

Research Paper

Cultural chaos and conflicts in Kiran Desais 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' and Italo Calvinod's 'The Baron in the Tree'

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Kiran Desai's 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard & Italo Calvino's 'The baron in the Tree'' is built around the same storyline of the main character resorting to a displacement from the existing society to a blissful co-existence of being in communion with an adopted culture. This self-imposed exile emerges as a result of a socio—cultural chaos within the then existing society. Resisting the whims and fancies of societal norms, the characters re-locates themselves to a new space. The re-located space of the characters becomes a space for collision of cultures and exchanges. This 'liminal space' or 'in-between spaces' allows mutual exchange between the cultures, reinforcing the essentiality of co-existence between the binaries nature-culture.

Key words: Displacement, Adopted culture, self-imposed exile ,re-located space, luminal space, binaries ,nature-culture

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INTRODUCTION

Kiran Desai popularly known for her writing with a tinge of Diaspora and multi- cultural reflections is the youngest writer to win the Man Booker Prize (2006) for her second novel 'The Inheritance of loss', Her debut novel 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' (1998) won her many accolades, her upcoming novel being 'The loneliness of Sonia and Sunny', Kiran Desai's multicultural upbringing and her exile from the homeland have contributed a significant role to her writings. Born in Chandigarh in 1971 as the daughter of Anita Desai and Ashvin Desai, she spent her early years in Delhi, Pune and Mumbai before leaving for England at the early age of fourteen Kiran Desai's multi- cultural parentage – her maternal grandmother Toni Nimi a German and her maternal grandfather D.N-Mazumdar, a Bengali gives her the double perspective to write about Indians as well as

Indian migrants to the west.

This article focuses on cultural chaos and conflicts in Kiran Desai's 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' and Italo calvino's 'The Baron in the Tree'. Desais's debut novel 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' is a light comic satire about an eccentric protagonist Samapath Chawala.

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard'

It is based on an incident which was reported in 'The Times of India', in her own words-I started with a very small idea really. I had read a story in the Times of India and heard about a character from many people, a man who was a very famous hermit in India, who really did climb up a tree, who lived in a tree for many years until

he died. He died last year. I believe. So I began to wonder what it was about someone like this who would do something as extreme as to spend his life in a tree. So it started really with that character and then the story with that character and then the story built up around it"¹. The novel pictures Sampath's relentless struggle for freedom from worldly customs, hypocrisies, pursuits of wealth and other opportunistic profits. Sampath exiles himself from humanity and society and lives in a blissful existence along with monkeys on a tree top. Sampath thus enacts a displacement from the town of Shahkot to the guava Orchard. The picture of the town of Shahkot and the post office where Sampath worked is reflected in his mind "curtains billowed white out of every window. Bits of newspapers and old plastic bags turned cartwheels in the indigo streets".(Desai,14) whereas the guava orchard for him is "Something he had imagined all his life; myriad green-skinned globes growing sweet-sour and marvelous upon a hillside with enough trees to fill the eye and enough fruit to scent the air".(Desai, 50)

The protagonist Sampath does not emulate an external geographical displacement when he moves off the boundary of the town of Shahkot but he moves on a psychological Plane into the open space of freedom. He takes refuge in a guava orchard atop the guava tree- "Here sitting, not too high and not too low, he had seen the world in absolute clarity for the first time, the days emerging as if purified from nights of a clean and brilliant blackness".(Desai,142). He does this to escape the peculiarities of worldly life, later on he is called as "monkey baba" by the Superstitious people of Shahkot. In his blissful communion with nature, Sampath attains not only freedom, peace, solitude but also becomes free from customs, rituals and beliefs.

John Simpson in the Oxford book of Exile emphasizes the internal aspect of exile as "exile is the human condition and the great upheavels of history have merely added physical expression to the inner fact"² Sampath thus enacts a self-imposed exile or internal exile. Sampath thus resides in his own country and yet feels alienated. He does not suffer due to clash of cultures like the other characters in Desai's. 'The Inheritance of loss'. In 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' Desai portrays Sampath as a epitome of New Age Diasporic Distress where the character feels alienated in his own homeland. Sampath while in communion with nature attains external happiness and silence. His self-alienation isolation can be traced back to his childhood days when he is always preoccupied with idle daydreams and fantasies. He spends "many blissful hours dreaming in the tea stall and singing to himself in the public garden".(Desai, 23). He is described as "a creature that looked as if he had come from another planet together or had seen discovered in the woods like something alien and strange".(Desai, 12)

Sampath was miserable in his studies during childhood days and later on at his job at the post office. It was only his grandmother who supported him strongly in spite of all his failures- "The world is round, wait and see. Even if it appears he is going downhill, he will come up out on the other side. Yes, on top of the world. He is just taking the larger route".(Desai,26) True to the words of Sampath's grandmother, he moves out of the society and culture and achieves solidarity in communion with nature there by taking him to heights of fame in his new role of 'monkey-baba'. His reflections on his newly acquired culture, his resistance is shown, "how he was leaving the world, a world that made its endless revolutions towards nothing. Now it did not matter anymore. His heart was caught in a thrall of Joy".(Desai,48)

The binaries nature-culture divide is so narrow that they interact and intersect so frequently. Sampath thus moves on to a new plane of life adopting a new culture and new life. Resisting the whims and fancies of societal norms he moves on to a new arena which provides him an open space for free thought, moreover his airborne status makes him to visualize everything from a fresh perspective'

The Baron in the tree

Italo Calvino's *The Baron in the tree* (1957) which won the 1957 *via reggio* prize runs on a similar story line of the main protagonist resorting to a fulfillment of life in communion with nature. 'The Baron in the Tree' is the second book in Calvino's trilogy *our Ancestors*, the other two being; 'The cloves viscount' and 'The Nonexistent Knight'. Italo Calvino (1923-1985) associated with neorealism school of Literature, Italian novelist, short story writer and novelist is the most translated Italian writer. Both his parents were botanists and he grew up playing on his parent's Farm at San Remo. The greenery, vegetation and flora are often well reflected in his writings. Associated with the publishing house Einaudi, Calvino produced a number of works during the 1950's which include. *The cloven viscount* (1952), *The Nonexistent Knight* (1959), *The Baron in the Trees* (1957). The publication of *Italian Folk tales* now included in the American Library Association Notable Book List gave him International recognition and establishes him as a literary figure.

'The Baron in the Tree' is set in the late eighteenth century, the main protagonist *cosimo piovasco di Rondo* is fed up of his life in a strict aristocratic and structured environment, thus the young Baron at the age of twelve decides to climb a tree, marking his against his father and family and thereby lives a complete life. The narrator of the story is *Biagio*, *Cosmos's* younger brother and his partner in mischief and exploration. In his adventure he befriends a group of impoverished boys and also becomes close to young girl. Later on he becomes the

defender of the forests and the trees thus helping the village folk to fight forest fire. His entire life is spent on the trees, as he had vowed "I'll never come down again" (Calvino, 13). In his exalted state he manages to spend time with his childhood passion viola and also tending his sick mother. Moreover his passion for storytelling makes him a beloved character among the towns people. Cosimo the successor as baron of the Ombresa estate thus moves from a culture of essential stagnation of wealth, titles and comfort to a life of simplicity, excitement and adventure.

The readers are left amazed at the with which the Baron, Cosimo continues to live throughout his life in this adopted culture where he comes face to face with people from various cross-section of the society. Cosimo experiences total freedom from the rigid atmosphere of wealth and status, which no longer appeal to him. He is least bothered about the cultural differences that exist between his royal parentage and the common folk. Nineteenth century anthropologist Edward Tylor famously defined culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.³

Both Sampath and Cosimo moves out of a structured society, out of their free will primarily moving on to an entirely different culture which becomes their comfort zone. Culture is a product of humans living together and it is learned. American sociologist Talcott parson sees culture as necessary for the better functioning of the society. According to him culture also provides language and other symbolic systems essential to social life. Culture thus occupies "a central place because on the one hand it is internationalized to the stable patterns of action that make up major economic political and Kinship structures of the society".⁴

CONCLUSION

The space which Cosimo and Sampath relocate for themselves becomes a space for collision of cultures and exchanges. This 'liminal space' or 'interstices', which according to Homi.K.Bhabha in 'The location of culture' is a space where the production of cultural meaning is located. The in-between space according to Bhabha is that space which does not separate culture but allows mutual exchanges between the cultures. culture is something that is acquired.it is learned, anthropologically it is acculturation/enculturation. cosimo and sampath tries to acquire a new culture thus passes through zone of contact. This is the space where Cosimo and Sampath are exposed to new cultures which intersect or interact with each other, transform themselves incorporating everything.it is a never ending process which change and mutate into new forms. Their airborne status attained through foregoing comforts and enduring ridicule makes

them capable of fresh perspective regarding strained relationship. They thus chooses freedom over conformity. They resort to live amidst nature reinforcing the essentiality of the binaries nature-culture which co-exist and are inseparable as glorified in the English and European literature. Cosimo and Sampath try to revive the delicate balance between man and the environment. They might be trying to propagate what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels was trying to say through materialistic conception of nature-that all human progress was based upon a careful exploitation of the nature.

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