

SAMPATH'S ALIENATION, DISPLACEMENT AND A CRAVING FOR WORDSWORTHIAN SOLACE IN NATURE IN KIRAN DESAI'S *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD*

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Abstract

Daughter of celebrity novelist Anita Desai, Kiran Desai has written two novels namely Hullabaloo in the *Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss* so far. Though her second novel won the prestigious Booker Prize, her first novel is no less remarkable. It has won the Betty Task Prize, serialized in the New Yorker and been included in the Vintage Book of Indian writing. It is remarked by Salman Rushdie as lush and intensely imagined. In this novel, Desai has raised issues like the credulous creation of gurus, certain forms of religiosity, self-involved families, the inefficiencies of the public services, the excesses of the entrepreneurialism etc. Some of her raised issues are of a more existential character such as life's limitations and the pressures of society. The present study has subsequently tried to explore Desai's diasporic anxiety of displacement, loss of identity and yearning to belong to roots as reflected in her protagonist Sampath, though in a different manner. A modest attempt has been made to analyse and explain Sampath's alienation, loneliness and suffering in commotion and his deep longing for solace in natural world of peace and contentment. Sampath experiences a sense of alienation from his family, his neighbourhood, his society and his city. His suffering leads him to a new land of peace and isolation viz. the world of nature devoid of hullabaloo.

Desai voices out the environmental issues through Sampath's love for nature, his oneness with nature and his empathy for the degradation of nature. It leaves a baffling question to our minds whether Sampath's withdrawal to the woods is a search of illumination or it is an escape and freedom from any social bonds and responsibilities.

Keywords: Diaspora, Displacement, Identity, Alienation, Solace

The term Diaspora is derived from the ancient Greek word means “sow over”. According to Cohen, “Diasporas can be characterized as being of a mass nature with catastrophic origins and as having been dispersed from an original centre to two or more foreign regions” (Cohen 2008, p. 9). Displacement has no replacement and this is the reality of diaspora (Tiwari 2011, p. 1). A diasporic writer’s criticism of the reality of home reaffirms the longing for their lost home, though in an inverted manner (Kirpal 1989, p. 6). He must necessarily “deal in broken mirrors” (Rushdie 1991, p. 11). This may result in the loss of “first-hand knowledge of economic, political, social changes..”(Parmeshwar 1976, p. 43). Desai left India at the age of eleven when “India was quieter then, with a closed door economic policy, the world arrived only through books, and they meant everything”(Rochester 2012, p.1). Desai’s second novel ‘The Inheritance of Loss’ tells the story of two different kinds of diasporas-one of undocumented, ...and the other is an aging, elitist cluster of Indian professionals (Yadav 2012, p. 398).

In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, however, Dislocation and voluntary exile are problematized, as they become signs of privilege rather than the reason for nostalgia and homesickness. Desai portrays her protagonist Sampath as a day-dreamer who is fed up with busy town life, full of meddlesome people and eventually turns towards nature to find a Wordsworthian solace in it. Nature to Wordsworth was an unfailing source of joy and purest passing. He thought that man can find in nature an endless source of educative, moral and spiritual influence. Every object of nature has an animate existence. Desai’s Sampath, a failure everywhere, at home, at school, and at work; seeks a life of peaceful contemplation. His search leads him to beautiful guava tree in an attractive orchard. He sits on the tree and vows like Calvino’s Baron (Calvino 1977, p. 54) never to touch the ground again. His dream to become a part of nature comes true.

Sampath’s Loneliness: A Hierarchy of Eccentric Displacement

Sampath has inherited this eccentric displacement from his mother Kulfi who has inherited this familiar strain from her mother’s side of family. As a young girl, her mind was full of dark corners, her looks were strange and unrecognizable and she showed desperation on being enclosed by an enormous wall. As a somnambulist, she walked barefeet by the bottle brush trees, eating fruits like a queen enjoying midnight feasting. But she woke refreshed as having sound sleep with no memory at all of her nightly walk:

In the mornings they discovered apple cores and walnut shells under her bed...In her pockets they found bits of cinnamon and asafoetida. In her hair, little twigs and often a crushed night beetle. But she woke refreshed, with no recollection of her nightly rambles.(Desai, p.63)

She always sought a little quiet in her house after marriage. In her pregnancy also, she was desperated for another world, a new landscape:

to everybody but herself.....in desperation for another landscape,...she began to On her face, about her mouth and in the set of her chin was an expression intent and determined but yet far away and distant, as if all her thoughts were concentrated upon a point invisible draw...(Desai, p.4)

Kulfi could never appease her wild dreams with her tame life in Shahkot. But in the orchard, like Sampath, she discovers the relief of space. She feels a wave of understanding the landscape like she understands her son without any need of conversation or to construct a connection:

She felt she was on the brink of something enormous. All around her was a landscape she understood profoundly, that she could comprehend without thought or analysis.(Desai, p.78)

Kulfi feels an emotional bonding with Sampath not as mother and son but as someone who also feels rest in the lap of nature. When she finds her son sitting on the tree, she feels her emotions shifted in him and merely says:

“let him be.”(55)

While Sampath’s dejected family members oppose and protest his shameful decision of choosing guava tree as his abode and even try doctors and bridal, Kulfi thinks orchard to be the right place for him; this is where he belongs. She resembles the peace settled on his face while sitting among the leaves with the exquisite peace on his face at the time of birth in the midst of chaos. She decides to take care of Sampath’s nutrition in orchard with every possible wild animal or bird and spices available in those natural surroundings. She prepares her intricate meal like a chaos of ingredients and dishes sometimes involving hundred ingredients.

Sampath’s Craving for Freedom

As soon as Sampath is born, he is destined for greatness by family and friends, with the advent of historic monsoon ending years of drought with silver miracle of rain and food packet (famine relief) falling as a birthday present. This perforated sheet of greatness shreds bit by bit as he grew up not reaching to the level of any expectation, resulting his terrible waking at night and his practical and scheduled father calling him ‘a cross between potatoes and human being’(26). He gets a job at post office with his father’s influence. There he remains isolated and spends hours steaming open letters written to and from his neighbourhood, thus knowing and pondering over private matters of their lives. The humiliation he has experienced and sense of underachiever force him to feel inferior in front of others. Failure to cope up with practical society and a craving for another world lead him towards sufferings, agitation and agonizing:

Up and down, back and forth. He walked to calm himself, as you would walk with a baby who cries and cries and cannot sleep. (Desai, p.16)

On the wedding day of his officer Mr. D. P. S.’s daughter, in search of terribly interesting thing, he enters a room piled with wedding finery and as a box full of sweets, he wraps fabrics and jewellery around himself. Slowly, deliciously and with a majestic wave he tries to get rid of worldly attachments (fabrics and jewellery) in front of all guests and hosts, resulting his dismissal from post office. His surroundings appear to him like pieces from a jigsaw puzzle, detrimental to his mental health. He prefers his freedom than his meal.

The same days. The same place. The one road -
The post office at the end of his journey like a full stop.
He did not want another job.
He wanted open spaces. (Desai, p.44)

He feels lonely like Sai feels in The Inheritance of Loss (Jaggi 2010, p.115). Whereas Sai yearns to be part of a family full of love, warmth and activity, Sampath wants to be a part of external nature full of affection, warmth and solitude.

Nature’s Opulence of Placidness Satisfying Sampath’s Imagination

When Sampath is leaving his world around Shahkot, a world that made its endless revolutions towards nothing, he feels himself of:

Snakes that leave the withered rags of their old skins behind and disappear into grass, their presence un –betrayed by even a buckle in the foliage; of insects that crack pods and clay shells, that struggle from the warm blindness of silk and membrane to be lost in enormous skies.(Desai, p.48)

He is attracted by an ancient tree standing in a wild old orchard and feverishly begins to climb, clawing his way from branch to branch. As soon as he settles among the leaves, the rapidly growing spirits responsible for carrying him so far away, fall from him and melt into nothing. A wave of peace and contentment overtake him as he conceals in the branches of that magnificent guava tree. The warmth of November afternoon sun, the music of soft rustling of plants, the fragrance of poppies and fruits, the sight of leaves a shade darker than the fruit and the bark, a delicate and smooth peeling off of yellowish brown colour over a milky paleness, branches growing into each other yet not obscuring the sky filled with a vivid jewel green spirited flock of parrots, with its thick and crowded leaves – all this appear to him very charming and elegant. It satisfies his auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinaesthetic as well as visual sensations. It matches something to his long sought after imagination which He has always dreamt:

Myried green skinned globes growing sweet-sour and marvellous upon a hillside with enough trees to fill the eye and enough fruit to scent the air. (Desai, p.50)

He imagines himself a king and all this natural bounty his riches. He painfully tries to swallow it whole in one glorious mouthful to make it an inseparable part of his existence. He wishes to exchange his life for that opulence of placidness and tranquility. Alienated from his family, he begins to listen to them like Raka, alienated from her great-grand-mother, begins to listen to the winds (Swein 2000, p.134). He wants to know everything in that orchard: each small insect, the smell of the earth, the bristling of leaves, way through the foliage trying to pronounce every difficult word correctly. Like a precious jewel, he holds a green, gold and ripe guava against his cheek so as to feel its wounds and scars and on having tasted finds it the most wonderful tasty guava.

Saturation in the Lap of Nature

Having desired to withdraw from any social responsibilities and bonds, this place appears to him the right place. Sampath's craving for another world finds solace here. He assumes himself one with nature. He imagines himself declaring to his ashamed family:

'I am happy over here...I am adopting a single way of life. From now on I have no relatives.'(Desai, p.53-54)

Having spent some days in this long desired natural abode, he fills saturated and permeated to a great degree:

His cheeks grew 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. (Desai, p.79)

Sampath's past habit of reading letters at post office turns him, in the eyes of devotees to be omniscient, a rare spirit who knows all sort of things. With mysterious preaching's, he fills his audience with a sense of magic and well-being. A local news bureau introduces Sampath with a modest column:

'...According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom.'(Desai, p.67)

Gradually, with his inexplicable teachings, Sampath becomes unexpectedly famous as a hermit and the number of his visitors increases day by day. His chronic daydreaming is reinterpreted as a life of spiritual contemplation (Bipinchandra & Chauhan 2013, p. 44). Even his news is printed in The Times of India, together with the headline 'The Baba of Shahkot in his Tree Abode' reading Sampath's rare simplicity and deep wisdom 'bringing solace and hope to many disheartened' (119). During moments of devotion, his devotees too like to sit in that pleasant,

magnificent and pure surroundings enjoying sprinkling of wild flowers with the colour and fragrance of fruits without any familial bounding and responsibilities.

How beautiful the Himalayan foothills were! How bountiful and lush!

Butterflies fluttered through the landscape, tree pies and flycatchers flew from tree to tree, lizards sunned themselves on the tin roof of the watchman's shed, sliding down in a stupor during the warm afternoon, and the breeze rustled the leaves.(Desai, p.98)

Even his sister Pinky who always feels ashamed about Sampath's ways and criticises him every now and then; now weighed by the feeling of fragility of life, starts to like Sampath as well as his natural home:

She spent hours sitting under Sampath's tree, in a private cocoon within which she indulged her every thought, wrapping herself in endless imaginings, endless ruminations, snapping in quite an uncharacteristic way if she was interrupted.(Desai, p.110)

Wreckage of Natural Lovable World

All these events leads practical and money-minded Mr.Chawla to a quick and incredible realisation of business possibilities in Sampath's sitting on a tree and his strange and enigmatic preachings to multitude; thus indirectly taking first step in wrecking Sampath's new lovable natural world by making elaborate arrangements amidst the greenery.His grove does not resist the invasion of commercialism and the economic exploitation of false gurus (Reis 2008, p. 170). Arrival of the band of monkeys contributes further in that wreckage. Though Sampath and some of the visitors are happier about the monkeys' arrival and seeing Sampath's charming them; his family members are quite unelated with this onslaught- grandmother foreseeing trouble in their nasty qualities, Mr.Chawla mourning for not being able to sell and resell the offerings, Kulfi worrying about her kitchen and Pinky being reminded of the insurmountable Kwality Hungry Hop boy. As soon as the impressed monkeys identifies Sampath as the central part of that orchard, he is not merely accepted, but is endowed with elevated status. In reference to his fondness for animals and the simplicity of his dwelling place, his disciples starts calling him 'Monkey baba' or 'Tree baba' affectionately. In his secluded hours, sitting upon the string cot, he spends his time making sophisticated images of birds, animals and insects with his fingers and musing over them. He thinks of:

Human beings with bird-beak noses, people with swan necks, cow eyes, bird-heart terror or a dolphin's love for the ocean. People with sea-water tears, with bark-coloured skin, with stem waists and flower poise, with fuzzy-leaf ears and petal-soft mouths. (Desai, p.122-123)

When alcoholic monkeys begin to rummage with a new recklessness as if a resumption of their old bazaar habits, Sampath's father tries to convince him for a proper concrete structure but he rejects his idea entirely. The tree with its smooth and silvery branches stretching wide and far has become an important part of his life. It is his long desired home and sitting here, he has been able to see the world in absolute clarity for the first time. The sifting and flickering sunlight at daybreak treats him as something liquid instead of solid being. And the hills around him rises to warm and white sky.

He felt weightless here, rocked by this lambent light, lapped by the swell of flower and grass, of leaves as rich as fruit, being warmed to their different scents. (Desai, p.143)

As a visual proof of his father's silliness, he spots a beetle crawling out of an aberration, 'antlers sprouting from its head and wisps of wings like transparent petticoats' (128). All insects around like butterflies, bees, beetles and caterpillars and all creatures made from leaves and flowers appear to him very beautiful:

He watched an endless parade of them, wriggling, hopping, flying by, emerging as if from the bubbling pots of a magician, with the flicker and jewelled shine of ... of what? Of the essence of wind and grass? Of sunlight and water? (Desai, p.128)

Seeing his father's determined face filled with a mission to chase away monkeys, he is very much grieved and sympathise with monkeys who were quite unaware of all the plotting and planning against them:

Poor, poor monkeys... And poor, poor myself... What would happen now?
(Desai, p.144)

They are his perfect placid companion. He thinks that he is incomplete without them. He is getting fond of them. He imagines:

All the fun would disappear from his life: the teasing, the games, their naughty behaviour- their shamelessness and outrageous charm. (Desai, p.142)

Commotion and Hullabaloo Disintegrating Peaceful Orchard

Sampath, worn out by the discussions about monkeys by devotees and family, sweeps away by a surge of anger as a substitute of leaping, throwing, yelling and bursting. The breeze sounded about him, seems to him sharing his concerns and thus shushing and soothing him:

He tried to surrender himself to its gentleness, to its quiet, to the coolness that moved like a tender hand over his forehead, his cheek, his entire body. (Desai, p.160)

When Sampath first arrived in that orchard, he had made a small collection of his most precious items in an old tin can. His mind was completely filled with the thought of those things at that time. Now feeling a little uneasy with the hullabaloo in the orchard, he tries to tempt himself with his once great obsession:

A red velvet-backed spider; a tall, thin seed case...; an orange bead of resin; a snakeskin; a bit of bone; feathers of various colours; soft silk cotton silk; the furry cape of a moth; a whorl of sepals; a leaf, diseased, freckled blue with fungus.. (Desai, p.164)

The shouts of the hysterical and bewildered crowd beneath his tree make him quite nervous, close to tears. He feels fiery rage. It seems that crowd is attacking him, claiming him and dirtying the air around him. He remembers, regarding the remains of his precious collection, how he had spent hours stringing necklaces of seed pods, putting flower behind his ears and unzipping pods with his teeth. He had become engrossed in those activities:

He had tickled his heel with the razor edge of wild grasses, rubbed his feet against a bit of bark...squeezed the sticky gum from shrubs, cut into stems so the sap ran like milk...tapped another heavy with pollen so they spilled their rich yellow cargo on to his fingers and he had dusted this richness over his eyelids... (Desai, p.167)

All this commotion, uproar and shouted slogans disintegrated once peaceful orchard into a sorry state. It starts becoming more and more like city life with ugly advertisements defacing the

neighbouring trees and a smelly garbage heap behind the tea stall. This life he has tried to leave behind for ever:

The buzz of angry voices and the claustrophobia he had associated with life in the middle of town were creeping up upon him again. And now they were getting rid of his favourite company in the orchard.(Desai, p.181)

There are no more talks, no more gentle evenings; there is no more laughter.

Sampath's Anguish for Degrading Surrounding and Flee to Distant Natural Place

Sampath now sits miserably nervous in his tree. Like Ishwar and Omprakash in Rohinton Mistry's "A Fine Balance", he feels being caught in an inescapable dilemma, between two worlds- native one which he abandoned and other which has lost its charm (Goel 1998, p.57). He recognizes the old feeling of being caught in a trap and tries to escape from all advertisements, noise and dirt, cars and buses and trucks which so dirtily defaced his beautiful landscape. Mr.Chawla has noticed this transformation:

The way his son was slipping back into his old silences, into his old opaque and unhappy manner, the way his eyes were loosing his quiet, contented look and glazing over. His good humour and his sense of fun had disappeared altogether,..(Desai, p.179)

He wishes the crowd to take their filthy minds away and leave him to his peace and quiet, to his beloved monkeys. He thinks of his old miserable life in the post office, of the people milling around him and he feels as ill and nervous as on the day of some official inspection. At last, he falls in a state in which he was unable to think or hear anything. He is practically ill with worry, unable any more to sleep and eat:

Sampath stared up into the mountains, tilting his head all the way back, to look upon where there was not a trace of civilization...There were no villages, no houses, no people...Just sunlit forest and rock, and the living rough white water.(Desai, p.185-186)

On Monday, the last day of April, the day chosen to execute the plan to catch all the monkeys in one go, Sampath sits in the guava tree just after midnight surrounded by absolute stillness. This impersonal darkness seems him more comforting than a crowd of devotees paying sole attention on him. It works a soothing effect on Sampath as he felt his muscles relaxing, his thoughts being calm and a strange power entering into him making his senses sharper. He could hear every tiny sound in the night:

The stirring of a mouse in the grass, the wings of a faraway bat' the beckoning scent that drew the insects to hower and buzz somewhere beyond the orchard. Underground, he could hear water gurgling... he heard the breathing of the leaves and the movements of the sleeping monkeys.(Desai, p.203)

He picks one ripe guava and began to consider over its contents philosophically. He sat in this state quite still, pondering his plan of escape from the ugly sea of humanity. His empathy for his maladroit and clumsy surroundings at Shahkot had brought him to this peaceful orchard. And now, when this orchard itself has become a picture of hurly-burly rumpus and commotion, he can no longer stay here. Sampath reflects the degradation of nature from its glorious path. He, who once felt happy for his environment in the orchard, later regrets for its absurd transformation. Like Kersy in Rohinton Mistry's "Tales from Firozshah Bagh", he is forced to run from one space to another in search for peace, happiness and permanence (Tikkha 1998, p.

52). For the good for him and also for the good for monkeys, the birds and insects and even for the grass that is behind so carelessly trampled under-foot, he flees from this orchard to some unknown distant place devoid of any civilization where he can find solace in the lap of Nature.

Thus, the novel is a marvellous satire on the superstitious mentality pervaded in Indian society. Kiran Desai's narrative exuberance and acute sense of diaspora is praiseworthy. She takes the elements of irony and playfulness to the extreme so as to criticise or comment on the foibles of the Indian society. She accomplishes the task of portraying displacement with subtle characterization, meaningful but never portentous details. The sleeping town Shahkot comes alive when Sampath Chawla, a middle-class purposeless post office clerk, tries to escape his repeated failures by climbing a guava tree and gaining recognition as a hermit. In a brilliant pioneering study, she outlines her protagonist Sampath's sense of suffering with the hectic town life and his flee from the place to be alone with nature. The peaceful orchard is opposed to the city, which stands for duty and the claustrophobic atmosphere of both the post office, his work place and his home, 'hot and stuffy'. In the lap of nature, Sampath's puzzled mind get relaxed. He finds the tree as an appropriate home for him. The company of nature illuminates his soul. It becomes clear that it is not some kind of social detachment which forces him to flee to nature. It is that belief of Wordsworth that nature can perfectly play the role of mother, teacher, guide, friend and philosopher. It suggests the vulnerability of natural havens.

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