

**DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE IN KIRAN DESAI'S *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD***

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*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, in a satiric mode, brings to light the dark side of human nature in various aspects of Indian life. Satire is one of the most practiced modes to expose the social ills, moral dilemma, eccentric behavior, religious fanaticism and pernicious age old customs and traditions of a society. Unlike the past satirists like Swift, Fielding or Dryden, Kiran Desai, as a post modern novelist, highlights the dark side of human nature by the interplay of fantasy and reality. She presents a kaleidoscopic picture of Indian culture, tradition and ethos, the various strata and walks of life and its hustle bustle which down the ages have attracted the attention of the west, although the India of her writings is not like that of Rushdie's 'imaginary homelands' that most of the expatriate writers tries to have it in their works. Thus the dark side of the institution of marriage, rusty functioning of various government sectors, diseased condition of the department of health, lethargic police department and its superintendent, unwieldy bureaucracy, impractical hypothesis of the university teacher and so on, are delineated with a slice of razor sharp wit, tongue in cheek humour and coded criticism in this novel. Hutcheon appropriately says "Satire is extramural (social, moral) in its ameliorative aim to hold up to ridicule the vices and follies of mankind, with an eye to their correction"<sup>1</sup>, which is the inner significance of Desai's brilliant literary debut.

Kiran Desai, one of the greatest novelists of worldwide critical acclaim, is the youngest woman ever to win the coveted Man Booker Prize in 2006. Born to an affluent family in Chandigarh (India) in 1971, she left for England almost at the age of fourteen and then went to America where her creative talent began to blossom. She takes keen interest in going through the Indian novels in English. In particular, she has developed a great deal of fondness for the novels by R.K.Narayan.

Even as a daughter of Anita Desai, a fiction writer of international repute, Kiran Desai has charted a territory of her own. In her debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, the fire of fertile imagination sweeps through one page to another. Salman Rushdie in his *Minor Work: An Anthology of Fifty Years of Indian Writing* heaps lavish praise on her language, voice, psychological and social insight, imagination and narrative skill, and describes this 'impressive' debut as 'highly original book' and 'lush and intensely imagined'. Emphasizing its exquisite fun on the surface and brilliant satire in the deep, one critic treats this novel as "a hilarious tale with a

smattering of Rushdiesque flourish”. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s unbiased admiration of this funny satire, immaculately crafted with perfect lexicon and heart warming language is worth noting: “A delicious blend of human and magic, hilarity and wisdom and unexpected poetry, Kiran Desai’s language will delight you after you turn the last page”. It won her the “Betty Task Award” a prize given by the society of the author for the new novels by the citizen of the Commonwealth Nations under the age of thirty five.

Kiran Desai’s second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* that earned her the prestigious Man Booker Prize, was published in 2006. Commenting on this novel, Kiran Desai says, “This book is better than the last but certainly don’t think, it is perfect. It is the hardest thing to write a perfect book for that reason.” Reviews of this novel, featured in the *The New York Times*, *BBC News* and *The Guardian* describe Kiran Desai’s 2006 novel as a literary work grappling with the issues of “globalization” and “multiculturalism.” Pankaj Mishra, laying tremendous emphasis on the relevance of this creative work in the present era, hails it as “the best kind of post 9/11 novel” much as it has its setting in the mid 1980s. Owing to its vivid account of multifarious human issues, it is described by Hermione Lee as “a magnificent novel of human breadth and wisdom, comic tenderness and powerful political acuteness.” It is “a globalised novel for a globalised world”<sup>2</sup> holding a mirror up to the multicultural diversity of the new millennium with engaging panache. Her second novel, as mentioned by both Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry, secured her place with the enormously acclaimed contemporary Indian authors who explore life and society in India and across the globe. As a result, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* gains in overwhelming popularity in the reflected glory of *The Inheritance of Loss*.

In her *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, a book of rare humour and craft, she exposes the commonplaces and oddities of Indian life in a fabulist mode and witty style. While gaining a genuine insight into social fabric of India, she sheds light on the faith of simple village folk in the tone of a satire and farce. Her lively imagination and remarkable descriptive skill give the novel a humorous touch that amounts to breathless excitement in readers. This novel reflects upon the ‘alternate realities’ of life, animal world and man as the supreme power, who gains the perception of looking beyond the realities of everyday life. Nature in this novel is a powerful symbol, a representative of the fantastic world which is not only constantly desired by man but also drastically misused. Individual culture, society and their relationships have been objectively analyzed by the novelist with special reference to myth, history and society in the postcolonial India. Delving deep into the dramatic progress of novel reveals interestingly new relations that are held up to ridicule as though to heighten its satiric humour. The novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* paves the way for her confidence to flourish ‘in the making of mosaic plot and endlessly struggling creatures caught in currents of lucid pulls in her second novel’<sup>3</sup>.

The dark forces in human nature is working its way out of conscientious restriction round the clock to achieve its self centered motives and wrongly desired ends that amount to dangerous social, cultural, political or financial repercussions. Emerson, describing the dark side of human in his ‘Lecture on War’ emphasized it thus:

We surround ourselves always, according to our freedom and our ability, with true images of ourselves in things, whether it be ships or books or cannon or churches. The standing army, the arsenal, the camp and the gibbet do not appertain to man. They only serve as an index to show where man is now; what a bad, ungoverned temper he has; what an ugly neighbor he is; how long his hope lies.

Our world is largely made by selves, and what we have made of the world is then, in a sense, a portrait of ourselves, as stamped on the sensitive materials with which we live. Walker Percy while shedding light on the seamy side of human beings says:

But what happens when one feels in the deepest sense possible that something has gone wrong with one's very self? When one experiences the common complaint of the age: the loss of meaning, the purposelessness, the loss of identity, of values? What happens when a person comes to believe that his very self is also the appropriate domain of "them," that is, the appropriate experts of the self?

The vivid descriptions of everyday Shahkot reminds us of R. K. Narayan's Malgudi. The drudgery of the common, and the pleasure of the petty achievements strikes resemblance with portrayal of Narayanic character, however much Desai's character differs in terms of their hypocrisy and double standards. Magic realism is the cardinal force throughout this novel with a perfect mix of the fantastic with the realistic. Thus Shukla and Chandra say "The intricate balance, with which the language has been used to describe various levels of realities not only delights but also makes the readers aware of the finer sensibilities and differences in a very genuine manner."<sup>4</sup>

In this novel, Kiran Desai holds upto ridicule those personnel who are indeed a wolf in sheep's clothing. They are the people of blatant hypocrisy and treacherously deceptive appeal with a scant regard for ones conscience, moral fibre, genuine commitment and social obligation. As Leo Tolstoy says "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Most of the characters in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* fall prey to the dark forces, and when there is no constraints on one's actions, it rears its ugly head.

Kulfi's total disconnect from the norms of the society like a social reject, lands her in daydream and frustration. During difficult period of pregnancy, she does not turn to her husband or mother in law 'but rather to the walls that cage her'<sup>5</sup> That she is, to a large extent, divorced from reality remains unchanged in the new situations of Guava Orchard. Kulfi seems as if she was rarely reaping any benefit from the hullabaloo, she was, though, enjoying herself the most. Taking it as a kind of relief from the duties and responsibilities of social and familial life on the whole 'freedom from traditional middle class parameters'<sup>6</sup>, she makes every efforts to provide creature comforts for Sampath, strange and eccentric as they are to a person of healthy mentality. In addition, wrapped up in 'high imaginary flights and her exotic curries'<sup>7</sup>, she continues her job of keeping Sampath within his comfort zone in the face of adversity. Her laissez-faire attitude and overindulgence in useless things make her feel thoroughly at ease and strangely elated in the Orchard that, for others family members, becomes the hotbed of trouble, stress and anxieties as to how to settle Sampath. In a devil may care expression, she revels in the things:

Here in the Orchard, the hold of other people on Kulfi and her awareness of the retreated even further and like Sampath she discovered the relief of Space.(p.78)

She shows no concern nor any discernment for others, which is, in all seriousness, a matter of considerable repulsion and regrets.

All round her was a landscape she understood profoundly that she could comprehend without thought or analysis. She understood it like she understood her son...Pinky was a stranger to her... But Sampath she knew. She knew why she was sitting in a tree...(p.78)

Mr. Chawla, in spite of his close association with the strenuous schedule and rigorous integrity of a bank job, makes every effort to cash in on the erratic behaviour, eccentric body language and bizarre comments of Sampath who intoxicatingly charms the audience by revealing some of their jealously guarded secrets. Conservative in nature, Mr. Chawla raises vehement objection to the way Pinky behaves and dresses. Frowning upon her dressing sense, he instructed her to be 'in least ostentatious' fashion. That persons of such orthodox life style and non-conformist attitude can think of business possibilities of 'making money out of his son's lunacy' is a matter of crying shame. He thought:

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 an unfathomable bank accounts? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere!( p.68)

B. Mahanta in his article , "Kiran Desai's Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard: Some Exorticism" comments on it. He says " It effectively exposes the weird sense of propriety and logic of the middle class Indian . The Indian sense of religiosity is Desai's main target of satire. In India anything sells in the name of religion. Religion in fact is the most lucrative business here, and involves the least number of risk factors...Desai vividly brings out the skill and *modus operandi* of the making of a saint in our country. There are full proof business tricks involved in the trade complete with productions advertisement and selling arts from recycling of coconuts to picture post cards of the baba to limited visiting hours, everything is well laidout, and money pours into Chawala' bank accounts from all possible sources.<sup>8</sup>

It is nothing but a blot or the adverse side of Mr. Chawla's personality.

Despite the fact that Sampath is indeed dull, unenthusiastic and treated by his father as 'an absolute good for nothing,' it is his cunning or rather malicious intent to delve into others dark secrets through letters that catapulted him to overnight success and fame as a hermit or monkey baba in the tree. By revealing some secrets, he manages to beguile the people into believing his intricately misleading appearance that he has clairvoyance- the ability to tell others past and future.

Among the crowd of faces, the brother in law of a neighbor in Shahkot. Mr. Singh, whose letters he had sometimes read in idle moments in the post office.....He remembered one particular letter sent by him to his father. 'Is your jewellery still safely buried beneath the tulsi plant?'

Mr. Singh turned pale.(p.66)

Consequent on such developments, people including Jyotsna showed enormous reverence to him. Either in the work of post office or wedding ceremony he feigned interest and succeeded in escaping others eye, although, at heart, he was nursing a dark spirit to pry into others personal lives.

Pinky, Mr.Chawla's daughter and Sampath's sister, considers herself modern, fashion conscious, updated and completely au fait with current trends, though, in reality, she is no better than an ignoramus, when it comes to responding a new if odd situation. She prefers to use 'sulking technique to achieve her ends'. The assistance, offered by Hungry Hop boy against threatening monkey was face saving to her, and she treated it as his daredevil act. She fell head over heels in love with him but the way she expressed her love is an instance of perverted mind:

"Seeing him she is filled with a rush of elation and rage. How placid and smiling he was! For a minute, she thought she might kiss him, but the

vein of aggression pounded powerfully within her and she bit him instead. She bit his ear so hard that the Hungry Hop boy shouted out and his voice boomeranged about the town.”(p.113)

It seems as if biting ‘his ear so hard’ is an expression of her intense love, fierce desire and dangerous passion for the Hungry Hop boy who, subsequently, falls victim to Pinky’s weirdest approach of whirlwind romance. Her inferiority complex in the company of her grand mother and cavalier attitude for Hungry Hop boy while in police custody speaks volumes of her elusive and volatile character.

In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, the way the prospective bride is selected and brought to Sampath is a matter to be discussed and debated at great length. The stringent criteria, set for an ideal bride in the novel is ludicrous and utterly demeaning to woman. The physical structure or exterior beauty matters the most. This is as follows:

She should not be fat. She should be pleasantly plump with large hips and breasts but a small waist (p.58)

Generally woman is considered to be an emblem of pity, purity virtue, wisdom and knowledge in Hindu Vedic culture. They are as though the incarnation of Goddess Saraswati or Durga. The inner spiritual values outweigh the exterior physical beauties of a woman. In sharp contrast to Shakespearean woman, the woman here is treated like an object or a tamed animal. The materials that she brings with her to the in laws decides her fate and future. Precedents of this sort are at their most dangerous, when they are not an exception but a rule, relegating the woman to endless suffering being at rock bottom of social hierarchy nevertheless. In the novel, the would be bride’s condition is alarmingly deteriorated due to inhuman treatment meted out to her for her awkwardness to climb the tree and make an impassioned appeal to Sampath to accept her as his wife.

The devotees raised the girl’s rigid unwilling form into the tree . Up’ they urged and slowly she began to climb...Losing her balance, she tumbled indecorously towards the ground. (p. 60)

However, the bride faces notoriously apathetic situations, as she falls from the tree, and the superstitious rather than try to heal her trauma, physical and psychological, add insult to her injury. They had no qualms about casting aspersions on her falling from the tree and sneezing as a consequence, and at the same time subjected her to mental agony calling these incident as an ‘inauspicious sign.’ Thus she suffers the worst tragedy just owing to negative perceptions of human nature. A tinge of this lackadaisical attitude towards woman is also strikingly marked in the selection of a bride for Hungry Hop boy.

As regards the Indian cinema and its audience, the author fully exposes the cold facts of people’s especially the young mass’ vulgar taste. As a matter of fact, the cinema is a copy of society, mirror of truth and reflection of life, and the young has a lot to learn. They have to read, understand and analyse the very essence of Indian life through cinematic art and use it for their own revaluation and reformation. Instead, for them, cinema becomes the reservoir of frivolous sensual pleasures. They have stooped to such a low that they regard it as a means to douse the fire of their animalistic passion and satisfy the constant voyeuristic hunger. Thus, the visit to the cinema hall,time and again, meets their most desired ends:

The crowds nicknamed the heroine Thunder Thighs and went again and again to see her cavort in the famous waterfall scene.(p.85)

This holds the mirror up to the evil intentions and dark formless danger lurking in the brain and sick mentality of the people. When it comes to religion, the Indians are on their toe to put up a strong fight, probably unmindful of what the root cause is. Religion is the lifeblood of Indian culture. To be bitterly divided on the issue of whether or not the monkeys should be disbanded or driven off from the guava orchard based on religious lines, is no longer strange to this country. People here makes an issue out of nowhere. It is appropriately mentioned:

The battlelines had been drawn and everybody even remotely associated with the dispute felt compelled to involve themselves and make their voices heard. Sampath was forgotten in the fray... (p.158)

In one way or other, many express their affiliations for this particular cause, and take side, more often than not, at their own peril. As a result, agitation starts, protests are held, unrest spills over into varied areas and its impact spreads across the country like a wild fire.

The devotees made their way back down to Shahkot only to continue their arguments there, the sounds of their raised voices buzzing over the valley, rising from tea stalls, balconies and street corners. (p.160)

A society like Monkey Protection Society taking its cue from Cow Protection Society, is formed to vigorously champion its cause, although it may serve no purpose and often lead to a disastrous end. This is indeed the seamy side of being doggedly adhere to a particular set of beliefs without rhyme or reason. Such obnoxious mindsets, unless thoroughly checked, will prove dangerous for Indian ethos that gives considerable credence to peace, non violence and selfless service to humanity.

In absence of Mr. D.P.S the head of the post office, the officials ought to work diligently. Working in a government sector is a matter of prestige and dignity, and ones working style need to fall in line with that standard. Indian post and Reserve bank are reputed for their impeccable integrity. There is no corruption in this sector, if there is any, it is to the utmost minimum. Nevertheless, there is a dereliction of duties observed in Miss Jyotsna and her male colleague, Mr. Gupta, as they were altogether engrossed in flirtatious talk and ‘gossip mongering’ capitalizing on Mr. DPS’ absence. Such indiscipline is seen even in bank when Mr. Chawla is given ‘extended compassionate leave from work’ in order that ‘he would have enough time to see if his secrets plan for Sampath and indeed for their entire family could work’ (p.80). This is what goes on in a workplace.

‘Don’t you ever look in the mirror?’ he teased. ‘Look and you’ ll see that I am right. As always. ‘He winked. Will you be my fashion consultant for the wedding?’ She laughed as well. Clearly you know much more than me. (p.31)

This is nothing but clear display of their blithe disregard for official rules and regulations, much to the angst of the customers. This mind set is infectious, and spreads across all echelons of powers and positions, when there is no rigorous restrictions or monitoring system. As a head of the post office, Mr. D.P.S is entrusted with huge responsibility to maintain the official decorum. He has to keep a close eye on the employees of the post office. There is a difference between personal work and professional one. In no way should personal dealings poach on the preserve of professional space. That Mr. Gupta makes the best use of his Assistants for his own daughter’s wedding to serve his own purpose really indicates his cavalier attitude for his duties and responsibilities which indeed is his dark side.

Police utter inaction against Pinky after being aware of her connection with Sampath notwithstanding her brutally insensitive treatment to Hungry Hop boy, gives a clear indication of police ineptitude for the job.

The ferociously ambitious spy fails to achieve his goals due to his grave inexperience and immaturity. Being a spy requires special skill and training. Switching from a non-challenging job of teaching to a most daunting task of spying without skill and knowledge or test and training in the hope of wide recognition and driving ambition may be deadly dangerous, if not pursued and handled with caution. It happens what, once, was feared. Bewildered by his dark vision, the spy lost his life in this mission.

The dark side of unweildy bureaucracy plagued by red tapism has been exposed in the novel. Against the backdrop of driving off the monkeys, there is no consultation and coordination, among the officials while devising the strategy, thus giving rise to a slew of failed measures.

Voicing serious concern for undermining the valued ethos of contemporary society at every levels, Desai manages to satirise the dark side of human nature, ‘ugly face of materialism’<sup>9</sup> ‘entrepreneurialism and the credulous creation of gurus’<sup>10</sup> and the parochial aspects of Indian culture.

*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* serves as “barometers of human responses to social forces”<sup>11</sup> and paints the grim picture of ills and wrongs in Indian society in graphic detail. A brilliant literary debut rooted in Indian culture, this novel proves to be a work of a gifted writer. Thus Sunday Telegraph appropriately observes:

There is so much to admire in this charming book, dainty in its construction but ballasted by real emotion, that to call Desai a young writer of promise would do her a disservice. On this showing, she is already the finished article.<sup>12</sup>

## NOTES

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