epistemologies when confronted with indigenous ecological knowledge.

The eco-spiritual dimensions of arboreal ascension in Desai's work reveal patterns that both align with and diverge from those found in post-Enlightenment European traditions. While European literary representations of tree-climbing often emphasize individual transcendence or romantic communion with nature, Desai's protagonist experiences arboreal ascension as simultaneously personal transformation and social reconfiguration. As Desai writes, "He must have gone through a thorough and complete transformation, 'said Jyotsna. 'Look how his face is so different now'" (73). The cultural specificity of Desai's arboreal spirituality appears in how readily the townspeople recognize Sampath's tree-dwelling as potentially sacred action.

This immediate recognition draws on specifically Indian spiritual traditions that have long acknowledged withdrawal into nature as a path to wisdom. This contrasts with European traditions more often focused on exploitative, aesthetic, or scientific relationships with trees, reflecting what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin identify as "the divergent trajectories of Western and non-Western ecological thought" (28). Desai's representation of the guava tree as subject rather than object, as being with its own spiritual significance rather than merely symbolic resource, exemplifies the core principles of both Berry's communion of subjects and Naess's biocentric equality. The arboreal realm in Desai's work functions as what Macy terms a gateway, a point of access to expanded ecological consciousness and spiritual renewal.

Desai's novel embodies Thomas Berry's concept of a unity of beings rather than a mere assembly of objects, through Sampath's experience of the tree and orchard as living, communicative presences. This portrayal aligns with Berry's vision of nature as a community of interconnected, conscious beings rather than passive resources. Joanna Macy's theory of the greening of the self, the expansion of identity beyond conventional boundaries, manifests in Sampath's transformation in the tree, where he experiences himself as part of the arboreal ecosystem rather than separate from it. Arne Naess's principle of ecological Self-realization, emerges through Sampath's profound sense of belonging in the tree, illustrating Naess's belief that genuine self-fulfillment comes through identification with the more-than-human world.

The transformative potential of arboreal encounters in Desai's narrative suggests that literature itself serves as a form of what Berry calls reinventing the human, the cultural work of reimagining human identity in ecological rather than

merely social terms. Through her protagonist's arboreal ascension and dwelling, Desai invites readers to consider how their own relationship with trees might constitute not merely practical engagement but spiritual encounter with the more-than-human world.

This invitation is particularly significant within the postcolonial Indian context, where indigenous traditions of nature-reverence offer alternative pathways to ecological wisdom that may help address contemporary environmental crises. By interweaving these traditions with her protagonist's personal transformation, Desai creates a narrative that both honors cultural specificity and speaks to universal human yearnings for a profound bond with nature.

The analysis of arboreal imagination in Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* reveals profound eco-spiritual dimensions that transcend conventional human-nature relationships. Through Sampath Chawla's journey from societal alienation to ecological communion, Desai crafts a narrative that embodies key principles from spiritual ecology and deep ecology while remaining firmly grounded in postcolonial Indian cultural frameworks.

Sampath's evolution through his connection with the guava tree reflects Thomas Berry's concept of nature as a union of subjects rather than a gathering of objects. The tree emerges not as inactive milieu but as active participant in Sampath's spiritual journey, communicating through breeze and branch, offering both sanctuary and revelatory experience. This portrayal aligns with Berry's insistence that genuine ecological wisdom emerges through recognition of the natural world's inherent subjectivity and agency. When Sampath perceives the breeze as sharing his own concerns and soothing him, he experiences what Berry describes as the recovery of our primordial conversation with the world considered as alien to humans, a discourse essential for environmental and spiritual renewal.

The novel powerfully illustrates Joanna Macy's concept of the "greening of the self" through Sampath's gradual dissolution of conventional identity boundaries. His sensory immersion in the orchard, stringing necklaces of seed pods, sipping nectar, painting with sap, represents ecological identification that transforms consciousness. As Macy argues, "The self is a metaphoric construct of identity and agency, with varying degrees of inclusion (62)" and Sampath's experience demonstrates how this construct can expand to include the ecological community. His description of time in the orchard as a love affair, where he bloomed and blossomed, reflects precisely the expanded sense of selfhood that Macy identifies as necessary for environmental healing.

Arne Naess's principle of "ecological Self-realization" finds vivid expression in Sampath's profound sense of belonging in the tree feeling "as if he had been born to live in one." This illustrates Naess's assertion that genuine fulfillment comes through identification with the more-than-human world rather than through individualistic achievement or material accumulation. Depicting the realization of heavenly peace Desai mentions, "Yes, he was in the right place at last. Tiredness rolled over him like a wave and, closing his eyes, he fell into a deep slumber, lodged in a fork in the guava tree" (51). Sampath's unbearable ecstasy when in communion with the natural world exemplifies what Naess terms biocentric equality, the recognition that all alive existences have inherent worth and share fundamental patterns of experience.

Desai's portrayal of Sampath in the guava tree during his final night in the orchard represents perhaps the most profound expression of eco-spiritual consciousness in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. This passage beautifully illustrates what Thomas Berry terms "the universe as a communion of subjects" (*The*

Great Work 82) through Sampath's complete immersion in the sensory experience of the night:

But Sampath sat in the guava tree, encased in absolute stillness like a fossil captured within a quiet moment of amber... He had watched as the last of the sun disappeared the evening before, as the hills turned soft and blue like woodsmoke and as the bushes, gathering shadow since late afternoon, merged with the darkening air. (150-151)

The comparison of Sampath to a fossil captured within a quiet moment of amber, suggests not merely physical stillness but temporal transcendence, a merging with the vast evolutionary history of the natural world. This image aligns with Joanna Macy's concept of "deep time", ecological consciousness that extends beyond individual human lifespan to identify with evolutionary processes (187). Sampath has transcended the conventional human timeframe to enter what Berry calls "geologic consciousness" (*The Dream of the Earth* 195), awareness that places human experience within Earth's deeper rhythms.

The passage demonstrates what Arne Naess identifies as the "ecological self" through Sampath's heightened sensory awareness of the environment around him. As Naess argues, "The ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies" (261), and here we see Sampath identifying completely with the unfolding processes of the night as Desai writes, "He had felt the breeze against his cheek, heard the sound of the crickets start up, the first frog's awkward inquiry into the evening, its rising, ginger croak growing stronger with the night that leaked from the soil and ran from the dark shapes about him (151)." The animistic quality of this description, the frog making an "awkward inquiry" and night "leaking from the soil", reveals what

anthropologist Tim Ingold calls "the animacy of the lived world" (95), the recognition that nonhuman entities possess agency and subjectivity.

Sampath's perception of these qualities illustrates Macy's "ecological consciousness" where "the world is experienced as a communicative presence" (102). Desai's detailed sensory imagery evokes what phenomenologist David Abram terms "participation", the reciprocal relationship between perceiver and perceived in ecological experience (57). Sampath doesn't merely observe the night; he participates in its unfolding:

It had seeped from the black bellies of the underground tubers, from the hidden pods of seeds and flowers, from the inky beetles and the hollow-hearted bamboo. He saw the white petals of the night flowers unfold, a speckling of bright stars appears above him; smelled the jasmine his mother had planted and the poisonous datura, watched the wan moths ford the blackness to hover lovelorn over a tobacco flower. (151)

This richly textured description of ecological processes from underground tubers to night-blooming flowers to moths attracted to tobacco blossoms demonstrates what ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer calls "the grammar of animacy" (48), language that acknowledges the agency and sentience of nonhuman beings. The moths described as "lovelorn" exemplifies this attribution of emotional states to nonhuman entities, reflecting a mode of perception that recognizes kinship across species boundaries.

The above-mentioned excerpt by Desai that appears near the novel's conclusion, represents Sampath's most complete expression of what ecophilosopher David Rothenberg calls "wild thinking" thought that emerges through direct engagement with more-than-human nature rather than abstract conceptualization (43). Through Sampath's meditative immersion in the night ecology, Desai offers readers a

glimpse of ecological consciousness as spiritual practice—attention to the world that dissolves conventional boundaries between self and other, human and nonhuman, perceiver and perceived.

The tension between materialistic development and environmental preservation forms another critical dimension of Desai's narrative. As Shahkot's residents commodify Sampath's spiritual presence, transforming the orchard into a commercial attraction, the novel offers what Rajender Singh characterizes as "a pointed critique of modernization that sacrifices ecological integrity for economic gain" (78). Sampath's father Mr. Chawla gains financial growth alarming way as he expands his shop near the tree as Desai mentions, "these items he sold at a large profit, and then, in another lucky financial twist" (93). This commercialization threatens both the physical ecosystem of the orchard and the authentic spiritual connection Sampath has cultivated with his natural surroundings.

The analysis of arboreal imagination in Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* reveals eco-spiritual dimensions that align with the frameworks of spiritual ecology and deep ecology while reflecting distinctly Indian cultural contexts. Through the physical and metaphorical act of climbing a guava tree, Sampath experiences what Berry calls reinhabitation, the recovery of an ecological spirituality that heals the human-nature relationship. Sampath realizes the close bonding between human and nature that we all are interconnected as Henning argues, "Human beings, like other beings, belong to *Dhamma* or nature and are subject to its laws" (63). It is perfect that we comprehend to support each other as we all are the friendly travelers making the same journey following the same path.

This spiritual healing occurs when Mr. Chawla and all others search Sampath who has just had divine metamorphosis as Desai writes: "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, Wait, 'shrieked Ammaji. 'Give me the fruit. Wait! Sampath! Sampath!'" (208). Desai's representation of the guava tree as subject rather than object, as being with its own spiritual significance rather than merely symbolic resource, exemplifies the core principles of both Berry's communion of subjects and Naess's biocentric equality. The arboreal realm in Desai's work functions as what Macy terms a gateway, a point of access to expanded ecological consciousness and spiritual renewal.

The distinctly postcolonial dimensions of Desai's ecological vision offer important contributions to global environmental discourse. By grounding her narrative in specifically Indian spiritual traditions that have long recognized trees as sacred beings, Desai presents an alternative to Western environmental frameworks that often separate spirituality from ecological concerns. The townspeople's readiness to see Sampath as potentially a holy man because of his arboreal dwelling reflects cultural traditions where withdrawal into nature constitutes a recognized path to wisdom rather than mere escapism. This indigenous ecological wisdom provides a counterpoint to the reductive scientific rationalism represented by characters like the District Collector, suggesting that postcolonial literary perspectives might offer crucial resources for addressing contemporary environmental crises.

Desai's novel ultimately invites readers to reconsider their own relationship with trees, not merely as resources, aesthetic objects, or symbolic entities, but as potential portals to expanded ecological consciousness and spiritual renewal. Through Sampath's arboreal transformation, we glimpse possibilities for what Berry calls reinventing the human, reimagining human identity in ecological rather than merely social terms. This cultural work takes on particular urgency in our current moment of

environmental crisis, where dominant models of human-nature relationship have proven inadequate to the challenges we face.

Desai's novel, thus, embodies Thomas Berry's concept of intimacy of subjects rather than assemblage of objects, when Sampath experiences the guava tree as a sentient being that communicates with him: "The guavas were speaking to him. The branches were sharing their gossip. The leaves were whispering... he could hear everything" (78-79). This portrayal aligns with Berry's vision of nature as a community of interconnected, conscious beings rather than passive resources.

Joanna Macy's theory of the greening of the self, the expansion of identity beyond conventional boundaries, manifests when Sampath undergoes transformation in the tree: "He felt himself growing light and pale, just like the leaves that encircled him... metamorphosing into a creature of the forest" (57). This passage demonstrates Macy's core concept that ecological awakening involves dissolving the boundaries between self and nature.

Arne Naess's principle of ecological Self-realization, emerges through Sampath's profound sense of belonging in the tree: "As days went by, he found himself amazed at how comfortable he was in the tree—as if he had been born to live in one" (62). This illustrates Naess's belief that genuine self-fulfillment comes through identification with the more-than-human world. Further evidence appears when Sampath's consciousness expands to perceive "gossip of the entire town traveling through the roots and rising like sap into his ears" (79), exemplifying Naess's concept of the ecological self which extends beyond individual human boundaries to comprise the wider natural world.

The transformative potential of arboreal encounters in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* suggests that literature itself might serve as a form of ecological

practice creating imaginative spaces where readers can experience, at least vicariously, the dissolution of conventional boundaries between self and world that characterizes authentic ecological consciousness. By interweaving indigenous wisdom traditions with her protagonist's personal transformation, Desai creates a narrative that both honors cultural specificity and speaks to universal human yearnings for deeper connection with the natural world. Her guava tree stands as an invitation to recognize the sacred dimensions of our ecological relationships and the possibility that in listening more attentively to the whispers of trees, we might recover essential wisdom about our place within the web of life.

Chapter IV: Eco-Spiritual Dimensions in Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*

This chapter explores the eco-spiritual dimensions of *The Baron in the Trees* through the protagonist's ascent into the treetops and his transformative existence there. Drawing on Thomas Berry and Joanna Macy's spiritual ecology alongside Arne Naess's deep ecology and Daniel H. Henning's Buddhism and Deep Ecology. This analysis examines how Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò's arboreal life transcends mere rebellion, becoming a profound spiritual reorientation that reveals nature's inherent sacredness. Set against the European Enlightenment, Calvino's novel provides a cultural lens through which these eco-spiritual themes emerge, simultaneously critiquing Enlightenment rationalism and addressing the environmental and existential anxieties of post-war Italy.

This chapter unfolds through several interwoven explorations: first it establishes the theoretical foundations of spiritual ecology and deep ecology that shape the analysis. Then it interprets Cosimo's ascent as a moment of spiritual awakening by examining his treetop existence as the creation of sacred space. Next, this study situates arboreal spirituality within the context of the European Enlightenment and compares these patterns with postcolonial traditions. It also examines how Calvino's work portrays trees as gateways to ecological spirituality in contemporary literature. This chapter highlights the divine and spiritual dimensions of the human-tree relationship, illustrating how Calvino infuses nature with personal and human qualities to reveal profound ecological wisdom.

Calvino stands out as a novelist with a deep ecological sensibility in *The Baron in the Trees*, where he weaves a narrative that profoundly explores the beautiful connection between natural world and humans. Through Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò's transformative journey of climbing and living in the trees, Calvino depicts

nature not simply as a passive backdrop but as a vibrant, sentient force with which humans can form meaningful spiritual bonds. Daniel H. Henning writes, “Buddhism offers a spiritual solution, a life of harmony with nature” (12). Henning suggests that Buddhism provides a spiritual approach to living in balance with nature. Calvino’s portrayal of tree-dwelling in *The Baron in the Trees* reflects a life of harmony with nature, aligning with Henning’s idea of a divine linking between majestic mother nature and humans.

Calvino’s poetic portrayals of the arboreal landscape, the intricate web of branches, the ever-changing seasons captured in the foliage, and the trees’ ability to nurture both physical and spiritual life, reveal an author attuned to the eminent mother nature in a way that recognizes its intrinsic worth beyond human use. This ecological awareness is reflected in Cosimo's evolution into a being that occupies a space between humanity and nature, suggesting that true human fulfillment may lie in a deeper connection to, rather than a separation from, the non-human world. Henning puts, “Buddhism offers a direct path to harmony with nature” (13). Cosimo’s life in the trees shows his deep connection to the natural world. His choice to live among the branches reflects a path of harmony and balance, echoing Henning’s idea of a direct relationship with nature.

In the lush literary landscape of post-war Italian fiction, Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* stands as a towering achievement that transcends conventional narrative boundaries. This remarkable novel presents the extraordinary tale of Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò, a young nobleman who, following a dispute over dinner, climbs into the trees of his family estate and promises never to place foot on the earth again. What begins as an act of childish rebellion transforms into a lifelong philosophical

commitment, as Cosimo creates an entire existence amid the branches and canopies of Liguria's arboreal world.

Beyond its surface charms as a whimsical adventure, Calvino's novel ventures deep into the realm of what we might now call arboreal imagination, a way of perceiving and interacting with the world that is fundamentally shaped by trees and their unique modes of being. As Calvino writes, "From the highest tree Cosimo, in his yearning to enjoy to the utmost the unusual greens of this exotic flora and its different lights and different silence, would let his head drop upside down, so that the garden became a forest, a forest not of this earth but a new world in itself" (*The Baron* 41). These lines reveal that through Cosimo's gradual transformation from human observer to something approaching arboreal participant, Calvino anticipates contemporary discussions about plant consciousness, ecological thinking, and the spiritual dimensions of human-plant relationships that have only recently gained scientific and philosophical legitimacy.

As Cosimo adapts to life among the trees, he undergoes a profound ontological shift that modern plant philosophers like Michael Marder might recognize as an awakening to the plant-thinking, that exists beyond human cognitive frameworks (10). The protagonist's body and mind gradually attune to the rhythms, temporalities, and spatial orientations of the forest. His nervous system becomes increasingly sensitive to subtle changes in light, moisture, and seasonal cycles. His perception of time slows and expands to accommodate the gradual unfolding of botanical life.

In essence, Cosimo begins to experience what botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer calls "the grammar of animacy", a way of perceiving the nature not as an assembly of inanimate substances but as a community of sentient beings with their own forms of

intelligence and agency (49). The divine element in Calvino's arboreal world emerges not through explicit religious imagery but through the protagonist's growing awareness. As Cosimo grows older, his distinction from the surrounding forest becomes increasingly blurred. He develops an almost mystical connection to the trees that support him, perceiving their hidden processes and participating in their communal existence.

Throughout the novel, Cosimo's arboreal existence serves as both literal narrative and powerful metaphor for an alternative way of being human, one that stands above conventional society while remaining deeply embedded in natural processes. His perspective shift, both physical and metaphysical, allows him to perceive the sacred dimensions of the natural world that remain invisible to those who keep their feet firmly planted on the ground of anthropocentric civilization. As Henning argues, "Buddhist teachings give rise to an environmental ethic with a concern for nature of which man is a part" (13). Cosimo's arboreal existence demonstrates an environmental ethic by living as part of nature rather than apart from it, aligning with Henning's view of humanity's interconnectedness with the natural world.

What distinguishes Calvino's ecological sensibility is its critical engagement with European Enlightenment traditions that have often privileged reason over nature, yet his work does not simply reject rationality but seeks to reconcile it with ecological awareness. Rather than romanticizing nature through a pastoral lens, Calvino grounds his environmental vision within the specific historical context of eighteenth-century Italy, where Enlightenment values began to transform traditional relationships with the natural world. The community's mixed responses to Cosimo's arboreal existence,

from ridicule to fascination to eventual respect, reveal how Calvino interweaves ecological concerns with cultural critique.

This integration allows him to question both the environmental consequences of Enlightenment rationalism and the potential limitations of pre-modern relationships with nature. Through his nuanced portrayal of Cosimo's arboreal spirituality, Calvino offers a distinctly European ecological sensibility that acknowledges the complexity of human-nature relationships. At the same time, it addresses contemporary environmental and existential concerns, positioning him as an important literary voice in global environmental discourse.

In the novel, the young aristocrat Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò climbs into a tree following a dispute over a meal of snails and vows never to descend to earth again. Through this seemingly whimsical premise, Calvino crafts a nuanced exploration of the complex association between the environment and humans, weaving together themes of ecological awareness and spiritual connection that resonate with contemporary environmental discourse. As Cosimo creates an entire life among the branches, the novel invites readers to reconsider conventional boundaries between human society and nature, suggesting that authentic spiritual fulfillment may be found through ecological communion rather than adherence to social expectations.

The ecological dimensions of Calvino's work emerge at a time when post-war Italian literature increasingly engaged with environmental concerns amid rapid industrialization. As David Damrosch observes, Calvino's fiction often reveals "an environmental consciousness that positions humans as participants in rather than masters of the natural world," reflecting both ancient philosophical traditions and emerging ecological awareness in mid-twentieth century Europe (73). This ecological sensibility in *The Baron in the Trees* manifests through Calvino's intricate

descriptions of the arboreal ecosystem and his protagonist's growing attunement to non-human rhythms and awareness.

Cosimo's transformation in the trees represents what Robert Harrison describes as "a rejection of anthropocentric worldviews in favor of biocentric perspectives that recognize the inherent value of all living beings" (52). As he abandons conventional aristocratic life to immerse himself in the arboreal ecosystem, Cosimo embodies what might be termed an eco-spiritual awakening. JoAnn Cannon argues that Calvino's portrayal of this transformation draws from "both Enlightenment rationality and a deeper ecological wisdom that perceives the natural world as possessing inherent value beyond human utility" (87). Indeed, the novel's contemplative passages depicting Cosimo's growing awareness of the forest's intricate web of life suggest that spiritual enlightenment emerges precisely through this ecological attunement.

The tension between human civilization and environmental integration forms another critical dimension of Calvino's narrative. As Cosimo develops new ways of dwelling in the trees while maintaining human relationships and intellectual pursuits, the novel offers what Constance Markey characterizes as "a nuanced exploration of how humanity might maintain its distinctive qualities while entering into more harmonious relationship with the natural world" (105). This creative integration suggests possibilities for cultural evolution that honors both human achievements and ecological integrity.

The Baron in the Trees ultimately presents what Gian-Paolo Biasin calls "an eco-spiritual alternative to both pre-modern superstition and Enlightenment hyper-rationality" through its portrayal of Cosimo's communion with the natural world (211). When Cosimo ultimately disappears at the end of his life, carried away by a

balloon into the vast sky, Calvino suggests that complete liberation may require a radical re-integration with the mother nature. This ending contests reader to reconsider conventional notions of progress and fulfillment, proposing instead an ecological vision where spiritual fulfillment and environmental harmony become inseparable pursuits. Calvino pictures the ultimate salvation as:

It was presumed that the dying old man had disappeared while the balloon was flying over the bay. So vanished Cosimo, without giving us even the satisfaction of seeing him return to earth a corpse. On the family tomb there is a plaque in commemoration of him, with the inscription: "Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò—Lived in trees—Always loved earth—Went into sky. (182)

This excerpt highlights the spiritual dimension of the journey, infusing Cosimo's otherwise earthly existence with an aura of transcendence and enigmatic wonder. This linguistic gesture toward the divine reflects what Berry terms "the numinous dimension of the evolutionary journey," suggesting that ecological consciousness connects with spiritual seeking through recognition of mystery and potentiality (*The Sacred Universe* 56).

Calvino's novel presents a profound illustration of what Naess terms ecological Self-realization, through Cosimo's gradual integration with the arboreal world. In one of the most striking passages, Calvino writes: "He seemed to have become part of the bark, of the leaves, of the wood; he saw every pine cone open, every feather mount from a bird's breast, every fig ripens on the branch" (56). This description reveals not merely physical adaptation but ontological transformation that Cosimo is not simply dwelling among trees but becoming-with-trees in a way that fundamentally alters his perception and identity.

This arboreal becoming aligns perfectly with Macy's concept of the greening of the self, which she describes as "the process of coming to experience our identity as interwoven with the wider natural world" (54). Cosimo's capacity to perceive intimate details of arboreal life, pine cones opening, birds molting, figs ripening, demonstrates a sensory attunement that transcends conventional human perception.

As Cosimo grows old and feeble his brother Biagio feels deeply emotional and says, "I went up the ladder myself. "Cosimo," I began, "you're past sixty-five now.... It's meant a great effort of will on your part, but you've done it, and now you can come down. For those who have spent all their lives on the sea, too, there comes a time for landing. "No use. He made a sign of disagreement with one hand" (180). Calvino reveals that Cosimo's attunement is not merely aesthetic but deeply spiritual, representing what Berry describes as "a communion with the natural world that awakens us to the divine dimensions of all life" (*The Dream of the Earth* 105). Cosimo's existence among the branches illustrates a communion with nature that reveals the sacred interconnectedness of all life, reflecting Berry's idea of awakening to the divine dimensions of existence.

The spiritual dimension of Cosimo's arboreal life is further illuminated by his reflection that, "From up there the earth seemed a different thing. It was revelation" (32). This simple yet profound statement captures what Berry terms "revelatory encounter with the numinous presence manifest in the natural world" (*The Sacred Universe* 73). The elevation provided by arboreal dwelling does not merely offer a different physical perspective but constitutes a spiritual revelation, a fundamentally altered relationship with existence itself.

This revelatory quality aligns with what Naess identifies as the spiritual dimension of deep ecology, "The religious component of the deep ecology movement

is an experiential awareness of the unity of all life, a shared sense of identification with all life forms" (Naess 29). Cosimo's recognition that the earth appears "a different thing" from arboreal perspective represents precisely this spiritual awakening to unity and interconnection.

Calvino's portrayal of Cosimo's deepening relationship with the forest ecosystem transcends physical adaptation to reveal spiritual dimensions of ecological interconnection. This is powerfully illustrated when Calvino describes how "...he felt himself immersed in that fountain of life that was the forest, felt the lymph running under the bark, the grains ripening in the spikelets, the eggs growing in the nests" (105). This passage reveals what Macy terms interbeing, the experiential recognition of interconnection that dissolves conventional boundaries between self and world.

The spiritual dimensions of this interconnection are evident in Cosimo's capacity to perceive processes normally hidden from human awareness, the flow of sap beneath bark, the development of seeds, the growth of embryos within eggs. This heightened perception represents what Berry describes as "communion with the comprehensive community of living beings" (*The Great Work* 105). Cosimo is not merely observing the forest but participating in its life processes through expanded consciousness.

This interconnection manifests what Naess terms, ecological consciousness, which he describes as "a form of consciousness when the self is identified with all life forms" (174). Cosimo's perception of himself as immersed in that fountain of life, represents precisely this identification, not merely intellectual recognition of ecological relationships but visceral participation in the life energy that rouses the entire forest ecosystem.

The spiritual significance of this immersion is further illuminated by Macy's concept of mutual belonging, which she describes as "the experience of being claimed by a universe that needs our participation" (Macy 163). Cosimo's experience of forest immersion represents this mutual belonging, a recognition that human fulfillment emerges not through separation from nature but through conscious participation in its processes.

Calvino's novel presents arboreal dwelling not purely as corporal habitat but as holy practice that generates distinctive ecological wisdom. This is evident when the author writes: "Only by living in the midst of nature, only by experiencing its cycles and secrets day by day, could man understand the world and himself" (121). This passage reveals what Berry terms, biocracy, the recognition that authentic wisdom emerges through sustained engagement with natural systems rather than abstraction from them.

The repetition of "only by" emphasizes the irreplaceability of direct experience, suggesting that ecological wisdom cannot be derived from abstract study or occasional contact but requires committed dwelling within natural systems. This aligns with Naess's principle that "ecological wisdom requires the mature experience of oneness with nature" (142). Cosimo's arboreal life represents precisely this "mature experience" not a temporary retreat or philosophical position but lifelong commitment to ecological relationship. Cosimo's act resembles as Henning argues, "Much of the *Dhamma* teachings of Buddhism dwells on what we recognize as environmental values" (17). Cosimo's choice to live in the trees reflects environmental values by embodying respect for and harmony with nature, aligning with Henning's interpretation of Buddhist teachings.

The spiritual dimension of this experiential wisdom is evident as Cosimo comprehends the world and himself, which suggests that ecological engagement generates not merely practical knowledge but existential insight. This aligns with Macy's concept of deep time, the expanded temporal awareness that emerges through attunement to natural cycles and generates "a sense of connection with both past and future generations of life" (187). Cosimo's life in the trees reflects an attunement to natural cycles, as he becomes deeply connected to the rhythms of the environment around him. His actions embody a wisdom of accountability and connection between past and forthcoming generations, aligning with Macy's concept of deep time.

The integration of self-knowledge, understanding oneself, with world-knowledge, understanding the external world, reflects what Berry terms reinhabitation, which he defines as "learning to live in a place in a manner that allows for the flourishing of both human and non-human communities" (*The Dream of the Earth* 94). Cosimo's arboreal dwelling exemplifies this reinhabitation, generating wisdom that integrates personal fulfillment with ecological harmony as Calvino puts, "Where I am isn't land and isn't yours!" (22) Cosimo responding to his father attempts to spread a remarkable message that the world belongs to all and the human nature of exploiting others is completely meaningless.

While Calvino's novel primarily focuses on ecological relationships, it also explores how arboreal existence facilitates broader spiritual seeking. This is evident when Cosimo reflects: "Perhaps true conquering consists not in arriving but in traveling toward; perhaps the real conquest is the restless, anxious will to conquer, which makes one start for God knows where..." (83). Although not explicitly ecological, this passage illuminates the spiritual dimensions of Cosimo's arboreal journey. Henning argues, "This deep ecological awareness recognizes that nature and

the self are at a ‘oneness’ with values inherent in all living beings, including trees and other plants, and is therefore basically a spiritual awareness” (72). Cosimo’s profound bond with the trees reflects a deep ecological awareness, embodying the spiritual oneness with all living beings that Henning describes.

The contrast between arriving and traveling toward, reflects what Macy terms "the spirituality of the journey rather than the destination" (215). Cosimo's recognition that true conquering lies in the process rather than achievement aligns with Macy's concept of active hope, which she describes as "becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for" (Macy and Johnstone 3). His arboreal existence represents this active hope, not a final solution but ongoing engagement with ecological possibility. The act of climbing tree in the novel finely speaks about the incredible journey to divinity as Cosimo says, "As far as I can get on the trees, here, there, beyond the wall, in the olive groves, up the hill, the other side of the hill, the wood, the Bishop's Land. . ." (19). So, mentioning the journey to The Bishop’s Land, Calvino portrays Cosimo’s act of arboreal accession is not merely a revolt of his aristocratic world but a holy trip to eternal world.

The restless, anxious will to conquer reframes conquest not as domination but as self-transcendence, aligning with Naess's concept of "the ecological self, as a process of ever-widening identification with others" (174). Cosimo's arboreal journey represents this ever-widening identification, extending beyond conventional human boundaries to encompass the more-than-human world. Cosimo challenges the world claiming his ever-expanding spiritual journey as, “"Yes! It's all mine up here"—and he waved vaguely toward the branches, the leaves against the sun, the sky. "On the branches it's all mine. Tell 'em to come and fetch me, and just see if they can!" (19).

Cosimo's bold determination depicts his eternal victory that he is achieving with his act of arboreal accession.

Calvino's portrayal of the forest ecosystem transcends scientific description to evoke sacred dimensions of ecological complexity. This is evident when he writes: "The forest extended, endless, complex, concealing within itself glades where the sun hardly penetrated, labyrinths of trunks and roots, secret pools" (45). Calvino reveals what Berry terms the numinous dimension of nature, the capacity of ecological systems to evoke amazement, mystery, and spiritual wonder.

The forest's description as endless, complex aligns with what Macy identifies as the sacred dimension of complexity, which she describes as "the recognition that ecological systems possess intricate organization that transcends complete human comprehension" (127). Cosimo's arboreal dwelling places him in relationship with this complexity, enabling what Macy terms "reverence before the mystery of being" (173). Cosimo's life in the trees places him in direct contact with the intricate and complex natural world, aligning with Macy's idea of ecological systems beyond full human understanding. His reverence for nature reflects Macy's concept of "reverence before the mystery of being," as he embraces the unknown and the sacred in the natural world.

The spiritual dimension of this complexity is further emphasized through imagery of concealment as Calvino puts, "glades where the sun hardly penetrated," "labyrinths," and "secret pools (93)". These hidden aspects of forest architecture evoke what Berry terms "the primordial sacred," which he describes as "the experience of being in the presence of mystery that both reveals and conceals itself" (*The Sacred Universe* 73). The forest's partial concealment from human perception reflects this simultaneous revealing/concealing dynamic characteristic of sacred

encounter. The imagery of "labyrinths of trunks and roots" suggests spiritual initiation through ecological complexity, evoking what Naess terms "the spiritual discipline of ecological awareness" (187). Cosimo's navigation of these arboreal labyrinths represents this discipline—not merely physical adaptation but spiritual initiation into the depths of ecological relationship.

The analysis of arboreal spirituality in the novel reveals eco-spiritual dimensions that align with the frameworks of spiritual ecology and deep ecology while reflecting distinctly European cultural contexts. Through the physical and metaphorical act of living entirely in trees, Cosimo experiences what Berry calls reinhabitation, the recovery of an ecological spirituality that heals the human-nature relationship. When Voila says Cosimo realizing his spiritual journey:

What I say! I can come up into your property and be an honored guest, d'you see? I come and go as I please. You, though, are sacred and untouchable while you stay in the trees, on your property, but as soon as you set a foot on the soil of my garden you become my slave and I put you in chains. "No, I'm not coming down into your garden or into mine either ever again. It's all enemy territory to me. (20)

This passage illustrates Calvino's representation of the trees as subjects rather than objects, as beings with their own spiritual significance rather than merely symbolic resources, exemplifies the core principles of both Berry's communion of subjects and Naess's biocentric equality. The arboreal realm in Calvino's work functions as what Macy terms a "gateway", a point of access to expanded ecological consciousness and spiritual renewal. Cosimo has become sacred with his arboreal sanctuary.

Through his portrayal of Cosimo's transformation into a being who is part of the bark, of the leaves, of the wood, Calvino illustrates the spiritual possibility of what

Naess terms ecological Self-realization, the expansion of identity beyond conventional human boundaries to include the more-than-human world. This expansion manifests when Cosimo perceives the earth as a different thing from arboreal perspective.

Cosimo experiences himself immersed in that fountain of life that was the forest and recognizes that only through living in the midst of nature can humans truly understand themselves and the world. When voila admits Cosimo, "You have the lordship of the trees, all right? But if you touch the earth just once with your foot, you lose your whole kingdom and become the humblest slave...but if you do fall, if you do, you change into ashes and the wind will carry you away"(20). These lines depict Calvino's pious message to humanity to have a spiritual importance of the trees since they let us realize the world as a place which only can thrive with the sense of mutual harmony amidst the biodiversity. In Calvino's narrative, the potential for transformation through encounters with the arboreal world underscores what Thomas Berry refers to as the process of "reinventing the human", the cultural task of reshaping human identity in ecological, rather than solely social, terms.

By depicting Cosimo's ascent and life among the trees, Calvino invites readers to rethink their relationship with nature, urging them to view their connection with trees as more than a practical engagement, but as a spiritual communion with the broader, more-than-human world. This exploration is especially poignant within the European Enlightenment context, where the rationalization of nature often stripped it of its spiritual significance. By weaving together rational critique with ecological enlightenment, Calvino creates a narrative that honors specific cultural moments while speaking to a universal longing for a deeper and friendlier affinity with the environment.

Comparative Analysis of both Novels

A comparative analysis of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* reveals the shared thematic exploration of isolation, rebellion, and spiritual transformation through arboreal living. While Desai's protagonist, Sampath, retreats to a tree in postcolonial India to escape societal pressures, Calvino's Cosimo takes to the trees in Enlightenment-era Italy to assert his independence and create his own identity. Both characters' actions represent more than mere physical withdrawal; they serve as acts of resistance against the constraints of society and an embrace of an ecological and spiritual connection with nature. By examining these novels through a comparative lens, we can uncover how each work reflects cultural and philosophical ideas, such as individualism, eco-spirituality, and the exploration for significance in a complex planet.

Susan Bassnett argues, "A comparative literature that starts with the high canon of European culture offers precisely defined pathways, roads with markers along which the scholar can travel safely between predetermined periods, styles and literary conventions" (86). Both *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Baron in the Trees* challenge the traditional boundaries of literary analysis by moving beyond the high canon of European culture. Desai's novel presents postcolonial India, while Calvino's work is rooted in Enlightenment-era Italy, introducing readers to distinct cultural landscapes. By engaging with these diverse settings, the novels push against predetermined periods, styles, and conventions, encouraging a more open and flexible approach to comparative literature.

While the divine manifests distinctly in each novel, several shared patterns emerge. Both protagonists experience:

1. Transformative Elevation: Physical climbing initiates spiritual ascension, with both characters undergoing profound identity transformation through arboreal existence.
2. Expanded Perception: Both access forms of knowledge unavailable to conventional human consciousness—Sampath hearing through roots and sap, Cosimo developing a "sixth sense" and neural connections with trees.
3. Sacred Recognition: Both initially face skepticism but eventually attain recognition as spiritually significant figures within their respective communities.
4. Transcendent Communication: Both develop communication with trees that transcends ordinary human-plant boundaries, suggesting access to divine modes of interrelationship.
5. Cosmic Awareness: Both perceive universal patterns through arboreal communion—Sampath experiencing the orchard as temple, Cosimo discerning "the unique and complex pattern of the universe" through individual trees. And more than that Sampath metamorphoses into a guava and Cosimo ascends into the sky at the end on the hot air balloon.
6. In both novels, trees are more than just biological entities; they act as sacred intermediaries that connect humans to higher forms of consciousness and knowledge. Through their connection to the trees, Sampath and Cosimo experience theophany, the exhibition of the purity in the material world. Their transformations show that true spiritual fulfillment comes not from separating from nature, but from embracing and integrating with it, challenging both religious and secular views that overlook the spiritual significance of the natural world. Sampath's metamorphosis into a guava and Cosimo's ascension

in the hot air balloon symbolize spiritual salvation through a deeper connection with nature.

These divine elements in both novels suggest that addressing contemporary environmental crises requires recovering a sense of natural sacrality that both religious and secular worldviews have often neglected. By portraying trees as portals to divine consciousness, Desai and Calvino invite readers to reconsider not only their practical but their spiritual relationships with the arboreal world, a reconsideration that may prove essential for cultivating environmental ethics capable of addressing the profound ecological challenges of our time.

Having such similarities, some differences in divine dimensions between both protagonists highlight their contrasting approaches to spiritual transformation through their connection with nature.

1. Nature as Escape vs. Engagement: Sampath's journey is about escaping societal pressures. He chooses to live in the guava orchard and ultimately converts into a tree, symbolizing a retreat from the world. His transformation represents a complete fusion with nature, suggesting that for Sampath, spiritual fulfillment means transcending his human form entirely. Cosimo, on the other hand, climbs trees to assert his freedom and challenge society. His spiritual growth comes from engaging with both nature and society. Unlike Sampath, Cosimo doesn't escape; he transforms by living outside society's constraints while still being part of it. His journey enlarges his perception, and he recollects his humanity even as he transcends it.
2. Final Acts of Ascension: Metamorphosis vs. Transcendence: Sampath's transformation into a guava tree represents a total surrender of individuality.

His spiritual journey ends with his preoccupation into nature, symbolizing a deep connection to the earth but also the loss of his personal identity.

Cosimo's ascent in the hot air balloon signifies transcendence while conserving his humanity. His advancement suggests that spiritual consciousness can be achieved without losing one's human essence. This transcendence is about expanding human latent through nature, not becoming something non-human.

3. Cultural and Religious Contexts: Sampath's transformation is rooted in Indian spirituality, where assimilation with nature and reawakening play important roles. His journey reflects the idea of divine comprehension through nature. Cosimo's ascent occurs in a European, more secular setting, where spirituality is seen as rational or philosophical rather than mystical. His spiritual growth is about empathetic universal patterns, not integration with nature in a literal sense.
4. The Role of the Community: Sampath's journey is largely one of isolation. He retreats into nature and, through his conversion, critiques societal pressures. His spiritual fulfillment comes from stepping away from society's expectations. In contrast, Cosimo's journey involves engaging with society in a new way. His relationships with others remain central, and his spiritual growth comes from creating a more harmonious connection with society, not rejecting it.

Both protagonists experience spiritual transformations through their connection with trees, but in different ways. Sampath's journey is about escape, metamorphosis, and divine absorption into nature, while Cosimo's ascent highlights transcendence while maintaining his human essence. Both novels celebrate the

sacredness of nature but offer different paths to spiritual fulfillment, one through retreat and metamorphosis, the other through engagement and transcendence.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This research examines the spiritual themes in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*. It highlights how trees are portrayed as sacred symbols, bridging the earthly and the divine. These divine elements emerge through specific textual patterns that reveal how arboreal ascension enables protagonists to access forms of consciousness, knowledge, and being that transcend ordinary human limitations. In Desai's novel, the divine dimensions of Sampath's arboreal experience emerge immediately upon his ascension. The text reveals an almost mystical transformation as he climbs the guava tree. This innate knowledge suggests a form of embodied wisdom that transcends rational learning, a divine remembering rather than mere skill acquisition.

The analysis of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* reveals profound insights into how arboreal ascension functions as a catalyst for eco-spiritual transformation across different cultural contexts. Despite emerging from distinct traditions, postcolonial India and post-war Italy, both novels demonstrate remarkable parallels in how they portray trees as portals to ecological consciousness and spiritual awakening.

The protagonists' acts of climbing and dwelling in trees represent far more than physical displacement or social rebellion; they constitute ontological transformations that challenge conventional human-nature boundaries. The comparative analysis demonstrates how each text reflects culturally specific traditions of tree reverence while addressing universal ecological concerns. Desai's work draws from Indian spiritual traditions that have long recognized trees as sites of enlightenment, with Sampath's arboreal dwelling immediately recognizable to townspeople as potentially sacred. Calvino's narrative, conversely, depicts a gradual

evolution from rejection to reverence, reflecting Europe's more complex relationship with ecological spirituality amid Enlightenment rationalism. These cultural particularities enrich rather than diminish the transcultural significance of both works.

Desai's and Calvino's novels explore the idea of trees as more than just physical entities. Through the protagonists' connections with the trees, each novel demonstrates how nature can serve as a gateway to deeper understanding and spiritual growth. In both stories, trees function as sacred spaces, where the characters can discover new dimensions of themselves and the world around them. Their experiences challenge the conventional view of trees as simply resources or scenic backdrops and instead highlight the profound, life-changing relationships that can form between humans and the natural world.

Both novels present unique yet complementary visions of how humans can reconnect with nature on a spiritual level. While Sampath in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* seeks escape and transformation through a literal merging with the tree, Cosimo in *The Baron in the Trees* emphasizes an active engagement with nature while retaining his human identity. These contrasting journeys reveal the diverse ways in which humans can interact with the environment, whether through retreat, reflection, or active participation. Together, these narratives offer important insights into how eco-spirituality can be practiced and understood, inviting readers to rethink their own relationships with nature in a time when such connections are more crucial than ever.

The eco-spiritual dimensions in these novels challenge dominant paradigms that separate human consciousness from the natural world. Both protagonists experience the expansion of identity beyond conventional human boundaries to include arboreal existence. These transformations suggest that authentic human

fulfillment may emerge not through mastery over nature but through deeper integration with it.

The implications of these literary explorations extend beyond aesthetic appreciation to encompass ethical and philosophical dimensions. By portraying trees as subjects with agency rather than objects for use, both the authors challenge anthropocentric worldviews that have facilitated environmental degradation. Their narratives suggest that addressing contemporary ecological crises requires not merely technical solutions but fundamental reconceptualization of human-nature relationships. This reconceptualization involves recovering what both texts present as a form of primordial wisdom, a deep ecological intelligence. Although mainstream society has suppressed this wisdom by prioritizing industrial progress and human dominance over nature, it continues to survive through the characters' intuitive connection with the natural world.

These literary works make a significant contribution to environmental humanities by demonstrating how fiction can articulate eco-spiritual perspectives that scientific discourse alone cannot fully capture. Their particular contribution lies in how they personalize abstract ecological principles through embodied characters whose transformations invite readers to reimagine their own relationships with the natural world. By creating narratives where arboreal engagement leads to expanded consciousness, both Desai and Calvino perform the cultural work of reimagining human identity in ecological rather than merely social terms.

Future research might productively explore several trajectories emerging from this analysis. First, a broader comparative study could examine arboreal imagination across diverse cultural traditions beyond the European and Indian contexts represented here. Second, interdisciplinary research might investigate how these

literary representations align with emerging scientific understanding of tree communication and intelligence, creating dialogue between humanities and ecological sciences. Third, pedagogical research could explore how these narratives might foster ecological awareness in educational settings, particularly through experiential engagement with trees inspired by the protagonists' transformations. Finally, further literary analysis might examine how contemporary climate fiction builds upon or departs from the eco-spiritual dimensions identified in these earlier works.

In conclusion, Desai's and Calvino's novels offer compelling literary articulations of what it might mean to recognize trees as more-than-human kin rather than mere resources or backdrop. Their protagonists' arboreal transformations invite readers to consider how our own relationships with trees might constitute not merely practical engagement but spiritual encounter with the living world. At a time of accelerating environmental crisis, these narratives offer not escapism but imaginative pathways toward more reciprocal and reverent association with entire ecosphere, a transformation that proves essential for cultivating sustainable environmental ethics for the future.

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