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ENTROPY AND EQUIPOISE: SATIRE ON THE ELEMENTS OF
SOCIETAL DISHARMONY IN KIRAN DESAI'S HULLABALOO IN THE
GUAVA ORCHARD

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Abstract

This paper unravels the satirical subtleties of Kiran Desai's novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. It analyzes the follies and vices of different characters and of society as a whole from social, political, and religious point of views. Kiran Desai, in this debut novel of hers, satirizes corrupt mindset and practices prevalent in the different domains of Indian contexts. Special narrative techniques and literary style of Kiran Desai help her achieve the desired effect in this novel. For analysis, this paper mainly relies on the methods of analysis based on 'Discourse Structure and Point of View' as suggested by Leech and Short (2007).

The substantiation of the theme(s), issues and characterization in a novel largely depends on its analysis of narrative structure and different viewpoints expressed in it. The patterning of a novel helps in ascertaining the time and the space, and point of view forms the basis of a character's intention and potential. These contribute in getting a better understanding of a novel. Though, the sustenance of a novel is viewed in terms of the issues dealt in it, it is the particular narrative style which paves the way these issues are to be understood and ascertained. Readability of a novel and reliability of its characters' intention, attitudes and their viewpoints regarding a particular aspect become easier to comprehend if the narrative technique used in the novel is compatible with its narration.

In the light of the above discussion, the present paper analyses the narrative technique(s) Kiran Desai has adopted in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, and tries to infer different ideological, sociological and psychological viewpoints to examine and evaluate the elements of satire in the novel.

Writing a satire requires special literary genius and narrative techniques and Kiran Desai, from her debut itself, is critically acclaimed for her unique style of narration. Sunita Sinha and Bryan Reynolds, in the introduction of their edited book *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai* (2009), giving paramount importance to Kiran Desai's literary genius write: "With Kiran Desai, a literary tradition is reborn" (xv). Salman Rushdie, even before the publication of Kiran's first novel, had a very high opinion of her. He writes:

... her arrival establishes the first dynasty of modern Indian fiction. But she is very much her own writer, the newest of all the voices, and welcome proof that India's encounter with the English language, far from proving abortive, continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts. (qtd. in Kellman 260)

And commenting on the prose style and narrative ability of Kiran Desai, Pankaj Mishra writes: "Desai's prose has uncanny flexibility and poise. She can describe the onset of the monsoon in the Himalayas and a rat in the slums of Manhattan with equal skill" ("Wounded by the West"). Desai really deserves such critical acclaims.

Kiran Desai's debut, the *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) (hereafter *HGO*). is written in a simple form of narrative. The story is told in third person narrative in a straightforward way. Written in presentational and psychological sequencing, the novel is structured on the basis of cause and effect. The *Daily Telegraph* appraises the novel thus: "Hullabaloo is delicious: with kindness and humour Desai describes a magical world full of eccentric characters that, at the end of the book, one is sad to leave" (qtd. on the back side of the cover page of the novel).

The novel, being full of pragmatic themes and subjects, motivates us to read it in the other way. It forces us to analyse, criticize and accept our own weaknesses. The novel satirizes our way of thinking and doing. Desai organizes the discourse of the novel in the line of what Ian Higgins says about a satirical work:

The satiric composition, whether a poem, play, or prose work, attempts to shame its subject. A work of wit, satire employs such resources as irony and invective, diminution and derision, innuendo and allusion, parody and pastiche in order to expose malpractice and corruption, folly and vice. (866)

The depiction of "the differences between what things are and what they ought to be" (Pollard 3) helps Desai create stylistic effect to make the audience involve in the setting of the novel.

When Kulfi is expecting a baby, the predicament regarding the sex of the child engrosses the members of family, neighbours, friends and relatives. Even Kulfi, though herself a female, is prone to gender bias. The writer remarks:

Everywhere there was the feeling of breath being drawn in and held, as if it wouldn't be let free again until the baby was born and it could be released—released happy and full of relief if the baby was a boy; released full of disappointment and resentment if it wasn't. (*HGO* 07)

The Chawla family, which is assured that their son, Sampath is “afflicted”, is expecting a bride who has all the divine qualities. Desai, from the point of view of the family of a boy, on the pages 57-58 of the novel, in a satirical tone, lists the qualities which people generally seek in the girl they wish to marry their boy with:

- The daughter-in-law must be from a good family. The girl should be decent, bold with a pleasant personality. But, to the boy’s family, the meaning of decency is quite different from its actual meaning. Desai writes:
This girl should keep her eyes lowered and, because she is humble and shy, she should keep her head bowed as well. Nobody wants a girl who stares people right in the face with big froggy eyes. (*HGO 57*)
- The girl should be beautiful. Beauty of the girl lessens the burden of dowry on her parents. If the girl is not fair complexioned, it increases the possibility of more and more dowries. The more the beauty, the less the dowry; the less the beauty, the more the dowry:
... if she is dark the dowry should include at least one of the following items: a television set, a refrigerator, a Godrej steel cupboard and maybe even a scooter. (*HGO 57*)
- The girl should be multitalented; a good student, a good singer and a good dancer. Her honey-sweet voice and rhythm of the feet must force the audience to applaud but these qualities are required in girl only for the sake of being: “It should be made clear that she will not dance and sing after marriage and shame the family” (*HGO 58*). In a humorous and satirical tone, Desai reiterates:
This girl should have passed all her examinations in the first division but will listen respectfully when her prospective-in-laws lecture her on various subjects they themselves failed in secondary school. (*HGO 58*)
- She should not be lame but she should sit quietly.
- After being persuaded many times, she can utter one word or one sentence just to show that she can, though she should be able to shout down the prices of vegetables and haggle with the shopkeepers.
Desai attempts to give a graphic description of a society where everybody, be it a politician, government official or common public, is busy in making illegal profits and where everybody is interested in taking care of their own interests only; nobody, from the highest level to the lowest level cares for the interests of public. There are frauds and scams. White money is being converted into the black money. Crime and corruption are increasing rapidly. The uncontrolled anarchic condition is prevalent in the society because everyone, from the one sitting in the highest office of the country to the government servants of lowest ranks, is involved in the corrupt practices. Desai writes:
Another corrupt politician! Before we are properly out of one international scandal, we are in another. Our politicians are growing careless. They are opening more Swiss bank accounts than they have Gandhi caps to distract us with. Not one truthful politician in the whole country. Yes, our parliament is made of thieves, each one answerable to the prime minister, who is the biggest thief of them all. Look how well he’s doing. With each new photograph he is fatter than before. (*HGO 20*)

As a consequence, the government officials are not desirous to do their duties sincerely and they always think of afternoon siestas, festivals and holidays:

Government service! People thought of afternoon siestas. Of tea boys running up and down with glasses of steaming milky tea all day long. They thought of free medicines at the dispensary and pensions. Of ration cards and telephones. Of gas connections that could be had so easily. They thought of how this was a country with many festivals and holidays. Of how the government offices closed for each one. They imagined a job where, even if your boss turned out to be unpleasant, there were always plenty of people to shout at, people whom you could shout at even louder than your boss had shouted at you. (*HGO 23*)

Flattery has become one of the best instruments of getting promotions and increments in the salary. Whether one is a sweeper boy or a prime minister, they need not pay any heed to the problems of the common people or of the country, rather they are required only to do what their bosses ask them to do for their personal interest. Making his son, Sampath understand the practical approach to sustain a job and consequently getting higher positions, Mr. Chawla says:

A job has two major sides to it. And it is of no significance if you are the prime minister or the sweeper boy, they are the same two points. First, the work itself. Put your best foot forward always. Even if it involves something a little extra, such as making railway bookings for your boss, don't complain. It is only a small thing. (*HGO 24*)

Kiran Desai, very precisely and subtly, satirises election campaigns in India. Promises done in election manifestoes are never met. In fact, promises for leaders are just to move the public to vote in their favour. Frequent elections, election-promises and slogans of high spirit are merely to serve the personal interests of the political parties and their leaders. These things have led to the whole system becoming a mockery:

Not one of the streetlights worked and they wouldn't work, everyone knew until the next local election. Then there would be a flurry of excitement, with five-and ten-point for the electricity supplies, and enough modern technology, they always promised, to send Shahkot and its residents bounding into the twenty-first century. (*HGO 16*)

Sparingly, with a subtle humour and satire, Desai attacks common people also. Common public too, directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, involve themselves in the corrupt practices. The fence of the post office where Sampath works "was not entirely intact" because the residents of Shahkot, just after the fences of the post office were made barbed wire, began to think of the need of the wire in and around their houses:

Naturally the barbed wire fence was not entirely intact, for the residents of Shahkot, never ones to respect such foolish efforts, had set to work as quickly as they could to dismantle this unfortunate obstruction. All about their own houses and in their gardens and courtyards, they discovered a

sudden need for wire; ... A curtain needed hooks. A gate, some sort of latch. There was a plant that would not stand up straight" (*HGO* 27)

The novel is a glaring example of the Indians being too religious to question the propriety. When the mental faculty fails to differentiate between right and wrong, this takes the form of religious fanaticism resulting in a hullabaloo in the society. Politicians often take advantages of such situations. Common people with a business bent of mind like Mr. Chawla begin to dream of business prospect in the name of "Babas" as it happens in case of "Monkey Baba" in the novel. One can sell anything in the name of religion. Markets, in the name of religion, go mushrooming. Any one among us can be projected as a god-man to deceive guileless innocent people. Kiran Desai takes such gurus apart and makes her characters utter generic statements like: "Think of all those shams," said Miss Jyotsna, "all those crooks posing in their saffron, those gurus who are as corrupt as politicians..." (*HGO* 109).

This is due to a blind faith in religion, which forbids our intellect to challenge the authorities of such gurus. These gurus are supposedly accountable to none because of our fanatic beliefs. They bathe in milk, eat rich food and maintain hefty bank accounts. In making his own son an instrument for making more and more money, Mr. Chawla's modus operandi has been very skillfully penned by the author. Commenting on the inner-goings of Mr. Chawala's mind, quite contrary to his own lectures on corruption and corrupt politicians, Desai writes: "True, Sampath had brought in no dowry, but Mr. Chawla was not one to sit around and complain. "Everybody can make something from nothing" (*HGO* 91). Now it was high time for Mr. Chawla to execute his business planning:

He opened a new bank account and approached businesses in the area that might be interested in advertising about the orchard, a place that would not only ensure their products a large audience but also endow them with a sanitized glow of purity. And he began to think of stocks and shares. Stocks and shares were a good idea because they were not in the least ostentatious. (*HGO* 91)

Mr. Chawla is always thinking of the best possible ways of attracting the attention of the public towards the projected magic spell of Baba in the orchard. He knows that people in India can be easily moved and cheated if their attention is diverted to religious matters. He is planning to take every possible step so as to befool the people and to make them think that whatsoever Mr. Chawla is doing is just for the much needed uplift in religion Desai writes:

Perhaps the family should do without the refrigerator and motor scooter? Even the advertising? Oh no! Perhaps the bank account should be opened in the name of a special fund for building a temple? That way attention would be diverted to religious matters and donations would pour in. Not that he planned to embezzle and steal. They would build a temple! Then there would be even more donations. Endlessly, his mind bounded from scheme to enchanting scheme. (*HGO* 92)

And he executed his plans accordingly:

He obtained cuts from the scooter rickshaw men and the bus drivers to enter and park in the compound, ... 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 ... Mr Chawla managed a small cart. Here, while also keeping his eye on everything else, ... he was given a large discount (after all, he was the father of the Shahkot hermit). These items he sold at a large profit, and then, in another lucky financial twist, the family reclaimed many of the coconuts and sweetmeats from the bottom of Sampath's tree at the end of the day to pile them back upon the cart so they could be sold once more the next day. (*HGO* 92-93)

Mr Chawla's business is just like any other business. There is production, there is advertisement, and there is selling. Kiran Desai, using her skill of vivid narrative technique, explores how a market, developed by the persuasion of religious sentimentality of the people, is one of the most lucrative business strategies in India. The novel, especially the scene discussed above, produces a very clear picture of such businesses in India and the readers find themselves among those who are being deceived by such business tactics.

Against the established viewpoints regarding religion and faith, Desai puts her point of view through the spy, a very pathetic character from the Atheist Society (AS) and a member of the Branch to Uncover Fraudulent Holy Men (BUFHM). He goes to the Guava Orchard to gather facts against fraud so as to publicly expose the mystery of Monkey Baba. But this is not a child's play in India, especially when the popularity of such projected gurus goes to the extent that even the people in administration begin to bow their heads before them:

The policemen all climbed up the ladder to receive Sampath's blessings. The superintendent placed his unpleasantly greasy head under Sampath's toes and felt as though he were being bathed in pure holiness, as if he were being washed gently and cleansed in sweet blessing..." (*HGO* 115-116)

For such cases, Kiran Desai criticizes the print media heavily. At the annual meeting of the Atheist Society, she makes the spy, her mouthpiece, condemn media for the popularity of the Monkey Baba:

Did you see the newspaper article about the Chawla case? It is completely outrageous. Even the press in this country goes along with this rubbish. In fact, they are the ones who propagate it. They take a rumour and put it into official language and of course, everybody who reads it promptly swallows it as the whole truth. (*HGO* 119-120)

The spiritually motivated people made the spy a ridiculous fellow but "the more his efforts were thwarted, the more suspicious he became" (*HGO* 104). The spell of Sampath on monkeys, as his devotees used to say, was no more than "just well-developed human-monkey interaction" (*HGO* 109) for him. Like a high school student, he makes the notes of all he observes. In the annual meeting of the AS, he repeated all non-sense he heard from the Baba and in the subjective tone, he says:

It was precisely people like Sampath who obstructed the progress of this nation, keeping honest, educated people like him in the backwaters along with them. They ate away at these striving, intelligent souls, they ate away at progress and smothered anybody who tried to make a stand against the vast uneducated hordes, swelling and growing towards the biggest population of idiots in the world. (*HGO* 120)

The spy has doubts that Sampath's mother, Kulfi mixes some intoxicants in Sampath's food. He follows Kulfi when she goes to the nearby forest for herbs and spices. He spends his sleepless nights to keep a vigil on Kulfi. Once he climbs a tree positioning himself "above the cauldron so that he might watch exactly what was going on. In his pocket was his collection of vials and string; hopefully, he would be able to take samples from the gravy while seated above it" (*HGO* 205). The final hullabaloo in the guava orchard, takes place with:

A crack!

A howl!

A watery splash! (*HGO* 209)

Kulfi heard the sound and everybody wanted to know what happened there. The novel ends with the following lines:

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.

Gingerly, they approached the bubbling cauldron. (*HGO* 209)

In creating such a pathetic scene by making the spy fall inside the boiling cauldron, Kiran Desai, possibly, wants to give a deeper message suggesting that there is no place of rational thinking in India; the voices of those who try to go against the unquestionable authority of the god-men are crushed and the people of rational thought are boiled to death.

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