


Sampath's Whims and Kulfi's Fancies: A Dance of Magic Realism and Irony in Kiran Desai's 'Orchard'

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the absurdity and unseen desires in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. It also examines how the narrative explores issues of repressed urges, cultural conventions, and identity difficulties. In addition to other humorous characters and stories, particular emphasis is given to Sampath's inadvertent escape from the problems of daily life and his mother Kulfi's strange, almost obsessive desire for food and spices. Desai employs a blend of magical realism and humour to highlight the eccentricity of human conduct setting the plot in a rural Indian environment. This paper will examine how Desai skilfully combines these aspects with comedy, innocence, mysticism, irony, and humour.

Keywords: Humour, Absurdity, Philosophical, Satire, Religious sensitivity, Magical realism, Eccentricity.

Introduction

Caught up in this drunken dance, savage faces, long tails, saris draped in purple and yellow streamers all about him, useless bits of thought flew past Sampath, everything going too fast for him to stop and grab at them. He could jump; but no, it would be his undoing. He could pull on the monkeys' tails; no, he would shout. No, he had better hold tight. (*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, 131)

The above excerpt amazingly captures the vivid spectrum of chaos and exhilaration in the life of Sampath Chawla. It not only effectively depicts a world full of sensory overload amid the frenzy of "drunken dance," "savage faces," and "long tails", but the chaos of "saris draped in purple and yellow streamers", "a world of spices" and unpredictable nature of Sampath by adding a layer of eccentric colours holding the series of maddening tales taking the readers to a world of infinite waves of laughter. Certainly, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) by Kiran Desai is an anthology of humorous incidents from the life of a twenty-year-old boy and

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his family living in Shahkot, a small village in the northeastern Himalayas. It is a narrative that follows the family members of Mr. R.K. Chawala as they experience a series of unexpected and humorous events. "It is a light-hearted work told in the 'faux-naive' style of the literary folktale." Most significantly, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* tells the funny life narrative of Sampath, a middle-class youngster with peculiar hobbies and habits, who struggles to live a life that fulfills his wishes, and ultimately succeeds in obtaining his goals. The boy's accomplishments, remaining the main focus of attention, serve as the main focus of the novel and are presented to us in a way that is both incredibly funny and thrilling, while also being philosophical and satirical. The central theme of the novel is the increasing uproar in Sampath's life and his family's response to it, which keeps readers intact at every turn of events.

The book is not just a series of humorous and dramatic events; it also serves as a constant critique of the false beliefs that people have about their religion and cultural customs. The novelist has made a wonderful attempt to arouse our religious sensitivities so that we can see the distorted face of religion in the modern world. There is a concealed serious note underlying the story's uncontrolled descriptions of laughter which works to bring the human mind to a true realisation. It's undeniable that *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a superb work of fiction by the famous Booker Prize winner novelist Kiran Desai. Salman Rushdie welcomes the young writer for her debut work of fiction, stating, "welcome proof that India's encounter with the English language continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts." (Menon, P 46-47)

Kiran Desai Masters Social Dynamics and Satirical Humour in her Literary Creations

The renowned Indian English novelist Anita Desai's daughter, Kiran Desai, was educated in India, England, and the US after she was born in India in 1971. She traveled to the United States to complete her academic training at the age of fourteen, having spent a year in England. Following high school, she pursued further education in Massachusetts and higher studies in Vermont at Bennington. She had a passion for creative writing as a young girl, so shortly after graduating, she enrolled in the Virginia writing program Hollins. She began work on her first book, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, at this time. In 2006, Desai's book *Inheritance of Loss* won the "Booker Prize". Her writing has appeared in *Mirrorwork: Fifty Years of Indian Writing*, an anthology edited by Salman Rushdie, and 'The New Yorker'. The author's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a 'great debut novel'. The story focuses on the harsh living conditions of

the residents of Shahkot, where the delayed arrival of the monsoon causes the inhabitants to suffer greatly from the heat of summer. Though the author describes *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* as a farce or a trail of eventual incidents, it keeps a rapid pace while also incorporating elements of satire and fable.

The novel's main plot is primarily around Mr. Chawala's family members and their quite unusual activities. Mr. Chawala recently got married, but his wife has certain mysterious character qualities that make him question whether or not she has a mental disorder. As a result, he does not feel completely happy or satisfied in his married life. What puts him in this unpleasant predicament is another person in his life, his mother (called Ammaji in the novel). While his family is searching for a suitable marriage for him, their preferences do not matter in the life story of Mr. Chawala—it is the story of every young Indian middle-class male. He somehow makes ends meet despite his challenging circumstances. This serves to reinforce his sense of dominance and superiority since he believes that he is the only one in his home who possesses reason and life experience. The pregnant wife of Mr. Chawala, Kulfi, has peculiar and compulsive eating habits. She cooks the food and imagines more types of cuisine, continuing her never-ending experimentation process. Sampath is the name of the male child that Kulfi gives birth to with all of her unusual hobbies and pursuits. This name signifies the arrival of good fortune. And with the arrival of the heavy monsoon—something that the inhabitants of Shahkot had been eagerly awaiting—the Chawala family experiences this much-anticipated occasion.

Fortunately, it has resulted in a moment of dual happiness for Kulfi and their family. The coincidence between the advent of the monsoon and the birth of Sampath caused everyone to interpret it as an auspicious omen from God to inform them of their impending fortune. As they exclaim with joy, "Let's name him Sampath," they say. "Good fortune."² Interestingly, as the novel progresses, we are introduced to a young boy of twenty who exhibits some unusual behavioural qualities. Sampath was born with her mother's weird attitude. However, he cannot be regarded as a wholly abnormal human being; rather, we consistently sense something extremely substantial missing from his personality that would classify us as normal humans. To clarify, he is an introverted boy who is dissatisfied with his life and the people around him. Unfortunately, this is extremely difficult for his father to adjust to. Mr. Chawala's rage flares up anytime he believes his son has acquired the same signs of eccentricity that have overwhelmed his mother's sensitivities.

Mr. Chawala's domineering personality has grown stronger as he constantly regulates his son and does not expect his daughters to take their lives seriously. Pinky is also among the many. He and Sampath are constantly urged to live by their father's ideals. Despite Sampath's time and routine-bound job, his father has acquired government work as a post office clerk. Sampath, the aimless public relations clerk, is indifferent and apathetic to his duties. In any case, he wants to escape the boredom that comes with everyday social life. Sampath Chawla, a very bored post-office clerk in the dull village of Shahkot, decides not to answer a fellow traveler's strange inquiries on a bus ride because he feels "the air thin about him and the freshness of greenery bloom within his tired frame." When the bus comes to a brief stop, Sampath leaps "from the window of the stalling bus, spurred by his annoyance at the old crane's voice," struck by "the marvelous emotion that had overtaken him."

...into the wilderness towards an old orchard visible far up the slope. He ran with a feeling of great urgency. Over bushes, through weeds. Before him he saw a tree, an ancient tree, silence held between two branches like a prayer. He reached its base and fervishly, without pausing, he began to climb. He clawed up his way from branch to branch. Hoisting himself up, he disturbed dead leaves and insect carcasses and all the bits of dried- up debris that collect in a tree. It rained down about him as he clambered all the way to the top. When he settled among the leaves the very moment he did so-the burgeoning of spirits that had carried him so far away and high up fell from him like a gust of wind that comes out of nowhere, rustles through the trees and melts into nothing like a ghost. (49-50)

However, the story and the life of the poor Sampath take an intriguing turn, which is followed by much laughter and joy. In addition, a humorous yet embarrassing situation related to the marriage function of the post office head's daughter causes Sampath to leave his work. Poor Sampath, much troubled by his father's offer of a new job at the 'Utterly Butterly Delicious Butter Factory', is forced to leave his home and flee his people. Eventually, he took refuge in a guava orchard. Ironically, for the first time in his life, things have begun to respond according to his desires. This new environment reminded him of his fantasy land. It intrigued Sampath so much that he chose to make his home in the guava tree. However, the celebration could not continue long. Sampath's high-imagined flights are interrupted by his family members, who have somehow managed to gather information about his encampment in the orchard. As soon as his family joined him, a new chapter began in the lives of the Chawalas and the Shahkot

residents. At first, the family tried every technique to divert his attention and get him down from the tree, but they eventually opted to stay with Sampath. However, this additional context shifts the plot towards the two contrary dimensions. A few coincidental circumstances turn Sampath into a "tree-baba," but his family also began to profit monetarily from the chaos. Sampath's family members began working hard together to ensure a sound future. Everyone, Mr. Chawala, Ammaji, Pinki, and Kulfi excepted, contributed fully to Mr. Chawala's plans in the rapidly expanding process. Kulfi was the only one not affected by anything going on around her; instead, she used the unfamiliar environment as a stage to showcase her undiscovered culinary skills. Her weirdness is coming into its own here. She foolishly began a never-ending quest through the forest for spices and herbs, devoting all of her days and nights to it. Sampath initially becomes agitated due to the activities that are disrupting his freedom and tranquility, but he eventually settles in with his new friend and begins to receive more attention and respect than he ever imagined. These unforeseen events persisted all around him, and before long he had a reputation as a holy man in the community. All of the personalities start to revolve around the guava orchard. She's able to fully embrace her eccentricities here. She spent all of her days and nights in the forest, frantically beginning her never-ending quest for spices and plants. Although the events there at first make Sampath a little restless, he eventually settles in with his new acquaintance and begins to enjoy a greater level of respect and attention than he had ever anticipated. He was immediately known as a holy man in the community as these unforeseen events were occurring all around him. Everything about the characters revolves around the guava orchard. The press reports: "According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways, being coupled with unfathomable wisdom" (67).

Meanwhile, the orchard becomes a place for selling and business activities, followed by a swarm of businessmen who set up a market near the monkey baba's residence. This market sold everything from toothpaste to mosquito repellents. However, Sampath had nothing to do with his father's money-making process or the selfish objectives of his family members; instead, he was enjoying his spare time. Unfortunately, the arrival of the monkeys in the orchard has jeopardized this pleasant experience. Like others, Sampath too feels terrified in the beginning but is swayed by a strange happiness as things grow up. He experiences outstanding living with the monkeys in the orchard and somehow manages to establish a human-monkey conversation between them. But this man-animal partnership could not last long. Since humour is the novel's

defining element, we can see it in practically every action the characters take. Sampath's past as a forgetful post office clerk; his practice of reading other people's letters when he has free time; his escape from a domestic life and simultaneous transformation into a renounced holy man by the use of pre-gathered information on the populace; and his family's shifting response to his deed. Ultimately, the story of the monkeys' arrival and his relationship with them is quite entertaining. But throughout the novel, there are additional amusing situations that are overseen by other characters like Kulfi, Mr. Chawala, and Ammaji, in addition to Sampath's careless actions that have made the entire thing so much fun.

However, there are moments when deriving the right meaning from his statements becomes a complex and overwhelming task. As he says: "First a chikoo is raw, said Sampath, then, if you do not pick and eat it quickly, it will soon rot and turn to alcohol" (123). Though Sampath's careless actions are certainly responsible for much of the story's amusement, other characters like Kulfi, Mr. Chawala, and Ammaji also supervise several amusing situations. Furthermore, none can deny the unforgettable story of Pinki's romance with Ice Cream Man. Everyone in the book retains some odd characteristics, but it makes more sense to think of them as people who are utterly unhappy with the lives they have. Even Mr. Chawala's mother, Ammaji, shows no consideration for his son's wishes when deciding whether or not to marry him. The only other individual who has no complaints about Sampath is Ammaji, after Kulfi. But their motivations are very dissimilar from one another. Kulfi doesn't have any issues because she sees in Sampath the same culmination of what she is going through. Ammaji still does it, though, just to show her grandson how much she cares. Sampath believes she has won when she gains notoriety as a saint. For it was only Ammaji who used to promise that one day Sampath would prove to be a fortunate mascot for them, when Sampath was viewed by his father and others as a good for nothing person. Ammaji is without a doubt one of the main factors that elevates the book to the level of outstanding comedy. Her subsequent actions that further enhance the enjoyment consist of gathering and reselling the objects that his followers have donated to the "tree baba." at addition, the readers will remember her rapidly increasing need for a new pair of dentures as a symbol of their recent success and her nearly insane behaviour at the marketplace after she and Pinky noticed the movie monkey. Another hilarious part of the book is how the dentures go missing and then come back during all of the chaos. Each character has raised the stakes and enhanced a specific aspect of the book. Within this framework, we have unresolved issues. Pinky's world to reside in. One's problems may appear

to be commonplace and comparable to those of any teenage girl. Pinky is acting normally, which includes her increased focus on her appearance, her activities with clothing, and her collection of jewellery. Her inner need to become the centre of attention is what drives her confused views about the people around her. Unfortunately, for a girl going through a sensitive age, her family—which is not exactly typical like Foras'—fails to provide a nice friend. And as a result, she was turned into a laughingstock, heavily makeup-applied in garish hues, and a thick covering of talcum powder. Her unusual show of love for Ice Cream Man, combined with her dumb attempts to draw his attention, results in a succession of laughs. Though her desires differ from those of her brother, mother, father, and grandmother, her basic need to be acknowledged and loved by her boyfriend generates a sense of humour. This is not because she chose an ice cream vendor, but rather because of the methods she has used to capture his attention. Her persistent efforts and illogical ideas for informing her lover, Hungry Hop Boy, of her affections make us laugh out loud.

Along with hilarity and innocence, Desai also has a talent for skilfully weaving satire, absurdity, playfulness, and mysticism in one thread. Desai's narrative is reminiscent of R. K. Narayan's popular hero Raju Guide from the novel of the same name. He too like Sampath accidentally made to give up the material world without any hidden agenda. In contrast to Raju, Sampath embraces the monkey kingdom in the verdant guava orchard, implying that he is close to the wild and primordial environment. Incredibly, a twenty-year-old boy with so many opportunities for his future walks away from this planet. A self-absorbed gesture and fixation with daydreaming were seen by the simple-hearted villagers as a sign of spiritual sublimation, and they quickly extended their faith and devotion in Sampath's newly declared status as a 'Sadhu' or 'Tree' Baba. Sampath had a positive impact on those who lacked the education to recognise anything strange or absurd in his actions or remarks. Sampath's fame was elevated even further by the day he identified Mr. Singh's face among his flock of followers and questioned him: “Is your jewelry still safely buried beneath the tulsi plant?”

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the novel maintains an incredible balance of comedy and satire from beginning to conclusion. And whatever we had left was more than justified by the novel's beautifully structured ending. The plot, which had previously been infused with humour, finished with a very serious and persuasive tone, perfectly aligned with the novel's central

concept. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is undeniably a bizarrely fascinating novel. The novel is a wonderful blend of imagination and reality that sometimes overwhelms our senses with heavy dodges of laughter, and other times with a soft shower of reality wrapped up in a firm satire. Kiran Desai embraces it, adding, "I do feel very close to this book in one way, but the book is very much a product of my imagination as well. It is a comedy and it is satiric in many ways I think, and it's fantastic.... I think anyone with a sense of humor would enjoy it." Kulfi's love of food introduces us to the author's personal passion in cooking and food. The author's individuality remains intact while mixing humour and seriousness. Kulfi's growing stomach as a result of her pregnancy, as well as her selling of clothes and jewelry to satisfy her eating desires, all contribute to the creation of a good piece of humour. The author has successfully revealed the goals of a middle-class family through well-placed humour, and for that, we are grateful. The novelist has used everything carefully, including the juxtaposition of opposing sets of characters, an old list of spices, clever use of imagery, local words and phrases, and combinations of food products. Ultimately, this novel provides an incredibly insightful and sometimes heartfelt look at the paradoxes and contradictions of small-town Shakhkot life amid a guava orchard.

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