

Extended Essay Sample

Title: Throughout the *House of Blue Mangoes*, David Dabidar reminds us of India's natural beauty and fierce climate. What role does nature and setting play in the novel?

2900 words

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1. Abstract

At the heart of the novel is the story of the lives of various family members, friends and foes of the Dorai family, set in 1899 right up to 1947. Davidar threads his thoughts and views about caste, religion, family traditions, family squabbles, the British occupation and freedom fighters through a multitude of characters¹. The novel ultimately depicts the way in which the theme of nature is seen to be of great importance when dealing with the Dorais' hometown of Chevathar.

David Davidar continuously compares and contrasts the nature and setting which the main characters in the novel are surrounded by, but as they move farther away from Chevathar into cities under strong Western influence, Davidar's underlying conclusion is always that Chevathar's fierce and natural beauty is the best.

Davidar uses several different techniques to enhance Chevathar's vivid natural beauty and fierce climate, such as wild imagery of animals, stereotypical symbols of India, as well as the nature of the Dorai family. The essay will therefore take into account the use of language, the context, as well as the themes highlighted in the novel to explore the main argument of whether Chevathar's fierce and natural beauty really is the best.

What inspired me most to focus on Chevathar was the fact that I felt it was the only village discussed in the novel that was always referred to with positive comments. I felt that this could enable me to create a strong argument to prove why Chevathar remains as a home to the Dorai family throughout the novel.

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¹ http://www.viewsunplugged.com/VU/20021212/arts_bookReview_blueMangoes.shtml

2. Introduction

"The House of Blue Mangoes" is a story about a Christian family living in South India, continuously having to face the changing nature of the world as well as the devastating violence with which India's castes confront one another². The novel develops in three sections, each of which portrays a different generation of the Dorai family in different environments. The author of the novel, David Davidar, enjoys accentuating the context of the novel by using the setting and nature which surround the characters. The initial action of the novel takes place in the milieu of Chevathar, but as it progresses, the descriptions of the setting and nature are moved farther away and become very different to Chevathar. Davidar continuously makes comparisons of the settings of other areas to Chevathar, in order to highlight its importance to the Dorai family. By the end of the novel, Kannan realizes that Chevathar *"is the land of (his) family, it is the place of (his) heart"*³. Only at the end does the reader begin to understand the importance of India's natural beauty and fierce climate which was experienced by the Dorai family mostly in Chevathar and to a certain extent in Doraipuram.

Davidar chooses to portray the states of Chevathar, Doraipuram and Pulimed as three backgrounds for each different section of the novel. This was because in the late 19th and 20th centuries, these districts consisted of hundreds of different dialects and religious figures, thousands of caste and tribal divisions, and geography with tremendous rainstorms, stupefying heat and thousands of forests⁴. All these factors link back to the intolerable and painful experiences faced by the Dorai family. In the year of 1907, India became more challenging and complex as there were rumblings of nationalist politics, weak monsoons, crop failure, as well as famine outbreaks. In the novel, Davidar makes clear reference to Western influences as being one of the causes of all these issues. The increasing amount of conflict and tension which took place in India is reflected in the novel. However, Davidar creates a contrasting effect to the negativity of India's history by exploring the theme of nature. Not only does nature give a positive side to the novel, but it also represents an extravagant aspect in the lives of the Dorai family.

The title of the novel is already associated with the theme of nature, for it mentions 'mangoes'. This suggests that nature plays a vital role in the novel. The reader finds out later in the novel that there is deep significance to the title *"The House of Blue Mangoes"*:

"This house represents the fruit of years of toil by my family. I've spent months now trying to find a name that would aptly represent our hopes and aspirations, and more importantly capture the essence of this place. I think most appropriate, a name that honours the memory of our revered ancestors, and this place from which we have sprung. ...I formally announce that this

² http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guide3/house_of_blue_mangoes1.asp

³ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar. the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002). p. 412

⁴ http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guide3/house_of_blue_mangoes1.asp

*house will be called, from this time onwards, the House of Blue Mangoes, Neelam Illum*⁵

The dignified speech Daniel writes shows the reader the importance of the mango to the Dorai family, and it is from this stage in the novel (the end of the first section), that the reader understands the significance of the relationship between nature and the Dorai family. *"Blue mangoes, the pride and joy of our family as far back as I can remember"*⁶. *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* is a huge representation for the Dorai family because it was built in their hometown and Davidar continuously refers back to the house throughout the novel to show the importance of it.

⁵ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 213

⁶ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 342

3. Language Used to Highlight the Importance of Chevathar To the Dorai Family

3.1 Descriptions Evoking Chevathar's Beauty

At the beginning of the novel, David Davidar bestows upon the reader a variety of descriptions of Chevathar to portray the environment in which the Dorai family live. Davidar uses the beginning of the novel to give a very strong and powerful impression of India by giving vivid portrayals of Chevathar. This allows the reader to build up a picture of the setting in his or her own minds. Davidar exposes the novel with a negative feel of disruption when describing how "*... the waters of an estuary reflect the rage of colour.*"⁷ Davidar chooses to use the word 'rage' in this phrase to suggest the idea that India is progressing towards an outburst of war. However, several phrases later, a positive description of the nature of the big house is given where "*the trees are astonishingly beautiful, the fruit glinting blue against the dark green leaves*"⁸ surround the family. The contrast between the positive and negative descriptions here already gives a very diverse feel to the nature of Chevathar.

Davidar gives a typical description of Chevathar on a routine basis to suggest a very habitual lifestyle for the Dorai family. This idea is conveyed when Solomon waits for "*...the noises of the village in the morning surround[ing] them: squirrels and doves screeching and cooing overhead as they flight] for the ripening ruby-coloured banyan fruit, a flock of crows cawing and wheeling through the air a short distance away.*"⁹ The idea of this is to show how the Dorai family is accustomed to and familiar with life in Chevathar. Towards the end of the first section, Davidar enchants the reader with a reminder of Chevathar's beauty, and persuading them to recognize its great beauty compared with all the other villages within India. "*For the dawn was unique to each place and would ever be so: in Chevathar, the way the birds spoke from the branches and the light caught the casuarina trees, the lowing of the cattle and the chatter of the fowl, was different from this place or any other place.*"¹⁰ Davidar lends a magical and imaginative feel to Chevathar through personification for "*the way the birds spoke*" and this creates a very positive atmosphere for Chevathar's surroundings.

To enhance Chevathar's great beauty compared to the other two villages in the novel, Doraipuram and Pulimed, Davidar continuously compares the nature in other villages with the nature in Chevathar to remind the reader of Chevathar's beauty and make it stand out immensely. For example, when Kannan finds himself in Pulimed, Davidar portrays the setting in which he finds himself to be gloomy and depressing "*where haunted or not, the sound of falling water, unseen in the mist and darkness, was a curiously desolate one.*"¹¹ The tone here puts Kannan under a light

⁷ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar. the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 3

⁸ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar. the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 3

⁹ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar. the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 64

¹⁰ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar. the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 157

¹¹ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar. the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 277

of being companionless and solitary. As compared to the cheerful and neighborly surroundings of Chevathar, Pulimed is described to be less exuberant. In addition to this, Davidar contrast the homely and protective feel of Chevathar to the eerie and gloomy nature of Pulimed's sky when *"there was a fair-sized moon in the sky, but it was cloudy, and from time to time the world would grow very dark, increasing his edginess"*¹². The lexis used here, such as *"dark"* and *"edginess"* is used to give negative feelings of tension and fear, and it is also again helpful in bringing out Chevathar's greater beauty. This also suggests Chevathar exists as a more friendly and positive home environment for the Dorai family, and especially for Kannan.

3.2 Bringing out Chevathar's Explicit Beauty Through the Use of Figurative Language

Davidar brings great importance to Chevathar as being home to the Dorai family through the use of figurative language. Daniel Dorai grows up become a famous doctor in Chevathar, and Davidar uses nature in the form of metaphor and simile to imagine what Daniel's first patient's pulse *sounds* like instead of *feels* like. *"...Tell me what the pulse sounds like. Does it sound like the wind through the leaves, the flapping of a crow's wings..."*¹³ This suggests that life in Chevathar revolves conspicuously around nature and this envelops Chevathar within an amicable and positive atmosphere.

Continuing on a positive note, Davidar begins to stress the importance of the *"Chevathar Neelam"* which is the mango found within Chevathar. The idea of using the mango as a metaphor for life brings great importance to the title of the novel.

*One fact about it strikes me powerfully and it is this: No fruit is more beautiful, yet the blue mango has a monstrous flaw. Every season a tiny insect, the mango fruitfly, lays its eggs beneath the skin of some of the ripening fruits. The eggs hatch and the maggots tunnel through the pulp, eating as they go. From the outside, the mango looks perfectly healthy. But when it is cut open, dark tunnels and headless maggots greet the eye."*¹⁴

The suggestion is that life is so beautiful and yet so sad, and with the mango too, it is so beautiful externally, whilst internally can harbour such rot and decay. The contrast here distinctly parallels the Dorai family as Davidar shows the reader how one family copes with its country's divisiveness as it lurches forward into history.

Another issue associated with the mango is recollections from Kannan's childhood where his most vivid images of his father are reminisced because of a mango festival. *"Remember the Blue Mango Festival? ...That was the last one. I have so few memories of him"*¹⁵. This not only heightens the importance of Daniel's character, but the fact that the festival represents *"memories"* of his father is

¹² *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 369

¹³ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 116

¹⁴ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 350

¹⁵ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 364

significant in highlighting the importance the mango has on the family. Furthermore, Daniel's brilliant idea to construct a new house in Chevathar for all the relatives of the Dorai family gives Davidar the opportunity to establish a sense of nourishment and change to the Dorai family. He chooses to use nature in the form of a mango tree to present to the reader a healthy and beautiful change in the lives of those in the Dorai family. *"Even before work on the house had begun, an army of gardeners got to work restoring the ancient mango groves. In the centre of the front lawn, a great mango tree was carefully transplanted. The head gardener was given special charge of the tree to keep the showpiece tree ever healthy, ever beautiful."*¹⁶ The saying that "an army of gardeners" is required to nourish the mango and that it is placed "in the centre of the front lawn" stresses how meaningful the mango is to the Dorai family. Also, the diction choice of "showpiece" lends formality as well as fragility to the mango which is why it requires "special charge."

3.3 Representing an Artistic Invention of Chevathar Through the Use of Symbolism

Throughout the novel, Davidar uses a variety of symbols and images which stress the importance to the home of Chevathar for the Dorai family. Davidar eliminates all tension and trouble in Chevathar by bringing serenity, peace and freedom to the surroundings. He creates a description of the birds' movements which Solomon notices as *"a great flapping in the stand of tamarind trees"* and *"once it was in the air, its movements steadied, grew more graceful."*¹⁷ The main character in the first section of the novel, Solomon Dorai, uses the idea of birds to think back to the caste system where he admits that *"caste has permeated every aspect of their lives"*¹⁸ because they are so high up in the sky and with as much freedom as they want, so this therefore places them at the top of the caste system. By this stage, the reader can see that Davidar is using the symbol of birds to build up a climax where caste is being seen to have effect on the Dorai family as well as Chevathar. This makes the reader question whether Chevathar will remain home for the Dorai family.

Davidar increases tension of the climax he is building up on by using imagery of Chevathar's sun and sea. There is little reference to war given at the beginning, but by this stage in the novel, the reader begins to feel uneasy and anxious about Chevathar's surroundings, for Davidar describes images of how *"The sun had burned away the overcast and hammered the back of the sea into a mass of shimmering golden scales, but even this sight did not lift his spirits."*¹⁹ Despite the stunning effects of a natural surrounding, they do nothing to uplift Solomon's state of mind. As the novel progresses, nature is used in abundance for describing the age-old rivalries that pit one clan against each other. As well as this, Davidar uses the image of the sea as an important image for Chevathar's name, to raise the issue of Western

¹⁶ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 207

¹⁷ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 25

¹⁸ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 25

¹⁹ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 29

influence in the country. *"At the limits of his vision, the pale beige of the sky merged with the golden skin of the sea, with only the thinnest of lines showing where the earth's rim separated the two. Out of those depths they had come, foreign adventures and travelers by the shipload, to marvel and to be seduced by the astonishing riches of India."*²⁰ Davidar uses the image of the sky as a metaphor of foreign invasion, and the sea as a metaphor of Chevathar to contrast disruption to beauty. It is as if Davidar narrates a story of what is going to happen by describing "foreign adventures" invading the privacy and "riches" of India. Davidar uses the element of water in the sea as a means of depicting how Father Ashworth reflects the waves that remind him of the British invaders. *"His eyes followed the movement of the tide as it flowed over the beach and ebbed away. Invaders were like that, he thought. Just as the waves altered the shoreline, so too did conquerors."*²¹ Davidar uses the image of the sea to lend a sense of confusion and disorganization because of the word "altered". The diction choice of "flow" speeds up the pace of the speech, and this increases the tension between the foreigners and the Indians. This indirectly suggests that the western influenced villages such as Pulimed only cause devastation for the Dorai family. However, the Dorai family has already fixed a home for themselves in Chevathar and this lends the idea that they are strong and secure living there.

Davidar continues the novel by referring to nature in Chevathar in a more positive manner in order to decrease the tension apparent between the foreigners and the Indians, and to increase the importance of Chevathar as being home to the Dorai family. As the characters move farther away from Chevathar, Davidar repeatedly makes references and flashbacks to Chevathar in order to remind the reader of Chevathar's great beauty as compared to Doraipuram and Pulimed. For example, in the case of Kannan, *"the position of the moon in the sky awakened in him a memory of Chevathar."*²² Davidar uses the moon here to represent light and dreams as a reminding reflection of an image of Chevathar. Moreover, to enhance Chevathar's composure and comfort for the Dorai family, Davidar gives the idea that the trees there are like a protective system to India's people and land as they *"gr[o]w so closely together that they form an impenetrable canopy, keeping the ground cool on the hottest days."*²³ Davidar's diction choice here, particularly with the words "together" and "close", is significant in lending a sense of warmth and attachment not only between the trees, but also metaphorically between the members of the Dorai family, and this again highlights the importance of Chevathar as being home to the Dorai family.

²⁰ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 30

²¹ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 61

²² "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 126

²³ "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 95

4. Davidar's Portrayal of how Character's Experience Life Outside of Chevathar

As the novel progresses, the tension between the Indians and the British increases, but Davidar develops this idea even further by continuously highlighting the importance of Chevathar as being home to the Dorai family. He uses the priest as a reason to compare the parables which would have to be changed if the British colonized India. *"Instead of the vine and the fig tree there would have been rice and the mango tree, toddy would have replaced wine, and the Good Samaritan would probably have been the Good Marudar."*²⁴ Stereotypical symbols from both India and the west are being contrasted here in an indefinite tone to portray the assumptions being made by the priest. In enhancing the tension which exists within Chevathar, David Davidar uses India's unpredictable and fierce climate to suggest that trouble exists. *"From very early in the morning, the dead white eye of the sun would enamel the sky and the plain with heat and glare until they burned. And then a searing wind that was locally known as the Fire Wind would start blowing in from the teri wasteland, carrying with it dust and heat until you could hardly breathe."*²⁵ There is a mix of negative emotions being expressed here, for example through the phrase, *"you could hardly breathe"* as this suggests suffocation. Davidar never complains about the weather in Chevathar, and this clearly suggests that Davidar is using the weather in Pulimed to highlight the western society as being sickly and confined as compared to the energy-giving and harmless environment of Chevathar.

The final part of the novel moves into the setting of Pulimed where Davidar is given the opportunity to note all the differences between this more western influenced village as compared to either Chevathar or Doraipuram. Kannan is caught up in the miserable weather in Pulimed, and Davidar makes a note on the difference where are compared to *"the warm downpour of Doraipuram, the rain in the hills was cold. And it never let up. Day after day, he would struggle into clothes that never seemed dry and walk into a world where the sky hung low, grey and troubled"*²⁶. The depressing and anguished state which Kannan is in is exaggerated through the use of negative lexis here such as *"grey"*, *"cold"*, and *"troubled"* and this suggests that Kannan does not feel the same way he used to feel when he was at home in Chevathar.

In the final section of the novel, Davidar uses the theme of nature to stress great importance upon Kannan's changing character as he begins to realize how much Chevathar means to himself as well as his family. Kannan begins to apprehend that being a Dorai means he has to maintain his father's reputation. This means gathering up all his pride, strength and courage in order to show others who he really is and where he comes from. Davidar uses one of India's most fierce and powerful animals, the Pulimed tiger, to highlight how the Indians should defend for themselves, and not be dominated by the foreigners. To add to this, there is a

²⁴ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 37

²⁵ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 69

²⁶ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 272

meeting which is held in relation to hunting down the tiger. It brings to light a manifestation of obvious racism, which is also apparent towards the end of the novel. One of Kannan's very close British friends "*realized that there [was] not a single Indian planter in the room*"²⁷ and this idea is used to make Kannan realize he does not fit into the western society and that Pulimed is not as much of a home to him as Chevathar is.

Davidar creates a scene between Mr. Harrison and Kannan after the killing of the tiger to enhance the idea that Kannan does not belong in Pulimed and should remain in his hometown of Chevathar. Mr. Harrison uses several rhetorical questions where he tries to explain to Kannan that the foreigners are no better than the Indians by asking him whether he thinks, "*the English oak is sturdier than the banyan and the thrush superior to the bulbul? And that the lotus is inferior to the rose? Is Tamil less than English?*"²⁸ Again, stereotypical symbols of India are being contrasted with symbols of the western society to highlight the conflicting difference.

Finally, Kannan ashamedly admits that his presence amongst the Western world is wrong. After so long he realizes that he should be at home, where he is surrounded by people who love him instead of people who despise him and talk rudely of him but "*by the time Kannan reached Morningfall, the decision he had been mulling over was confirmed in his mind: he would leave Pulimed. Now that he had decided, he wasn't sure what he should do. Join the freedom struggle or help with Doraiapuram?*"²⁹ As Kannan's father had repetitively stressed on the importance of the mango, the impact the mango had on the Dorai family, and its good and bad sides to life, Kannan decides to take his father's advice and help out his family first by helping with Doraiapuram, "*The House of Blue Mangoes*".

²⁷ "*The House of Blue Mangoes*" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 381

²⁸ "*The House of Blue Mangoes*" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 404

²⁹ "*The House of Blue Mangoes*" by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 405

5. Conclusion

Davidar teaches each of the characters a lesson in his novel. Finally we learn that Chevathar will always remain home for the Dorai family as *"even if your average Dorai strays far from Chevathar, he magically hears the call and always comes back 'home'"*.

The novel also concludes with a reminder of the significance of its title. The reader now understands why Davidar chose to name his novel, *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* for they can see a representation of *"Blue mangoes, the pride and joy of our family"*³⁰. The reader now understands that the mango and the tiger are the most important elements of nature which highlight the importance of Chevathar as being home for the Dorai family.

Davidar also acknowledges the fact that Indians should not be controlled by Western influence. He illustrates that they should be empowered to control their own country for themselves, putting priority to what matters most. This is shown as Davidar continuously moves the setting farther away from Chevathar into villages under strong Western influences. However, the irony lies in that the setting at the end of the novel moves back to Chevathar after Kannan realizes that Indians do not belong in a Western society, and that home to him is Doraipuram.

The final speech in the novel is by Kannan, where he gives a warm and touching conclusion to the novel, and the reader is also able to finally understand the importance of "India's natural beauty and fierce climate" especially to the Dorai family.

*"This is the land of my family, it belongs to every one of us, we have made its hard red earth our own with our failures and our triumphs, our blood and our laughter. I'm glad I'm here, it is the place of my heart"*³¹

³⁰ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 342

³¹ *"The House of Blue Mangoes"* by David Davidar, the Orion Publishing Group Ltd. (2002), p. 412

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