



## SELF-IMPOSED ESTRANGEMENT OF SAMPATH CHAWLA IN *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD* BY KIRAN DESAI

Dr.J.MADHUMITHA

Assistant Professor of English

PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Tamil Nadu



Dr.J.MADHUMITHA

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### Abstract

Kiran Desai's debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* published in 1998 depicts the story of a man who isolates himself from the hustle and bustle of the city life. Sampath a post office clerk feels bored by the mundane world, believes that life is futile because he couldn't associate himself with the societal norms. He escapes from his earthly duties and seeks solace in a guava tree. Sampath thinks that self-imposed estrangement is the only way to avoid the familial duties and obligations. In the guava orchard he becomes one with nature and feels contented. But soon he becomes a sadhu and people swarm like bees to get blessings from him. Here Kiran Desai portrays how people like Sampath do not wish to take up the responsibilities in these modern times and also satirizes people's blind religious faith and ignorance in the post-colonial era.

Keywords: Isolation, mundane, escape, nature, satire, postcolonial era

The novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is set in a small Indian Town Shahkot during the post colonial era. The hilarious incidents which happen in the life of the protagonist Sampath Chawla form the main theme. Sampath's mother Kulfi was pregnant with Sampath during severe draught and when she gave birth it came to an end with a ferocious monsoon. Born on an auspicious day with brown birthmark on his cheek, he was destined to achieve something great. "Let's name him Sampath," they said. 'Good fortune', for though he might not be very plump or very fair, he was triumphantly and indisputably male" (HGO 12). Like all other sons of India he was also bestowed with the responsibility of living up to the expectations of the parents.

But right from his childhood Sampath used to avoid his familial responsibilities. Sampath wished to be free from the suffocation caused by the mundane town life. Shahkot is a very small town where

whatever happens in the neighbourhood is known to everyone. The elderly people involved in the lives of the youngsters. They restricted their freedom and dictated their life. Even in his house he suffered from lack of sleep because all his family members Mr.Chawla, Kulfi, Ammaji, his grandmother and Pinky his sister slept under one ceiling fan. This made him to suffocate and yearned for sleep. He was leading an idle life until Mr.Chawla arranges a job for him at the Post office.

Sampath's parents were very demanding and wanted him to secure a good position in the society. But he was not interested in going for a job. Even in the post office he feels tedious and to break the monotony Sampath started reading the post cards and letters. He also imagines a life beyond his village. He desired to get rid of the routine job and yearned to live in the company of nature. The dull mundane work, pollution in the town, demanding

parents, strict societal norms, cultural influence, and globalization made him to suffocate. All these factors were the impact of post colonialism. The growing needs of the people, modernization, and influence of the western culture became a burden on the youngsters who do not want to take up responsibility in their lives. Like Sampath, they yearn to live a comfortable life without doing any profession. Life in the city was so demanding that they could not cope up with the pace and estrange themselves to lead their life according to their fancy. Sampath also becomes a victim of his desire and the post office where he works puts an end to his career.

When Sampath decided to leave his job, he was accused by his family members. But one day addicted to alcohol he disrobes himself and daydreams in his boss's daughter's wedding. This unruly behavior leads him to lose the job whereby his father became anxious and pushed him into job hunt again. But Sampath does not want to go to any other job because he desired to live a peaceful life with nature. "Distant, tinged with mystery, warm with the romance of it all, he felt a sudden sharp longing, a craving for an imagined world, for something he'd never known but felt deep within himself" (HGO 38). Sampath's whimsical mother Kulfi is very much worried about her son's plight and gave him a guava to eat which transforms his entire life. He relished the guava and feels revitalized and decides to live his life according to his whims and fancies. Later, he boards a bus and gets down at an abandoned guava orchard. Astounded by the tranquility of the place he climbed up a guava tree and started to live there. "Sampath in wilderness ran towards an old orchard where he climbed a guava tree and he felt that the silence had held between its branches and the moment he settled among the trees, the spirits that had carried him so far and so high had melted into nothing. Finally he had reached the guava tree which to him is a home of peace" (Kavitharaj and Umadevi 13).

Sampath was always disturbed and felt nervous because of the crowded town life and people around him so that he decided to isolate himself from the money-oriented world and live a serene life accompanied by nature. The materialistic world made him to suffocate. Kiran Desai here brings

out the importance of leading a life in the company of nature. Nature can balance and restore the harmony of the human minds which is very essential to lead a peaceful life. "Upon the rooftop, Sampath felt his body fill with a cool greenness, his heart swell with a mysterious wild sweetness. He felt an awake clear sap flowing through him, something quite unlike human blood. How do such things happen? He could have sworn a strange force had entered him, that something new was circulating within him" (HGO 46-47). The guava orchard made him to relish his freedom for the first time from his routine life and he was able to breathe freely from then on. "A place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives" (Garrard 69-70). Life in the tree made him to feel one with nature. But Sampath's peaceful existence in the orchard was disturbed by his family who came in search of him. His father condemns him for bringing disgrace to the family by dwelling in a tree.

Lush greenery and the freshness of air in the tree enchanted his mind. "When Nature herself, as people learnt to say, became a goddess, a divine Mother, we had something very different from the spirits of wind and sea and forest and moon" (Williams 69). The tranquil atmosphere of the orchard changed his spirit and he was moved by the sanctity of the place. The tree harmonized with his imagination. Meanwhile his family wanted to take him back to home. He disapproves that idea and continues to dwell in the tree like a hermit. "Goose bumps covered his arms. He thought of Public Transport, of the Bureau of Statistics, of head massages, of socks, of interview strategies of never ever being left alone, of being unable to sleep and of his father talking and lecturing in the room below" (HGO 47). Soon, the orchard gets crowded because people wanted to see the man living in a tree. With the knowledge he acquired from prying into the private letters and post cards when he worked at the post office, he started to tell their secrets. Hence, Sampath became popular and people were surprised by his words which were really true so they flocked to the orchard to know about their destiny through hermit's mouth. Mr.Chawla utilizes this opportunity to commercialize Sampath's popularity

more. He arranges a tea stall and started to sell garlands, fruits and coconuts in the orchard. The visitors started to offer food, fruits and money in front of the tree.

Here, Kiran Desai characterizes Sampath as a Holy Baba who fools everyone by telling about their fortunes. As days passed he answered the questions of the people in a scholarly manner with excellent knowledge. His words reflected unfathomable acumen and were understood symbolically. A woman worried about the bad company of his son and approached Sampath to know about his future. Sampath suggests that "Add lemons to milk and it will grow sour." Even though his answers were like a riddle and doesn't make any sense people thought he had philosophical insight. Meanwhile the tranquil atmosphere of the Guava orchard was disturbed by the monkeys which came to eat the offerings. The situation went beyond control when monkeys tasted alcohol and created 'hullabaloo' in the orchard. They started to disturb the crowd and behaved violently. Chaos and commotion surrounded Shahkot. At the same time Sampath was impressed by the monkeys and he hooted and howled like them. After monkeys occupied the orchard Sampath was known as Monkey-Baba.

The monkeys disturbed the people who came to visit Sampath. They also misbehaved with the police by throwing peanuts on their heads. Mr. Chawla was deeply affected by the intrusion of the monkeys because his plan to earn money by commercializing his son's popularity is disturbed by the monkeys. They also created law and order problem in the city. Hence the police planned to evacuate the monkeys from the orchard. Sampath was fond of those monkeys and he thinks that if monkeys were removed from the orchard the liveliness and the entertainment will disappear from him.

Sampath is worried about the 'hullabaloo' which is going to happen while capturing the monkeys. He wanted to be free from the chaos and commotions in the city, but now that is happening in the orchard. Sampath felt that the atmosphere in the orchard looked like the depraved environment which prevailed in his town. Soon, he realized that

the congeniality of the orchard is spoiled and was surrounded by crowds of people who were at times angry and disordered. Because of his father, the place was commercialized and filled with advertisements, leftovers of eatables, plastic garbage etc. The garbage heaped grew up like a small hill. Sampath felt suffocating again. He was upset about the degenerated state of the orchard. Before he stepped in to the orchard it was like a heaven. Transformation of the place from heaven to hell was because of the reckless and negligent attitude of the people towards nature and the environment.

Monkeys here denote the symbol of freedom. They create nuisance and cannot be controlled. Sampath enjoys their company. Through his character the urge of an individual who wants to lead a life without any constraints or worries is brought out. But it is a must that every man born in this earth should take up a social responsibility. Sampath here lacks that social awareness and he just wants to get rid of everything and lead a king's life which is impossible.

For trapping the monkeys he was asked to come down. Sampath thinks that once if he gets down the tree it is impossible for him to get back to the tree again because he will be ambushed. He slipped away from his house to live a serene life and climbed up the tree. But now his survival in the tree was prone to menace and his longing for unison with nature cannot be accomplished once more.

Sampath picked a guava and held it in his hand and thought about the ways to escape. When the police came to the orchard, Sampath was not found. They searched for him in the orchard but only a guava was found in the place where he used to sit. The monkeys took the guava and left the orchard. Thus, Sampath's self imposed estrangement reaches its climax as he turns into a guava. People believed that Sampath is transformed into a guava. "He has shed his physical persona, and like wind or ghost, has merged into the surroundings. The transformation of Sampath is perhaps his last one..." (Sinha 6). But he ran off to the mountains to escape from the hullabaloo.

Through this novel Kiran Desai stresses the importance of nature in the lives of human beings. For Sampath nature gives shelter and comfort when he suffered from claustrophobia and restlessness. His obsession towards the society, polluted town life, monotonous job and demanding family disappeared when he sought the company of nature. He wanted to liberate himself from the clutches of the worldly life. Sampath's main idea was to get rid of the false manners of life. He feels that he is trapped in a net put up by the society. He does not wish to follow the rules and wanted to live amidst nature. Globalization and modernization has changed the lives of the village people. Kiran Desai here satirizes the social and political turmoil and the biting reality of the harsh town life in the novel.

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