



## Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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ON

**DISABILITY, REPRESENTATION AND LITERATURE**

held on 03 October 2019 and Organised by P.G. & Research Department  
of English

S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



### **A Study of Disability in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard***

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#### **Abstract:**

The attitude of society towards disability has undergone tremendous change from time to time. It differs with race, class, gender, nationality, etc. Disability is not just physical disability it also covers mental instability. It depends on how people see the disabled. Disability in general was once associated with curse or evil influence in Indian context. Disability though an external factor but affects the person emotionally. Kiran Desai, a prominent Indian English writer has dealt with disability in a different perspective in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. The protagonist, Sampath Chawla has cognitive disability, The readers instead of feeling heavy for Champath, is made to feel light when he becomes the godman of his village. This paper will highlight the disability and the problems faced by the protagonist in the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

Key words: Disability studies, disabled, autistic, dyslexia.

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Disability can be defined as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Ashutosh Singh Feb 2015). Nasrullah Mambrol records that Disability studies began to emerge during the twentieth century in the Western world as a result of the disability rights movement. The seminal work of a few scholars like Erving Goffman and Michel Foucault, and the flourishing of other interdisciplinary identity – based approaches that revealed compelling new aspects of the humanities while emphasizing rights (Disability Studies, 2018). To people who associate disability to medical problem located in an individual's body, the scholar's of disability studies has argued that disability is produced as much by cultural and environmental factors as by bodily conditions. The portrayal of disabilities



in Literature undergirds the exclusionary environment and the discrimination that disabled human being faces and warrants the flight from disability. Kiran Desai has pictured her protagonist Sapath with cognitive disability in a lighter sense, in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. ‘Cognitive disability or Intellectual disability is a term used when a person has certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills such as communicating, taking care of him or herself, and social skills’ ([www.oecd.org/CognitiveDisabilityResources.aspx](http://www.oecd.org/CognitiveDisabilityResources.aspx)). Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai has found a prominent place as a novelist in Indian English Literature. Her debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) received accolades from great writers and won the Betty Task Award. Her second novel *Inheritance of Loss* received universal praise and has won her Man Booker Prize in 2006.

Sampath Chawla, a dreamingly indolent and reluctant post office clerk, was born in a fictitious town Shahkot during the time of draught. Torrents of rain pour in during his birth giving hope to the members of his family that he would become someone great. Sampath had been an utter failure in school and work despite the love of his idiosyncratic family. He day dreams in tea stalls and sings to himself in public gardens, yearning for a peaceful, simpler way of life. His father has no hope in him but a positive note runs in his grandmother.

“But the world is round” says his grandmother.

“Wait and see! Even if it appears he is going  
down hill, he will come up on the other side.

Yes, on top of the world. He is just taking the  
longer route”. (*HGO* 26)

Even after twenty years Sampath did not show any mark of greatness as predicted by his grandmother. He was nothing but a trouble from the beginning and a mere disappointment to the family. All his classmates find job one by one but Sampath was left idle. His father find him a job at the local post office and try to counsel him that he could find himself in better job or raise in salary at the post office. Sampath does not pay heed to his father’s advice. Findings show that children with a profile of disability may feel isolated, lonely, excluded, as well as experience bullying and teasing. Sampath spends his time alone at the post office, reads the open letters written to and from neighbours and learns a great deal about their personal lives and secrets.

Sampath was fed up of his routine life, to him life was “a never-ending flow of misery” (*HGO* 43). He always wanted to explore things of his own interest. Researchers have identified,



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that a profile of intellectual disability produces a significant effect on the person's self concept, self esteem and self confidence. During the chief's daughter's wedding, Sampath was allotted the duty to fill in sorbet glasses. Feeling bored to do the work, Sampath wished to take a home tour of the chief's house. He stepped into the room piled with wedding fineries and Sampath's heart grew light with the fragrance of rosewater, scent of musk, of moth balls, marigolds and baby powder. Holding the fabrics close to his cheeks Sampath swathed the lengths of pink, green and yellow around himself. He wore a nose ring taking from the jewellery box and viewed himself in his fineries and he metamorphed himself into a glorious bird where he felt far away lifted to another plane. Sampath felt a sudden urge for an imagined world and ventured out of his room in his fineries. Encouraged by the atmosphere he felt himself floating and started to wade into and fountain and splashed water on the ladies creating a lot of confusion at the wedding ceremony. Sampath, mistaking the cries of the onlookers for admiration, started to disrobe himself. Class clown, misbehaviour, high anxiety are some of the characteristic of cognitive disability and the same can be found in Sampath as well who returns home jobless for his misbehaviour. Luckily for Sampath who did not want his job and such a desperate way of living. He wanted an open space and to be left alone.

Kulfi, his mother, who has great concern for Sampath feels sorry for him and offers a fresh guava. Sampath feels energized and transformed the moment he eats it. He leaves his house and takes refuge in a guava orchard, where he finds solace at the branches of the guava tree. He is misconstrued as a great visionary, a religious guru and becomes unexpectedly famous as a holy man. His parents made a visit to the holy man of Shahkot who lived near the Deer Park.

'Sorry to disturb you our son is afflicted'.

How is he afflicted?'

'How is he suffering? Is he shouting?'

'No'

'Having fits?'

'No'

'Is he tearing his hair out?'

'No'

'Is he biting his neighbours? Biting himself?'

Is he sleep-walking? Does he stick out his tongue and roll his eyes?'



Is he rude to strangers?’

‘No. He eats and sleeps and takes good care of his hair.

He doesn’t shout and he doesn’t bite himself. He has never been rude to strangers’.

‘Then he does not exhibit any of the sure signs of madness’ (*HGO* 57)

People with the profile of cognitive disability are judged as mentally disturbed, but they are not. They rather think differently and so they are creative. Lapkin states that, “ it’s unclear whether such creativity comes from thinking outside the box or from having a brain that’s wired a bit differently”( Web April 2016). Sampath’s seer-like status is based with irony on his previous knowledge he has about the Shahkotians, having stamped their mail in the back room of the post office. “Such ironies proliferate at the expense of popular mystic-religious susceptibilities. Too broadly to gain a satirical purchase with much depth; pilgrims swallowing such pseudo-cryptic nonsense as eventually issues from the tree top hermitage (Kumar, January 2009). Sampath’s father attempts to turn the orchard into a profitable one, a carnival scene. There crowds people and horde of businessmen who try to sell their wares ranging from toothpaste to mosquito repellents, to the tourists of the orchard. Even the newspaper gave a coverage “Post-office clerk climbs tree”/ “The Baba of Shahkot in his Tree Abode”. People believed Sampath had an unusual spiritual nature coupled with unfathomable wisdom, which bring solace and hope to many who are disheartened by these complicated and corrupt life. Miss Jyotsna, a postal worker tells a reporter that there is a spiritual atmosphere there which she had not seen anywhere in India. She confesses that she is a frequent visitor to that hermitage, whose disciples affectionately call “Monkey Baba” with respect to his fondness towards animals and the simplicity of his dwelling place. Sampath, the Monkey Baba became famous and thousands of letters all over the world poured in after the appearance of the article. The hullabaloo starts when everyone from his family to the people of Shahkot and the monkeys try to bring Sampath out of the guava tree.

Sampath moves from that orchard in search of a peaceful abode.

Power, responsibility and trust can work wonders in the life of the disabled. Disability is not a disease but a condition, which could be handled positively. Every one of us are born with unique characteristics so are the disabled, it is our responsibility to help them lead a normal life. Kiran Desai has recorded Sampath as the protagonist with disability and has depicted his life in a lighter vein.



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