

# Evolutionary Search for Self: Kiran Desai's Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard

Mrs. K. Shenbahapriya<sup>1</sup>, Ms. M. Jamuna<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MA., B.Ed., M.Phil., Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science, Theni

<sup>2</sup>MA (English lit), Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science, Theni

**Abstract-** Hullabaloo tells the story of Sampath Chawla born in a middle class family, who has no achievement to his credit for which he is constantly reprimanded by his father and derided by the society. His feelings of claustrophobia and sense of alienation with his milieu lead to the renunciation of present existence for the life of ascetic in the tree. Here comes into play the element which Kiran describes as 'Exaggerated Reality'. The mundane background and characters are transformed into something unique, having their own identity by Desai's rich imaginative colouring and perceptive humour. Everything seemingly normal is a bit off the track. The influence of American writers, particularly those belonging to the South like Truman Capote and Flannery O'Connor whose bleak and quirky humour appealed to her, can be seen in her work.

**Index Terms-** reality, claustrophobia, sense of alienation, etc.

## INTRODUCTION

Shahkot, the setting of the story has been compared to R.K. Narayan's Malagudi which formed the pivot around which diverse tales revolved. What Desai was looking for, however, was 'for some place to set down Sampath, this chapter desperately in search of the larger picture just so he can merge with it'. It is ironical that Sampath should establish this connection in a place at some distance from Shahkot, but the reason is obvious. The small town with its close-knit ties where every neighbor is aware of the other's doing, is a place where news travels fast. It's this constant involvement of others in his life that increases the sense of restriction and suffocation that makes Sampath yearn for freedom. He felt as if "they had conspired to build a net about him to catch him and truss him up forever. Their questions ate away at him. His head ached, and so did his heart. It was a prison he had been born into".

Shahkot is visualized as a pervasive force, affecting and altering the life of its people, subduing them to its will. The book begins with a description of the onslaught of summer heat on the town-people. Just as Shahkot intervenes in the life of its residents, it also asserts itself to link its destiny to the destiny to the rest of the world, 'the larger picture'. So a remote Indian town traces the cause of famine to the volcanic activity in Tierra del Fuego and the solution to the drought is also sought from foreign quarter. A newspaper headline proclaims, "Hungarian musician offers to draw rain clouds from Europe to India via the magic of his flute". The fact that Sampath was born in the year when famine struck Shahkot linked him inextricably to Shahkot's history. It will not let Sampath go – first his parents, then the residents and even the monkeys follow him to the orchard.

Sampath's parents offer a study in contrast and provide insight into middle class life and attitudes. The father is the head of the family and constantly motivates his son to do something worthwhile in his life. A clerk in a government office, the father is also in search of a bigger canvass, trying to realise his ambition through his son. His efforts are reduced to insignificance as Ammaji, the grandmother, and Kulfí, Sampath's mother, have little concern for his career. On one occasion, exasperated, by the frequent interruption while he is engaged in a serious talk with his son, he tells his mother "what do you care if the sky falls on your grandson's head so long as he has a Gulab Jamun in his mouth? No wonder the boy has turned out like this, spending his life at the bottom of the ladder". He is able to perceive the business opportunities that have arisen from his son's increased popularity in the aftermath of the tree-climbing incident.

The father's effort to take the son in hand is foiled by the protective maternal instincts of the women of the house. This scene is being constantly displayed in many Indian households. Desai handles the theme with panache and deliberately disinvests it with cumbersome seriousness. Yet behind the light and frothy treatment there is an incisiveness of view which cuts across layers to probe the truth inside. The unstinting love and faith that the grandmother has for her grandson is touchingly depicted. She strongly defends Sampath's failures in these words: "But the world is round...wait and sees. Even if it appears he is going downhill, he will come up out on the other side. Yes, on top of the world. He is just taking the longer route". Her faith in the cyclical pattern of the universal design is confirmed as Sampath finally achieves fame and adulation.

Desai's interest in the aberrations and the eccentricities that manifest in human beings are seen in her presentation of Sampath's mother Kulfi. In her family insanity had bubbled up through generations. So, when peculiarities like her obsession for food and sleep-walking became noticeable her parents knew that the errant genes had showed up in her. Her gradual insanity is poetically described, "...her sanity dissipating, the sense scattering from her like seeds from poppy pod".

It's through Sampath that she relates to the outside world, for in him she sees a reflection of herself. The sense of not knowing oneself and the mind being full of dark recesses is something that cannot be understood, but only experienced. Thus she recognizes the desperation of Sampath and his sense of constriction when the rest of the family force him to come down the tree. She remains usually wrapped up in herself and thus is the sole character who has no necessity of relating to the larger picture. In this sense her oddities and eccentricities are a blessing in disguise, for they give her completion which the rest are fated always to aspire for. It's also the reason for the confidence which makes her emphatically pronounce on Sampath's behalf "let him be" and the rest of the family accept her decision. It's the acceptance of human frailty that one need not be always striving to become something else. The theme of transformation or evolution which is suggested by Sampath climbing the tree and the Simian-human link is thwarted by Kulfi.

Actually, man's great error depends upon unreal objects. If a man thinks, "I cannot lead a good life without these objects which are born and perish," is one's prime error, one being a fragment of God, is real, while all the things of the world are kaleidoscopic, therefore, they are unreal. The real never ceases to be viz. the real always exists without any shortage. The unreal has no existence viz. the unreal is ever changing. When the unreal things seem to exist, they are perishing at that time also. Therefore, the essence of the two (the real and the unreal) has been perceived by the seers of truth.

So, the reality lies in perceiving things and 'Sampath' of Kiran Desai in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is out of the mirage of unreality. The wheels of his chariot make full circle while on the voyage of spirituality and thereby he gets the centrality of the reality so far un-divulged. The story of Sampath is the predicament of modern man, heavily crushed under the heavy burden of time, circumstances and society, striving blindly and achieving nothing.

#### REFERENCE

- [1] *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Kiran Desai, Viking Penguin India Ltd., in association with Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1998.