

ALTERATION OF SAMPATH IN HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD

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ABSTRACT

Kiran Desai, daughter of well known novelist Anita Desai, is the youngest of the immigrant writers, has gained an intimate understanding of the ideas, ideals and various life styles of Indians. Her maiden novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in 1998 and emphatically announced her arrival on the literary scene at the age of 26. The novel is slow to get into but soon catapults into a world of Sampath Chawla, born in a middle class family, who has no achievement to his claustrophobia and sense of alienation with his milieu lead to renunciation of present existence for the life of ascetic in the tree. This paper is an attempt to present the transformation of evolution which is suggested by Sampath climbing the tree and how the whole event has been commercialized by his father.

KEYWORDS: Immigrant, Claustrophobia, Alienation, Evolution, Alliteration, Atheist

INTRODUCTION

Indian fiction in English, especially from the later half of the 20th century onwards, betrays a discernible shift in terms of creative writers of the West. The first generation settlers had the problems of identity, recognition and reconstruction. The second generation too, in spite of their Western upbringing continually experience estrangement and discrimination. Kiran Desai, daughter of well known novelist Anita Desai, is the youngest of the immigrant writers, has gained an intimate understanding of the ideas, ideals and various life styles of Indians. She highlights to comic proportions, the incongruous blending of the Eastern and Western modes of life and writes about the on going social battles in the present day India. With rare expertise Desai describes the head on collision between the tradition and the modern, and the confusion that follows in the wake of these collisions. Kiran first became an object of attention in 1997, when she published in the New Yorker and in Mirror Work an anthology of fifty years of Indian writing by Salman Rushdie *Strange happenings in Guava Orchard*, was the closing price. Her maiden novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in 1998 and emphatically announced her arrival on the literary scene at the age of 26. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* has won her a Betty Trask Award, and is a different version of India, following the delicious social comedy, the novel deals with Indian social problems, within the typical family setup. The novel emphasizes the positive and energetic features of Sampath Chawla and his family.

The novel is slow to get into but soon catapults into a world of Sampath Chawla, born in a middle class family, who has no achievement to his claustrophobia and sense of alienation with his milieu lead to renunciation of present existence for the life of ascetic in the tree. Here comes into play the element which Kiran describes as 'Exaggerated Reality.' On a superficial level Sampath has sainthood thrust upon him. But here the saint is not troubled by the doubts that plaque the saint in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* a saint who finds himself swinging between the two polarities of sinner and saint. But there is no tension in the minds of Sampath as to what constitutes real sainthood nor is the novelist attempt for the true definition or description of a true saint.

The mundane background and characters are transformed into something unique, having their own identity by Desai's rich imaginative coloring and perceptive humour. The theme of transformation of evolution which is suggested by Sampath climbing the tree and the Simian-human link is thwarted by Kulfi (Mother). The Monkey Baba or Sampath, is an eccentric lad who at the wedding of his boss's daughter "with a style particular to himself, one by one he let the saris and dupattas draped about him fall." (Desai, p.41). In the full glare of light and guests, he could disrobe imagining that he had provided an evenings entertainment. Sandwiched between the nagging demands of an ambitious father and an insane mother, Sampath climbs up a tree in a whimsical mood.

"Before him he saw a tree, an ancient tree, silence hell 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. Hoisting himself up, he disturbed dead leaves and insect carcasses and all the bits of dried up derbies that collect in a true." (Desai, p.49)

And once he had ensconced himself comfortably on the branches of the guava tree, Sampath felt "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." (p.51). It is not the inhabitants of the Shahkot who proclaimed him as Baba, but the hard sell attitude of the father Mr. Chawla, that is responsible for the series of events that lead to his being hailed as Baba.

Hullabaloo enter the Guava Orchard as a crowds flock to seek the new Guru. Some come out of curiosity and others to see enlightenment or redresses of their problems. Here, Sampath's father is able to perceive the business opportunities that have arisen from Sampath's increased popularity in the aftermath of the tree climbing incident. "Sampath might make his family's fortune. They could be rich! How many hermits were secretly wealthy? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere!" (p. 68). And from that moment of realization, Mr. Chawla plans out each detail of the process of making a 'Baba' of his son. The Monkey-Baba himself does not assist in his process and exhibits no predilection for executing his father's plans. He just wants to be left alone but begins to enjoy all the attention that the family was now showering on him. "Nowhere was he waving at them as if he were a Raja wishing to be left alone." (p.71)

Gradually, he grows in a self esteem and thus "ensconced in his Orchard bowes, still not quite able to believe, the serendipitous way things had turned out. Sampath gave what came to be known as "The Sermon on the Guava Tree." (p.72-73). Very soon there is direct barb at the gullibility of the middle class devotees, who believes that Sampath's ascent to the tree has elevated him spiritually. Even his former colleagues at the post-office like Miss Jyotsna, who were familiar with his absurdities becomes his followers after his revelation of several incidents of their life which they thought was secret. This sudden power of clairvoyance with which he is able to mesmerize his audience is due to his sly reading of other people's letters at the post-office. Sampath obviously relishes the adulation and takes his role as the guru dispensing enlightenment very seriously. By the method of using trite examples he tries to allay the doubts and questions of the people. Thus, to a woman who wants to keep her son away from bad company he says:-

"Add lemons to milk and it will grow sour..... But add some sugar, madam, and watch! How good the milk will taste.... You yourself know you behaved just like your son when boy were young." (p.74)

The spurious and unscrupulous holy men who dupe their credulous believers are a fact of our society. The spy from the Atheist society represents rational view and has his opinion of Sampath. The people venerate Sampath, because of their need to believe in his transformation and he gives them assurance of their link to the larger frame of

things. It's the idea that he represents that they can't let go, that man cherishes this link because he is afraid of being an anonymous speck in the scheme of creation.

The monkeys are the next badge of pilgrims to the orchard, the ultimate destination of the residents of Shahkot, whether man or animal. The group is led by the notorious cinema monkey who had terrorized the cinema going public. They are tank aback by a man in the tree and quickly identify him at the centre of the bountiful offerings of the devotees. Sampath too established rapport with them, and for the first time in his life, he experiences a sense of completion. His abode in the Guava tree had given him a perspective-neither too high nor too low - on life which suited his philosophy. There is a period of equilibrium when all things are in perfect balance with each other.

This harmony does not last as the tenuous man - nature relationship and man's accord with one another comes under increasing threat. The transformation theme courses to a period of discord after peace. Firstly, the monkeys became addicted to alcohol and in drunken sprees assault people for liquor and destruct their property. Man too becomes determined to eradicate them. Secondly, Sampath's idyllic existence is temporary. His beloved monkey's are sought to be removed. Then Mr. Chawla plans to build a concrete structure befitting the 'Tree Baba' and proposes to dislodge him from tree. He also plans to embark on his favorite project of educating Sampath in higher philosophy as he cannot keep saying 'silly things forever'. Unknown to Sampath a member of Atheist society and 'BUFHM' (Branch to uncover fraudulent Holy Men) is determined to expose him by posing as a disciple. In short, same situation of curtailment and confinement faces Sampath again.

Desai introduces a whole array of characters, which will plan the removal of the monkeys from the orchard, strongly reminiscent of the pied-piper of Hamelin scenario. There is the D.S.P. who had "placed his unpleasantly greasy head under Sampath's toes and felt bathed in pure holiness..." (p.115), a C.M.O. who is himself sick most of the time; Vermaji an expert in human-langur intercourse whose own wife doesn't communicate with him; a Brigadier, whose solution to all the problems is annihilation. There is also the district collector, who on one hand respects Sampath and on the other plans the 'Operation Monkey', against his wishes. All the characters therefore display a divide in their psyche; the existence of contrary things in their being. The forces are clearly arranging themselves against Sampath.

It seems that Sampath's search will be rendered futile but something unexpected happens. The monkeys pursued by the army pause on Sampath's charpoy in the tree. The moment stretches infinitely as they gaze intently at a guava fruit lying on it instead of Sampath. The only clue is, to its past being a brownish mark resembling his birthmark. Clutching it the cinema monkey bounds off with the rest of the group. For Sampath it seems, it is capable of innumerable transformation in the search for the larger picture. He is linked to a 'gust of wind that comes out of nowhere and melts into nothing like a ghost.' He has shed his physical persona and like wind or ghost has merged into the surroundings. This transformation of Sampath is perhaps his last one for when he is absorbed into air, the all encompassing life of all beings; nothing further remains to aspire for. Nothing and nowhere denotes "end to all possibilities." Desai's success lies in her descriptions of the antics of the Simian companions that the Baba has and which really are responsible for his being called the Monkey Baba or the Tree Baba. Even *The Times of India* has an article on him under the headline "The Baba of Shahkot in his Tree Abode."(p.119). At last the Monkey Baba disappears and we are left with only "A crack! A howl! A watery splash!" (p.209)

CONCLUSIONS

Thus we can say that the alteration of Sampath Chawla started from the period when he became Monkey Baba further reflects the personality connected to monkey who enjoyed and wanted his life to be like monkey. The drastic thing in his life was how a normal boy became a saint and further was the source of earning member in his family as Mr. Chawla attempts to utilize his son's eccentricity of sitting upon a tree and to make a fast luck and is indicative of contemporary society's ability to commodify everything and finally was exposed by member of Atheist society and 'BUFHM'. The alteration of Sampath Chawla can be seen as the pathos of familial misunderstanding, the ridiculousness of hero-worship, the unpredictability of commercialism and the ineptness of official dom.

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