



## ROOTLESS IDENTITY IN KIRAN DESAI'S *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD*

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### Abstract

There is a particular role of a person in the human society. A person keeps his grandeur by performing a leading role in it. Each person is an embodiment of someone or something which attribute them with their status. The identity is not delivered but it is achieved by the efforts done by a person. There are people who are recognised and those who are not recognised. Such people find solace in abandoning themselves entirely from the society. These people are rootless though they have their roots in the society. The present research paper explores the rootless identity of such people through examining the character of the protagonist of Kiran Desai's maiden novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

*Key words: rootlessness, identity, alienation, diaspora, exile, reunion.*

With her winning the Man Booker Prize of 2006, Kiran Desai came into light with her works. Kiran Desai is a Diaspora writer as she grew up in India until the age of fourteen. Later, she moved to US with her mother Anita Desai. She learnt through her experiences the pangs for motherland. She used writing to express her diaspora feelings. She is a writer of two novels and her sincere endeavour brought worldwide name and fame for her. She published her first novel in 1998. This novel of hers got certain recognition bringing the Bretty Trask Prize for her. Later, she took a seven years long break to come forward in the literary scene. She dazzled with her glorious work *The Inheritance of Loss*; a tale of loss, alienation, pangs of migration, illegal migration, separateness, disruption and so on. She received the Man Booker Prize of 2006 and left

her strong imprint on the literary world; never to be forgotten. But before achieving the worldwide recognition, Kiran studied a lot the lives of the people she chose to narrate. It is her innate wisdom which also made her to do the same for her maiden novel. She caught the theme of her first novel in a newspaper which reported a man from North India living on a treetop until his last breath. She brilliantly explored and weaved the thread of the story intervening altogether a variety of characters. These characters are identified by their role attributed to them by the novelist. The identity helps them to find their way in the social sphere. The society needs their efforts to work for it. People live with their key features and their inmates are familiarized with their behavioural habits.

Kiran Desai, being a diaspora writer, feels pangs of separation from her motherland. She has her roots in India with her father and her days spent in experiencing Indian panorama. Setting in US doesn't mean she forgets her motherland. She made her identity as a diaspora writer with an impression of winning the coveted prize. The identity is made by a person himself in the society. A person is a representative of his self-identity. It is their innate wisdom which makes a person special. The writers of diaspora often write about their encounter with the Westernised world. The tough time in which they undergo is voiced by their characters. This results in imprinting their identity on the literary world. The diaspora identity has a special side of in their writings which emerge in assigning key roles to their characters and plots. According to Jennifer Hamilton, the construction of identity may be influenced by stereotypical views of a characters gender or culture (Jennifer). (Desai)

Gender plays a pivotal role in defining an identity. The male are expected to perform all kinds of duties in a family and in a society they live in. They are accountable for the expected outcomes of the family and society. They are considered strong and powerful who lead their families' affairs. They are socially connected and have a certain place in the society. Kiran Desai also presents such people in her works. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* has a protagonist named Sampath. Being a son of the Chawala family, the members of the family expects him to be strong and accountable. But it is contrary in Sampath's case. The protagonist of the novel, Sampath, is born bringing rain and food for the hungry and thirsty Shahkot. It is the month of September and the rain is late. It pours heavily bringing Sampath and showering its blessing upon the tiny creature. Thus, Sampath gets recognition immediately after his birth. 'Let's name him Sampath,' they said. 'Good fortune.' For though he might not be very plump or very fair, he was triumphantly and indisputably male.' (12) Being the male gender of the family, he is expected to grow up with a masculine strength. But he grows up 'with spider-like legs and arms, thin and worried looking' (14). He is a young man lacking all the possibilities of a young man. He is just no good for anything. His

strange behaviour makes him unbelievable lazy man. His entire habits determine his character. The people around him mock fun at him. Nobody takes him seriously as he doesn't speak seriously in a manly voice. He speaks like birds chirping.

It begins with his family members. His father often makes him realize that he is the leading man of the family who has to perform his responsibilities. His father tries to motivate and to inspire him with his speech but Sampath does not pay any heed to his father's inspiring words. His sister complains not to go out accompanying Sampath. She says, 'The monkey will probably choose me as the best person to target is Sampath is with me' (22). She always teases him. He is elder than her; but he is failed to create an image of an elder brother to Pinki. She fears to go out with him. Ammaji, Sampath's grandmother, supports him. She sympathises him on account when her son, Mr Chawala warns Sampath about his behaviour. 'He is not threatening. Poor Sampath...with no raise in pay or promotion anywhere in sight' (22). However, she understands her grandson better than her son. On the other hand, Kulfi, Sampath's mother correlate him to her adulthood days. Kulfi considers him as an embodiment of herself. She is happy that he has the same cravings as hers. Therefore, she lets him live on the treetop. The colleagues of Sampath also do not consider him as a strong man but a poor Sampath. Ms Jyotsana and Mr. Gupta flirt with each other in his company. 'Mr. Gupta, sharing none of Sampath's capacity for quiet observation, seized this chance for active involvement (31). They just allow him to do as he wants. Sampath has a secret crush on his officemate; Ms Jyotsana. The government building in which he works looks dull and he goes dull with its colour. 'Sampath, working at the back desk in the Shahkot post office, however, did not consider himself to be so terribly lucky' (24). His boss also warns him to do his job in correct way as he knows Sampath's mischievous behaviour. 'I am keeping my eye on you...Kindly no misbehaving'(33). There is marriage function of his boss's daughter. Therefore, each one of the office workers are deployed to do a particular work. Sampath is also assigned a job.

Thus, nobody takes Sampath seriously. Therefore, he abandons the thoughts of amalgamation and

lives in his visionary world. This alienation takes him away from the materialistic world. He 'has been progressing steadily in the wrong direction. Instead of trying to work his way upwards, he started on a downward climb and now he is almost as close to the bottom as he could ever be' (26). He possesses no identity except an idle, lazy, womanly young boy of twenty-years-old. He is tired of his job and the surrounding people. He likes to escape into imaginary world from the real life. He longs for his mental peace which he gets only throughout his dreamy world. He reads the contents of the mails of the people of Shahkot secretly. It is a general fact that persons with male gender are expected to do works with a kind of devotion. But it is reversed in Sampath's case as he does nothing good effectively. He lives in his imaginary world which makes him stranger and alien among his men. Being a human, he does not possess the qualities of humans. He thinks about animalistic ventures. He doesn't feel at home among the humans. However, the incident of marriage function brings havoc on his job. Actually, since his appointment in the back desk of government post office, he dislikes his job. His restless nights makes him idle and lazy. His pang for freedom comes true in his expulsion from his job. He is known as Mr. R. K. Chawala; a state bank manager's son. Having his roots, he often feels rootless. It becomes a disgrace on the family with his expulsion. It is a common talk among the neighbours who often peep into others matters. Unable to bear such words of sympathy, he decides to run away from the house on the day when his family goes on a wedding.

Sampath finds his way to guava orchard finally. He exiles in orchard to find peace. Here, he feels at home on the treetop. 'How beautiful it was here, how exactly as it should be. This orchard matched something he had imagined all his life' (50). His family endeavours to get him down by any means but in vain. He is mistakenly recognised as Monkey Baba by the people of Shahkot by revealing their secrets (mistakenly recognised as 'unfathomable wisdom') when they approach him. He is revered as Guru, a demigod. It is also declared by the media 'introducing Sampath to the world' (67). He also enjoys his new identity and status

among the people of Shahkot. His family gets special treatment. Mr. Chawala sets up a business out of his son's lunacy. Media uplifts Sampath proclaiming his supreme power on the monkeys. People becomes his devotees. They regularly pay visits and worship him. His unfathomable wisdom overpowers the brains of the Shahkotians. They pay regular visits to the neglected guava orchard which earns fame in a night.

The guava orchard becomes a religious place by Sampath's presence. He leaves his home, family and the people to find solitariness in the guava orchard but they all followed him here too. Guava orchard becomes an embodiment of holy place. The pilgrims find it more religious with the arrival of monkeys which once had a great burden on the people of the market. People believe and attach them with Sampath's holiness. 'Clearly, he has charmed the monkeys.' He was an endless source of wonder. He had even cast his spell upon the wild beasts of the market.' (109) they proclaim his authenticity by the monkey's restoration. Even his pictures in 'his undershorts' are 'sold from Mr Chawla's cart and proved to be very popular' (119). This peaceful days do not last long for Sampath and his devotees as the monkeys are habituated to alcohol. They start making life uneasy for all the people of the orchard. Sampath too is threatened to be brought down and kept in a temple. 'The Baba will have to descend temporarily' (180). However, he does not like the idea. He does not want to be caged. The plans are made and the day of the removal is decided by the authorities. At last, Sampath mysteriously vanishes from the guava orchard leaving all in wonder. Sampath enjoys the natural solitariness in the guava orchard but the people of Shahkot deface it with 'ugly advertisements; a smelly garbage; the buzz of angry voices and the claustrophobia' (181). He does not want a reunion with his past daily routine. Therefore, he ruminates to leave his rootless identity behind and becomes one by his transcendence with nature.

The diaspora writers often project what they experience. The people of diaspora living a migrated life often pang for their identity. They get it by their works or they are considered rootless although having roots in their motherland. They face

this rootless identity in the social sphere of the country they live in. Sampath's case is not altogether different. He lives among his people without having a proper identity. He loses it during his journey of life and unites with nature in the end. Concluding, exploring the theme of rootless identity in diaspora writers' works is a major dealing with their concepts and terms about what they feel as a diaspora and Kiran Desai beautifully weaves the feelings in her sketch of Sampath. Sampath signifies her diaspora rootless identity.

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