

Normal Abnormality: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Magical Realism

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Abstract

Kiran Desai, the daughter of the celebrated novelist Anita Desai, has written two novels *Hullabaloo in the Guava orchard* and *Inheritance of Loss*. In this paper, a study of the employment of Magical realism in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is undertaken. This paper consists of four parts. First part deals with Kiran Desai and her works. In the second part, the plot of the novel is given. In the third part, the narrative is studied with reference to magical realism. In part four, conclusion is given.

Key words: Indian English Fiction- Kiran Desai-Magical Realism- Abnormal happenings - God Men- Naïve Public-entertainment value - Indian ethos

Life & Works of Kiran Desai

Kiran Desai was born in 1971 in New Delhi, India. She is a distinguished Indian women novelist in English during the present century. She is the daughter of Anita Desai who is one of the most prominent Indian women novelists in English. Kiran Desai has two novels to her credit till date - *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* which was published in 1998 and *Inheritance of loss* published in 2006. She has won the Betty Trask award for her first novel and the prestigious “Man Booker Prize” for her *Inheritance of loss* in 2006. She became the youngest ever woman to win the Booker Prize at the age of 35. she lives in New York city. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* deals with the theme of fake sage hood in which “magical realism” is employed to unearth the Indian faith and sensibilities. *Inheritance of loss* is about colonialism and the effects of post- colonialism. It is about the loss of identity in alien lands and about the westernized Indians who have lost their traditions and cultural inheritance.

Plot:

Kiran Desai has acknowledged in an interview that the story of an Indian, Kapila Pradhan who took shelter in a tree and lived there for nearly fifteen years was the inspiration for her to write *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. She adopted the plot of sage hood in the contemporary time to expose how Godmen con the public that willingly succumb to it. The plot shows the rise of Sampath Chawla from the position of a sorting clerk in the post office to the status of a hermit/sage and his mysterious ending that only magical realism can unravel. As she has acknowledged that she is an avid reader of R.K. Narayan, she could have drawn influence from Raju of *The Guide*.

Shakot was reeling under unprecedented heat and draught. Sampath Chawla was born on a rainy day. He grew up as a weakling and as he is good for nothing, he starts work as a back room, sorting clerk in the local post office. As he is weak in structure and melancholic by nature, he is not paid much attention and his abilities are under estimated. Sampath Chawla is a mediocre boy who has made no significant progress in his studies. He lacks ambition to do anything to promote his career. His father, Mr.Chawla, gets him a job in the post-office in Shahkot after many an effort. He fails to fare well in his job as well. Hence his father rebukes him every now and then on account of his carelessness. His sister joins her father in humiliating him further. Instead of sorting mails, he spends his time opening them secretly and reading the contents. Sampath is more interested in reading the mails of others as people and their problems interest him to a great deal. He finds this assignment that he has taken up on himself quite amusing. He strips himself naked to the annoyance of every one in the wedding party of his superior officer’s daughter.

And slowly, deliciously, feeling it was the right thing to do, Sampath began to disrobe. Horrified shrieks rose from his audience. However, in this flushed moment, he mistook them for cries of admiration.... He tossed the garment

in to the air like a hero throwing away the rag with which he has cleaned the weapon that will kill his enemy. As the shrieks grew in volume and intensity, he lowered his hand to his pants. 'Stop him,' shouted Mr D.P.S., and several people rushed forwards. But Sampath climbed deftly on to the highest tier of the fountain and, in one swift movement, lowered both his trousers and his underpants. His back to crowd, he stuck his brown behind up into the air and wiggled it wildly in an ecstatic appreciation of the evening's entertainment he himself had just provided. (P.41)

Little does he understand that this is going to cost his job. But eventually that happens and he is left in the lurch.

Sampath Chawla undergoes a deep sense of frustration and annoyance. Therefore, he decides to leave his family once for all. When the members of his family have gone out, he escapes from his house and boards a bus. When the bus slows down near an orchard on a hill, he alights suddenly and runs towards a guava tree. He climbs the guava tree and settles down on a branch, all these on a sudden frantic impulse. The people of Shakot find this queer and the news about the man on the tree spreads. This news spreads across the town and the amusement starved public throng to see this man on the tree.

His parents become worried about him. His father attempts to persuade him to return home but ends up in failure. He consults a doctor and a priest on the advice of the latter, he makes arrangements for his marriage. Yet he is unable to make him get down from the tree.

In the meantime, he is mistaken for a sage by a group of pilgrims. This news is also published in the local newspaper. As a result, Sampath's image as a sage spreads like wild fire near and far, everywhere in the town and around. Consequently, the number of visitors and his followers multiply rapidly. His father takes advantage of Sampath's popularity and cashes in on the situation by way of constructing stalls and rooms for the visitors in the orchard. Besides, the number of monkeys roaming near the guava tree increases manifold. It causes nuisance to the visitors. Hence the district government authorities are assigned the task of keeping a check on the monkeys to protect visitors and save Sampath. All think, especially the government authorities, that it would be fine if Sampath could be brought down from the guava tree. In the operation that ensues, Sampath gets lost as the monkeys carry away the metamorphosed Sampath and flee from the orchard into the distant hills. Sampath has transformed himself into a big guava fruit.

Magical Realism

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard is a satire on the tradition of sage hood which has undergone a serious degradation during the post-independence period in India. It is evident in the emergence of false-sages and their exploitation of the public in many places in our country. The plot attempts to trace some factors which lead to the emergence of false sages and the consequences of such events.

Magical realism could be explained as a mixture of the following ingredients that create a semblance to reality, remaining magical and fantastic at the same time. By blending real life incidents and characters with that of the magical, the writer creates an illusion of every day reality and with his language felicity, he makes it all the more realistic. Salman Rushdie is celebrated as the high priest of the genre in India as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Juan Rulfo, Isabel Allende and Gunter Grass in their respective literatures of their languages and nation.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines the term as below:

Magic realism - a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the 'reliable' one of objective realistic report designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach beyond the confines of realism and draw upon the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a strong contemporary social relevance. The fantastic attributes give to character in such novels-levitation, flight, telepathy, telekinesis- are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often-pharmasmagoric political realities of the 20th century.

We shall study the employment of the following in the novel - elements of folk lore and fantasy, Metamorphosis, Hyperbole, Carnival, Satire, and hypocrisy - so as to bring magical realism employed.

Shahkot was reeling under summer heat. People started attributing reasons beyond the reach and bounds of realism. "Funny reasons are attributed. Iraq attempts to steal monsoon by deliberately creating low pressure over desert provinces and deflecting winds from India.(P 1). As rains were much needed, people started toying with the idea of

making it rain. “Hungarian musician offers to draw rain clouds from Europe to India via the music of his flute”. (P.1) The scientist at the university Vermaji “invented a giant fan which he hoped would attract the southern monsoon clouds by creating a wind tunnel moving towards north towards the Himalayas, and he petitioned the Electricity Supply Board for enough power to test it. (P.2) Many such methods were contemplated but to no avail. Kulfi, (the name as Desai reveals in the interview that she is fond of kitchen) pregnant in spite of the summer heat, developed a ravenous hunger to which she was subjected to even as a young unmarried girl.

Meal after meal of just rice and lentils could not being to satisfy the hunger that grew inside kulfi; she bribed the vegetable sellers and the fruit sellers and the butcher with squares of skill, with embroidery, a satin petticoat, an ear ring set in a gold, a silver nutcracker, bits of her dowry that nothing left to give her anyway. By then, her hunger was so fierce, it was like a big, prowling animal. In her mind, aubergines grew large and purple and crisp, and then, in a pan, turned tender and melting. ladyfingers were flavoured with tamarind and coriander. chicken was stewed with cloves and cardamom. she thought of chopping and bubbling, of frying, slicing, stirring, grating. (P.5)

She ate more and more unsparingly. This reminds the readers of Tita, the protagonist of *Like Water for Chocolate*. As if hunger and the consequent gluttony were not enough, she started to draw and draw everything everywhere in an ecstatic manner.

Sampath’s birth itself is described in a magical realist manner. “Look!” Kulfi shouted. “Here comes the rain”” (p.9). And it rained in such a way that the so far draught hit Shahkot was almost drowned and the relief planes had to come and drop food packets to its citizens. And at this auspicious time when roads were made into rivers and people were struggling to award off water getting into their houses “Sampath was born. As his face, with a brown birth mark upon one cheek” (P11). Sampath means good fortune and indeed it turned out to be so!

On the day of the birth of Kulfi’s child, there is a change in the climate. ...She is the first to announce “Here comes the rain.” Subsequently, it begins to rain heavily bringing about joy among the people of the down. This instance is symbolic of suggesting the birth of Kulfi’s first child as it is evident in the following:

The birth of Sampath is recorded thus:

She felt her muscles contract as a clap of thunder echoed about her. Again, the thunder roared. Kulfi, soaking wet, opened her mouth wide and roared back. Below her, the ground had disappeared, ponds formed, joined to make lakes and ran down streets to make rivers. Rivers took the place of roads. (P.10-11).

Sampath grew up as a hopeless fellow. His father, with great difficulty, got him job in the ost office. His lack of interest and crankiness cost him the job. After Sampath left home and sought refuge in the guava orchard making it his abode, People throng the guava orchard more in numbers as the days pass by. It became a thriving tourist spot, a holy centre and a business hub. This clearly exposes people’s interest in carnivals

Even buses thundering up the highways en route to farther destinations began making regular detours for their passengers to view the famous Baba... The path of Sampath’s tree had been widened and was swept clean and sprinkled with rose-water; a small ladder had been set against the trunk so those interested, in asking for blessing (and everybody was interested, of course) could climb up to the spot where Sampath dangled his legs. With his toes placed reverently upon their heads, they would claim his blessings and descend feeling smug and rather proud. Other arrangements had been provided too. Ammaji had been put in sole charge of a tea stall operating from under a bit of canvas sheeting attached to four poles...Near the tea stall, Mr Chawla managed a small cart. Here, while also keeping his eye on everything else, he sold flower garlands, fruit and incense... (P.93-94)

The above passage, in a satirical but realistic manner shows how people are so very gullible to the extent of seeking blessings from a good for nothing fellow.

Sampath himself has become a God man. But his family goes to another fellow seeking remedy for Sampath’s ills. Here is irony at its peak. That false sage suggests marriage for Sampath. Besides, the holy man give some instructions to Mr. Chawla while selecting a bride for his son. The requirements prescribed the hypocrisy of the society. Accordingly, the girl should belong a good family. Her personality has to be pleasant. Her character should be decent but not be shameless and bold. She should be obedient by way of keepingeeyes and head lowered. Her complexion should be fair failing which she should bring additional dowry like a television, a fridge a Godrej steel cupboard and a scooter. The prescription continues in an endless fashion. If all these qualities arefound in a girl, that can girl can

be chosen for Sampath through the arranged marriage system.

It is at this juncture a turning point takes place in the narrative in which Sampath is transformed from a madman into a hermit. Sampath identifies a few people among the pilgrims and reveals their personal matters. Those, who are identified, feel surprised and come to the conclusion that Sampath is not an ordinary person. They regard him as a man with supernatural powers. It creates a sense magic which is evident in the illustration as under:

In desperation he looked around him. Among the crowd of faces down, he recognized that of Mr. Singh, the brother-in-law of a neighbour is Shahkot. Mr. Singh, whose letters he had sometimes read in idle moments in the post office. As if in a frantic plea for help, he shouted: 'Mr. Singhji.' He remembered one particular letter sent by him to his father. 'Is your jewelry still safe buried beneath the tulsi plant? Mr. Singh turned pale. 'How do you know about my circumstances?' he asked. Sampath then caught sight of Mrs. Chopra. How is that lump in your throat that travels up and down your windpipe, whispering threats and almost bursting right out of your chest? (HIGO, 66)

In hearing this, Mrs Chopra is also taken back. She wonders as who has told him that she suffers from hiccups. Sampath gains more strength on discovering that Mr. Singh and Mrs Chopra are wonderstruck.

This is witnessed by the newspaper reporters. A modest column is written about Sampath in the newspaper the next day. Sampath's behavior is interpreted as that of an unnatural spiritual nature and as a mixture of unfathomable wisdom. This news is responsible for promoting the image of Sampath as a holy man. After this news spreads across the town, the orchard becomes, the ashram of Sampath who is treated as a wise sage. The narrative hence forth is filled with fantasy and humour indicating the use of magic realism.

The first person who takes the advantage of Sampath's fame as a sage is his father, Mr. Chawla. He, who kept of degrading him for his backwardness in education, employment and for his strange behavior of not leaving the guava tree, treats Sampath as the fortune of his family. Mr. Chawla's attitude of opportunism is noticeable in the illustration as shown below:

Sampath might make his family's fortune. They could be rich! How many hermits were secretly wealthy? How many holy men were not at all the beggars they appeared to be? How many men of unfathomable wisdom possessed hefty bank accounts? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere! Already there was a change in the way people looked at Sampath! no longer did they snigger and smirk or make sympathetic noises with their tongues. He, Mr. Chawla, must move as quickly as he could to claim these possibilities for his family, possibilities that stretched, he was sure, well beyond his sight's furthest horizon... He stopped berating Sampath for having climbed up the tree, and turned his attention to other matters. (P.68)

Mr. Chawla acts quickly and converts the place into a business centre. Instead of bringing Sampath down from the tree, they ensured his comfortable stay up there itself.

Thus Sampath was gradually provided with all sorts of comforts and, the more elaborate his living arrangements, the happier he was. He made a lovely picture, seated there amidst the greenery, reclining upon his cot at a slight angle to the world; propped against numerous cushions; tucked up, during chilly evenings, in a glamorous stain quilt covered with leopard-skin spots, chosen by Ammaji in the bazaar. On his head, he sported a tea-cosy-like red woolen hat, also given to him by Ammaji, who had knitted it and raised it to him on a stick. He was particularly fond of his hat, for it kept his head snug and warm at night when the breeze was chilly, and it kept the night rustlings, the crawling of little black beetles, ants and moths, out of his ears as well. (P.70)

Water is sent up in the buckets to the tree with which Sampath bathes himself. It is followed by breakfast which pinky herself takes to Sampath by climbing the tree. Thus Sampath is pampered by all members of his family as he has emerged as a big source of income.

The role of Kulfi is given prominence at this juncture. She undertakes the responsibility of cooking food exclusively for Sampath. Unlike in the past, she is absolutely free now to experiment with any sort of dish she likes. She regards the old method of cook as wrong and she tries the methods her visions indicate. There is an element of magic realism in this instance as it shows that the passersby feel that the mere smell of Kulfi's cooking provides them fulfillment. The following illustrates this thus:

Almost all day she worked, trying this and that, producing, even in these days of apprenticeship to her imagination, meals of such flavor and rarity that others could merely guess at what they were missing by the smells that rose from

her pots, so intoxicating them by evening's end that they had barely any recollection of what had passed when they departed from their audience with Sampath. They felt filled, though, with a sense of magic and well-being. By the look of Sampath, he too was permeated with a similar feeling, but to a much greater degree. His cheeks grow slowly plumper day by day; his tense, worried expression melted into one of contentment; the soft movement of the days and nights rising and falling about him were gently reflected in his face and his eyes mirrored the quiet of the distant hills. (P.79)

Kulfi's search for jungle birds for cooking for Sampath is depicted with humour and fantasy. It is well known that the sages are vegetarian in India. But Sampath is portrayed to eat meat in the narrative in order to satirize the false-sage hood which is prevailing in India during post-independence period. Kulfi lays traps in the forest and catch birds. Her behaviour is characterized by strangeness of fantasy is employed in presenting it. Her movements inside the forest for the birds appear like magic which is evident in the illustration provided as under:

Far in hillside roamed a lady responsible for Sampath's nutrition, a tiny figure on the crest of the university research forest, disappearing and reappearing among the trees, emerging at the point where the forest bordered the fields so as to check the cane traps she had set for pheasants and other water fowl. They lived in the forest but ate from the grain crops and were as fat and delicious as wildfowl could be. When she spotted one in the trap, she pounced upon it and, without flinching wrung its neck with a grip of iron. The profusion of greenery and space exhilarated her. And while it reduced her son to a happy stupor, it incited her to a frenzy of exploration. (P.100)

She moves into the deep forest fearlessly. Indeed, the goat herders are surprised to see a town woman like Kulfi moving into the dangerous and deepest parts of the forests. Kulfi is obsessed so much with the meat of the birds and roots in the wild that she treads into the forest every day and brings water fowls or partridges. She cooks them and serves the food to Sampath whose image is that of a holy man now. This depiction contradicts the Hindu tradition. The aim of this factor is to evince the sharp degradation of the tradition of sage-hood in India.

It is at this juncture two mysterious things happen that bring everything to an end - i.e., the disappearance of Sampath and the spy. It is depicted like the disappearance of objects and persons in magic.

Firstly, the instance of Sampath's vanishing is undertaken for elucidation. On the scheduled day for chasing the monkeys from the orchard, the task force of army and police arrives. Mr. Chawla reminds Sampath that the team has already arrived. Kulfi leaves the location of the guava tree and moves into the forest. Sampath notices the last guavas of the season in the tree with a glittering shine. He plucks one guava and speculates about its flesh inside. He sits holding the guava without any movement. Subsequently Mr. Chawla, Ammaji and Miss Jyotsna realize that Sampath is not there on his cot in the guava tree. Sampath seems to have vanished. His disappearance is presented with a tinge of magic realism thus:

They looked here. They looked there. Up and down the guava tree. In the neighbouring trees. In the bushes. Behind the rocks. They started up into the branches again and again, into the undisturbed composition of leaves and fruit bobbing up and down. Its painfully empty cot. But wait! upon the cot lay a guava, a single guava that was much, much bigger than the others: rounder, star-based, weathered... It was surrounded by the silver langurs, who stared at it with their intent charcoal faces. On one side was a brown mark, rather like a birth mark. 'Wait' shrieked Ammaji. 'Give me that fruit. Wait! Sampath! Sampath! But the Cinema Monkey picked up the fruit himself before anybody had time to move and, calm-eyed and wise, holding it close to his chest, with the other monkeys following in a band, he leapt from the guava tree's branches and bounded away. (P.207-208)

Sampath metamorphoses. The cinema monkey picks it up and flees from the tree followed by other monkeys. They travel higher like a strong and mysterious wind and disappear with the guava. Kulfi notices them a while later but they vanish from her eyes also. This magic like instance is depicted as follows:

High in a mossy magnolia, gathering orchids, Kulfi was caught up for an instant in a shaking storm, saw a pale blur flash past her. She stood up on the branch where she had become a guava though the mysterious being sitting, shielding her eyes against the rays of the sun, to watch at the monkeys climbed on. Up into the wilderness, up to the shoulder of the highest mountain. Here the trees at the very summit wavered for a moment, bowed their heads as if in farewell and they were gone. Without a trace. (P.209)

Secondly, the spy, who has devoted his entire time and energy to detect the truth about Sampath, also vanishes in a strange manner. When arrangements are made by the army and the police to capture the notorious monkeys, the

spy hides himself in the orchard to discover the fact about Sampath. When the operation force approaches the guava tree, he also climbs a tree stealthily to observe what is going to happen. At the bottom of the tree, Kulfi's cooking pot is ready on the local stove of fire woods. When Sampath vanishes, the spy also disappears suddenly. The depiction of this resonates with realism. Hence it is illustrated here thus:

The sound reached Kulfi in her tree. She turned back downtowards the valley. 'What was that?' 'Did you hear?' Pinky fired at the Brigadier with her beautiful big eyes.

'Did you hear that sound?'

'What was that?' asked Mr. Chawla and Ammaji, the army men and the policemen, the devotees and towns people. Despite themselves, they drew their attention from the mountain top. Above Kulfi's enormous cooking pot hung a broken branch. In the pot were spices and seasonings, herbs and fruit, a delicious gravy.

And something else. (P.209)

There is a clue that the spy might have fallen into the pot. He was moving from one branch to the other to observe the operation to capture monkeys and get Sampath down from the guava tree. He settled on a branch under exactly which Kulfi's cooking pot was boiling with the spice. The branch might have broken due to which he must have fallen into the pot. What is to be noticed is that the spy has also vanished now.

Conclusion

The analysis of the narrative in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* shows that Sampath undergoes a transformation from a hopeless little boy to an ordinary post office clerk and then into a powerful holy man. The depiction of Sampath's mother before her marriage and Sampath's birth foretells that Sampath is going to become a great person in the future. After twenty-four, Sampath comes to be viewed as a holy man. His interaction with the visitors evinces the employment of fantasy and surrealism. At the end of the narrative, the portrayal of Kulfi's strange behaviour and the disappearance of Sampath and the spy reveal that they are presented in the mode of magic realism. The narrative defies social realism by adopting magical realism. Hence *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* could be treated as a novel of magical realism.

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard has been examined in the light of Magical Realism. It is very much evident in the depiction of Sampath's mother, Kulfi and the circumstances related to the birth of Sampath, the Godman to be. She behaves in a peculiar way - over eating, night walking and her discovery of the bag of clothes and food is an example of magic realism. Sampath's revelation of the secrets of his followers are also in the form of magical realism. His mysterious and sudden disappearance surprises the readers like magic.

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