

### MALADY AND ESCAPE – READING KIRAN DESAI'S *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD*

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#### Abstract

Kiran Desai's debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* offers a remarkable description of a boy who seeks refuge on a guava tree. Sampath is good at nothing because of this malady and escapes in a tearing hurry from the chains of domesticity to enter the guava garden's captivating calm just to ally his frayed nerves. Then, he decides to settle there at top of the tree and, he heaves a sigh of relief having demolished the parental yoke, however briefly. The *baba's* antics and a host of fantasy evoke deep admiration and reverence in the guileless hearts of the believers. The local press has its own axe to grind as its print excites the curiosity of people who flock to the garden in hordes. Thus, Sampath became the hero of Shahkot. Recovering soon from the initial shock, Mr. Chawla's fertile mind embarks upon his specific plans to cash in on the possibility of amassing huge profits through his newfangled ideas. It is interesting to note that even the detractors of the Monkey *Baba* are silenced for a while as he (Sampath) has tamed the cinema monkeys, yet the atheist journalist seems determined to expose Sampath's fraud and, like the saying 'Curiosity kills the Cat', the poor fellow (the Journalist) gets killed and Sampath gets trapped amidst a turmoil. His ingenious escape turns out to be a divine incident at last. The marginalised individuals too have the power to enrich a society in their own way, though they follow their own norms and principles. Kulfi and Sampath are social outcasts; their habit of the daydreaming clearly distinguishes them from the society of Shahkot. This marginalization from the community, which is self-imposed, creates a profound desire for solitude and silence that contrasts sharply with the noise pollution of the town life. Desai clarifies the minute difference between solitude and silence. He ventured to take back the role as the master in the household. Silence is the necessary absence of verbal communication while solitude is related while living condition.

**Key Words:** Alienation, Marginalization, Negation, Estrangement, Anomie

The debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1997) of Kiran Desai depicts the sense of alienation, negation, estrangement, social isolation and unhappiness in life. Each of the major characters – the protagonist Sampath Chawala, his father Mr. R. K. Chawala, his mother Kulfi, and his sister Pinkey suffer from alienation, isolation, desolation, and loneliness. All are alienated and isolated not only because of their distress in life but also of their inability to understand and respond to one another. The treatment of these characters shows Desai's increasing interest in complex, disturbed and alienated personalities. It is simply a study of the development of insanity. Any severe critic of Desai who prefers her mother Anita's style and oeuvre, at first glance, may degrade her work as a funny and engaging novel. Talking about her novel, Desai remarks; "I think my first book was filled with all that I loved most about India and knew I was in the inevitable process of losing. It was also very much a book that came from the happiness of realizing how much I loved to write."<sup>1</sup>

While writing *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Desai seems to be inspired by Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *A Handful of Dust* (1934) moving from an uproarious comedy to a gloomy and pessimistic close. Desai asserted that she read an article in *The Times of India*, while her book was in process, in which a very famous hermit of India climbed upon a tree and lived there for many years. The novel and its characters are highly inspired by that article. The novel deals with the problems aroused by alienation. Hamstrung by a total lack of empathy, the story depicts the failures of Sampath who consistently tries to cope up with his poor plight. The treatment of the other characters and individuals reflect the notion that methods of exploring and searching a character change as per the needs. It can be seen in Desai's interest in complex, tormented, maladjusted and alienated individuals. Outstanding among young Indian fiction writers, Desai seems quite devoted to social reform by presenting the theme of alienation through irony and satire on the everyday existence of India. The novel provides a whimsical tale that blends alienation of human beings, a satirical comedy and a humorous annotation on multiculturalism, globalisation, and the post-colonial world.

The novel begins with the horror and tension of famine that struck Shahkot, a small imaginary village. Avoiding a vast canvas in which Arundhati Roy's characters work in *The God of Small Things*, Desai fixed her attention within a limited space at Shahkot. Roy's characters move from Kerela to Assam, with scattered family members in Britain and America. Kulfi represents the theme of alienation even before the appearance of the protagonist Sampath in the novel. The story begins with the setting of a prolonged rainfall and "murky yellow haze."<sup>2</sup> Kulfi, a young woman of twenty-one-year, is expecting a child. The drought appears worse as her pregnancy advanced and Kulfi eats gratefully and ravenously like a "prowling animal" (5). In fact, nothing seems to satisfy her hunger and she remained totally obsessed of eating food, but "the house was small for her desires" (4). Desai made her readers aware of the tension aroused by drought and the individual response to it; the division of consciousness within the alienated woman whereby her energies become directed towards her hunger.

The protagonist of the novel, Sampath Chawla is an alienated and self-estranged person who has little sense of a meaning or purpose in life, and therefore he feels disconnected and

<sup>1</sup> Catherine McWeeney, Interview with Kiran Desai, "Kiran Desai talks about her first Novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*." Random House Inc, New York. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Kiran Desai, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (Noida: Gopsons, 2002) 1. All subsequent references are given parenthetically.

fragmented. He is a self-effacing protagonist of the novel who is often scolded by his father, Mr. R. K. Chawla (a clerk in local Reserve Bank). Chawla is a paragon of the manipulative and opportunistic Indian and wants a change in the nonchalant attitude of his son. He, like a dictator, considers his son to be a spineless person and rudely refers him as “a cross between a potato and a human being” (9).

Mr. Chawla’s laborious efforts were swept aside by a careless impulse of his son who wants to escape the responsibilities of life during adulthood. Failure at all the fronts is a constant phenomenon of Sampath’s life; he does not know whether to laugh or grieve over it. Sampath’s desires are thwarted by his family, society, and its strict rules and conventions. Therefore, he feels an outsider in his social milieu and wishes to live alone in a solitary place. In his “Existential loneliness”, as mentioned by Clark Moustakas (an American psychologist), Sampath experiences the vulnerability of his interpersonal existence. This existential loneliness gives rise to existential anxiety – the anxiety that shakes the foundation of his existence.

Sampath’s sense of alienation is more aggravated when all his classmates got job “even the ones with report cards that were just like his” (23). This was only Sampath that left idle dreaming new visions “in the tea stalls and singing to himself in the public gardens” (23). In his aggressive and enterprising manner, Mr. Chawla manages a government job of a clerk in the local post office for his son, but his son performs miserably at his job as a mail sorter. He is a nonchalant, blasé person as an employee and feels claustrophobic in human company. He spends his days in the post office by opening private letters and indulging the lives of the villagers stealthily. Sampath feels suffocated in the environment and thus, yearns for freedom. Sampath’s disassociation from his family members and society forms a state of social isolation and he feels lonely and rootless. Frustration overpowers Sampath when he has to lose his job due to performing an impromptu cross-dressing striptease at the wedding of the daughter of his boss, where he was assigned a menial duty of washing and refilling water glasses. Shubha Tiwari points out:

His Job is dreary and boring. He fills the monotonous hours by reading others’ letters and by enjoying afternoon siestas. But then fate has something else in store for this erratic boy. One day, on behaving wildly at the marriage of his boss’s daughter, he loses his job at the post-office. Life gets hellish for him. Although, in his heart of hearts he is glad to be free from the dull job, he is continually tortured by his father’s cynical remarks.<sup>3</sup>

The act of removing clothes symbolises Sampath’s failure to come to terms with the society. His state of mind indicates towards Durkheim’s concept of anomie, which means normlessness, a type of alienation aroused from the social conditions. Sampath rejected moral norms of wearing robes to cover his body. Obviously, this normless conduct symbolises his extreme sense of meaninglessness in life.

Though Sampath hated his job anyway yet the loss was a big blow to him. His sense of alienation developed into “a never-ending flow of misery. It was a prison he had born into” (43). On being fired from his post on account of the ruckus he created at the wedding, Sampath

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<sup>3</sup> Shubha Tiwari, “Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard as a Satirical novel,” *Indian English Literature: A Post-Colonial Response*, eds. Gajendra Kumar and Uday Shankar Ojha (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2005) 134.

decides to settle down in an abandoned orchard far from the din of the village with an urge to cut and alienate himself from all social ties. He runs away from his home too. His resolution to isolate himself from the humdrum life is a bold step to cope up with the feeling of alienation. His fleeing from his surroundings is similar what Hegel sensed the implication of abstract possibility for alienation. Hegel observed that in practical life it is quite a common thing to escape from definite obligations. Sampath used to avoid his familial duties and obligations from his boyhood. Actually, there was much interference from others in his life that suffocated him and Sampath yearned for freedom. Sampath frantically boards a bus and at a convenient point jumps out of it, and finally takes shelter in the branches of a guava tree. Nandita Singh suggested that Sampath's "feelings of claustrophobia and sense of alienation with his milieu lead the renunciation of the present existence for the life of an ascetic in the tree."<sup>4</sup> Sampath's existential dilemma is that he thinks differently from everyone else. The orchard seemed impressive to Sampath.

The guava orchard is full of fruits and a perfect place where Sampath can find peace and solace. He quickly went towards a guava tree and decided to make it his abode, at least a temporary place where he could get momentary relief from the troubling sense of alienation. Above all, this place was not claustrophobic and offered simplicity and pleasantness. Life in the guava orchard was totally enjoyable until the people of Shahkot came to know of this unexpected flee of Sampath.

Sampath is an alienated individual who is isolated from other people, and this pathetic psychological isolation can be traced back to his childhood. The character of Sampath, who decides to spend his life in a guava tree and consequently is treated for a while as a *guru*, is similar to Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener: a Story of Wall Street* (1853) who, in his passive resistance to work, receives pity from his surroundings. Bartleby, like Sampath, is thought as an efficient worker in a law office but eventually refuses to do anything. Desai's Sampath and Melville's Bartleby are the best examples of alienated people who are suffering from mental illness or can be read symbolically or metaphorically as the imprisoned citizens in a harsh, capitalist society. This is evident from the self-reliant mannerism of both the characters. At first, his family and townsfolk thought that Sampath had gone mad and when his family came to know about his presence through the headlines of local newspapers "*Post-office clerk climbs tree*" (67) reached the place to take him back to town. Sampath was not convinced and declared that he is happy in the present place, "I am adopting a simple way of life. From now on I have no relatives" (54), and Mr. Chawla was compelled to fix a cot onto the tree. His habit of stealthily reading others' mails in the post-office provided him with an opportunity to behave like a saint who could reveal the personal details of others like a fortune teller. At one point Sampath asks Mr. Singh Ji, "Is your jewellery still safely buried beneath the tulsi plant?" (65). Asking Mrs. Chopra Sampath uttered, "How is that lump in your throat that travels up and down your windpipe, whispering threats and almost bursting right out of your chest?" (66)

Interestingly, in the past, Sampath has clandestinely read the letters of people and after revealing the choice secrets, he behaves as if he was a clairvoyant. Moreover, people took all these ill-mannered remarks as the vision of a 'Godman.' Thus, Sampath's cowardly fled in guava orchard to escape from the pains of alienation is taken as a convenient step to keep away *Maya*

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<sup>4</sup> Nandita Singh, "Evolutionary Search for Self: Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*," *Indian English Poetry and Fiction: A Critical Evaluation*, eds. N. Raj Gopal and Suman Sachar (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2000) 28.

and worldly affairs. This daydreaming is also considered as a life of spiritual reflection and before anyone grasps the reality he swiftly receives the reverence as of a holy man and “tree baba,” *guru* and *sanyasi* and the Hermit of Shahkot. Known and honoured by entire Shahkot, he also attracted the attention of local newspapers. One of the papers reported: “*Post-office clerk climbs tree [...] Fleeing duties at the Shahkot post office, a clerk has been reported to have settled in a large guava tree. According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom*” (67).

Eventually, Sampath’s flight from society due to his alienation is thrust back into the sea of humanity, but this time creating a hullabaloo like never before. Sampath answers the questions of devotees as if he had been a great scholar with excellent reading and knowledge. Sampath had an aura around him. Each word of his speech reflected the deep meaning and was taken as a wise suggestion. His answers were interpreted symbolically concerning the secret life of devotees as if he had been their master, friend, philosopher and guide. At one occasion, a lady who has been worried about her son sought his advice. Sampath replied in an exceptionally sociable manner “Add lemons to milk and it will grow sour” (74). His mythical sentences were awe-inspiring and they drew people like a magnet. He would keep on uttering blunt sentences like “one can digest fish” or “moth will go to the lantern” etc. (76) and people would stress their brains to decipher their meaning. Sampath came to be regarded as extraordinary *baba* of astonishing ability. Sampath’s exile or separation is completely different, the alienation depicted by Bharati Mukherjee and V. S. Naipaul. In their works, exile often leads to the alienation and struggle to maintain the identity. But in Desai, it is not so; Sampath’s fled or exile provides him a prestigious identity and endearment both in society and family.

Desai’s captivating words and lush imagery describes how Sampath, the batty recluse, is transformed into a ‘*Baba*’ owing to his father’s excellent salesmanship of the incident. Mr. Chawla could foresee the best commercial possibilities; after all his son has turned a holy man. The guava orchard became the popular stop and the tourists rushed to the site. Pilgrims took great interest to listen to Sampath’s words of wisdom. The government does not intercede and soon the orchard looks rather like a city. And for Mr. Chawla his son may bring his family’s fortune.

Mr. Chawla efficiently popularizes the spirituality of his son by giving advertisements: in fact, he is not betrayed by the compelling power and words of wisdom spoken by his son, rather he knows that his son is the same old moron. But Mr. Chawla is very happy about others’ perception regarding his son since his temporary success attracts money and fame for them all around.<sup>5</sup> Marx suggested once that alienation can be defeated by “material force”, and it seems appropriate in case of Sampath who enjoys the revered life of a holy *baba* in the forest.

Sampath, a holy man in an orchard with his avaricious father, a mother who is always obsessed with food, a younger sister who loves an ice-cream seller and Amma Ji (grandmother of Sampath) depict the predicament and alienation of modern Men in a larger sense.

The arrival of “cinema monkeys” (so named because of their nuisance to the female moviegoers) in the guava tree create a real hullabaloo. Though the arrivals of monkeys do not create any harm to Sampath and, in fact, he gained a new feeling of compassion from them. The

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<sup>5</sup> Nandita Singh, “Evolutionary Search for Self: Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*,” *Indian English Poetry and Fiction: A Critical Evaluation*, eds. N. Raj Gopal and Suman Sachar (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2000) 134.

monkeys sat grouped about Sampath and people astounded “Look at that monkey. Gentle as anything! The *Baba* has “subdued the beasts” (108), and thus “the behaviour of the monkeys was just another proclamation of Sampath’s authenticity” (109). Sampath is now popular as *Monkey baba* since all the monkeys have taken abode around him. Like the existential hero – Yank – of Eugene O’Neill in *Hairy Ape* (1922), Sampath finds solace in the company of monkeys. The world of animals is better than the world of humans.

The cosmos turns into a complete chaos when the “cinema monkeys” turn into alcoholic monkeys after drinking liquor and create a complete mess by ravaging the orchard. But by the time Mr. Chawla has managed to become rich enough to establish an ashram for his son and instructs the latter to come down: “They would not let him go. If he descended from the tree, they would catch him. If he stayed, things would only get worse. He recognised the old feelings of being caught in a trap” (143).

Here, Sampath’s mental state of embarrassment is similar to the character of Cosimo in Italo Calvino’s well-known classic Italian novel *The Baron in the Trees* (1957) in which the author tells the story of an alienated and frustrated individual. Calvino’s protagonist Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo, a twelve-year young boy, finds a way to stay in the trees, which is a metaphor of meaninglessness, for most of his life in order to escape from parental authority. Whereas Sampath is treated as Godman, Cosimo becomes a philosopher. Similar to Sampath, Raju in R. K. Narayan’s novel *The Guide* (1958) also gets the attention of Media by keeping a fast of fourteen days to attract the rainy clouds for relieving the townspeople from a drought. But Raju is a criminal and a charlatan, and Sampath is a protagonist whose disarming simplicity and naiveté is charming in its own way. The ending of both novels also provides a contrast. Whereas Raju sags down after eleven days fast, the *Monkey-Baba* disappears and one is left only with “A crack! A howl! A watery splash! (Desai 209) Sunita Sinha points out:

It seems that Sampath’s search will be rendered futile but something unexpected happens. The monkeys pursued by the army pause on Sampath’s charpoy in the tree. The moment stretches infinitely as they gaze intently at a guava fruit lying on it instead of Sampath [...] Sampath, it seems, is capable of innumerable of transformation in his search for the larger picture [...] He has shed his physical persona, and like wind or ghost, has merged into the surroundings. The transformation of Sampath is perhaps his last one [...] Nothing and nowhere denote end to all possibilities.<sup>6</sup>

When Sampath realises that his solitary existence is being encroached upon by a sea of humanity, he disappears. Perhaps it will suffice here to note that Sampath’s fleeing from the scene is a significant step to overcoming ‘estrangement’ and alienation in his life. His escape broke the cycle of alienation and he became capable of detachment. He found a way, perhaps, where he could give befitting defeat to alienation.

From the beginning of the novel, Kulfi developed a feeling of exclusion and rejection. Her meaninglessness in life led to emptiness and hollowness or a condition that Viktor Frankl

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<sup>6</sup> Sunita Sinha, “The Novels of Kiran Desai: A Critical Study,” *Indian English Poetry and Fiction: Critical Elucidations*, eds. AN Prasad and Rajiv K. Malik (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2007) 271.

calls “the existential vacuum.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout the novel, she is confused about her existence. Kulfi could not keep herself busy with the routine work during her pregnancy. She just wanted to eat more and more but unfortunately her house “was small for her desires” (3). Initially she had a longing for the food. Despite the worse conditions of drought she managed to fulfil her insatiable desires. Going to an extent, she gives an inducement to the vegetable and meat sellers, “until they had nothing left to give her anyway. Her hunger was so fierce; it was like a big, prowling animal” (5). But her hunger alleviates as soon as she feels her baby moving inside the womb; Kulfi shows her disturbed mental equilibrium after drawing pictures of eatables all over the walls of her house “in desperation for another landscape” (8). Not only she becomes heavy while her pregnancy advances, but “she seemed to be claiming all the earth’s energy for herself, sapping it dry, leaving it withered, shrivelled and yellow” (10). Kulfi is tirelessly searching for the meaning of her life; she does not try to talk to the people of her locality. She is always happy to be alone. She becomes introvert and her mind remained focused on “a point invisible to everybody but herself.” Singh describes:

Kulfi remains usually wrapped up in herself and thus is the sole character who has no necessity of relating to the larger picture. In this sense her oddities and eccentricities are a blessing in disguise, for they give her completion which the rest are fated always to aspire for [...] The theme of transformation or evolution which is suggested by Sampath climbing the tree and the Simian-human link is thwarted by Kulfi.<sup>8</sup>

At a point when Sampath decides to leave his job, there was short respite between Kulfi and the other family members. She does not pay heed to others and accepts her pain. Though the family members continue to harangue her habits but it does not affect her. To see her son assimilating with Nature in a guava tree, Kulfi, too, dreams her way to freedom and a strategy for escaping alienation at the same place. At this moment, Kulfi’s early experience of alienation leads to a desire for liberation. Kulfi is reminiscent of her own desolate and alienated feelings, when she also hoped to free herself from social and familial ties. Here Kulfi’s mental quandary is deeply related to social isolation, which is an alienation from one’s own fellow beings and community. Kulfi’s silence dissociates her from the materialistic society. She decides to take care of her son. She cooks everything and this is a source of constant joy to her. She chooses different berries to keep Sampath healthy and a little intoxicated. Her desire to cook gives her a kind of respite from alienation, which is abnormal in many ways.

Kulfi discovers that the intoxicating food given by her to Sampath keeps him joyous and subdued too; and so Sampath appeared as a wise *guru* for the common folk. In fact, it is Kulfi who plays important role to make Sampath from a secret teller to a *Monkey-Baba*. From the outset, Sampath is seen behaving abnormally with the society around him. Both Kulfi and Sampath represent a hyperbole of the extreme desires; they stood alone as if they have lost a sense of belonging to their community. This is just like a Hegelian version of ‘self-alienation’ in which man feels spiteful, isolated and develops a hatred for others. Sampath and Kulfi share a sordid past and no future; both are not prepared to embrace the social and institutional norms.

<sup>7</sup> Viktor Emil Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985) 79.

<sup>8</sup> Nandita Singh, “The Search for Identity in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*,” *Indian Women Novelists in English*, ed. Birendra Pandey (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2001) 19-20.

Sampath's and Kulfi's self-alienation and social isolation, express the same depletion and loss what Felix Geyer and Walter R. Heinz point out in the introduction of their book *Alienation, Society and the Individual*; "Social isolation is often bemoaning the loss of personal ties and social networks."<sup>9</sup>

Initially Sampath's futile attempt to escape from his alienation exasperated Mr. Chawla since to his horror his son may bring disgrace and dishonour to the family. He made a complaint to the police and waited promptly for an action:

Mr. Chawla walked around and around the building, making the policemen dizzy by shouting through every window he passed during his circuits. If he were the Superintendent of Police, he said, Sampath would, right this minute, be back in his usual vegetable-like stupor between them (52).

When Sampath has climbed the tree, his father does not ask him about the reason behind his behaviour but hurriedly takes action to bring him down. He immediately takes consultation from a doctor. And to find a wife for his insane son sounds like a plan to him. However, his efforts go in vein when the bride-to-be tries to go up to Sampath's tree, but falls down sheepishly. Feeling acutely embarrassed, she runs away, smashing Mr. Chawla's greedy dreams of obtaining a fat dowry. Mr. Chawla does not want to slip in the shell of alienation by losing his dignity and thus he becomes a foil to Sampath's character. He turns Sampath's action into a profitable adventure. He is quick to capitalise on his popularity. Actually, Mr. Chawla "is in search for a bigger canvas, trying to realise his ambition through his son."<sup>10</sup> He gives money to a photographer who takes Sampath's photo and then Mr. Chawla sells the photos to the pilgrims for earning money. Mr. Chawla forces the city people to come to see the tree-baba. And pilgrims too from different places come to seek blessings of the tree-baba; to feel the touch of the holy foot just a moment on their heads; to hear and dive deep into his enigmatic words.

Mr. Chawla's sense of alienation became quite acute when he feared that all his wishes will be shattered soon. The fact that he cannot control the forces of nature confused him completely. His temporary happiness shattered, as the monkeys disrupted his plans. Though he tries to get rid of monkeys, as suggested by the District Collector. Mr. Chawla is both smart and stupid and he knows how to overcome alienation, but at the same time, alienation is his destiny and he cannot avoid it. It is evident that Mr. Chawla, throughout the course of the novel, pursues his dreams, trying to fulfil his own desires through the momentary success of his son.

Though like Narayan, Desai is fascinated with pastoral but like Rushdie she looks more interested in social upheavals. She tries this experiment on Sampath's mother, Kulfi who has been suffocating herself with alienation. The novelist too deals on the institution of marriage and shows how it demands on women in Indian society. At one point of the story, Desai ridicules both Jane Austen and the *Manu Smriti*.

At the outset of this point, it seems that Desai would discuss the inequalities and gender discriminations. But Desai too like Rushdie, lacks her grip over social engagement, especially after sympathising Kulfi's nonconformity. In addition to Sufiya Zenobia and Shakil in Rushdie's *Shame* (1983), Kulfi too become a victim of self-pity and condemned to madness. Desai quickly

<sup>9</sup> Felix Geyer and Walter R. Heinz, *Alienation, Society and the Individual: Continuity and Change in Theory and Research* (United States: Transaction Publishers, 1992) xxx.

<sup>10</sup> Singh, *Evolutionary* 28.

reveals that the entire Chawla family has plagued by mental illness and an extreme sense of alienation; the narrative tries to tame her by giving her a stove that belonged only to her. “Don’t worry, cook curry.”

*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* reflects the problem of alienation, search for identity, turmoil in relations, isolation from society and its characters are actually aware, (consciously or unconsciously) of their embattled place within a confining, alienated milieu either in the city or in nature. Desai seems mature enough to explore her characters’ sense of alienation within and beyond the sordid world all around them. Everyone finds himself or herself eventually alienated and separated even barred in the hostile and confining environment.

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