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Exploring the Masculine Anxieties: A Study of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

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Abstract:

Gender, as a term, distinguishes between sexes describing how its conception revolves around identity, power, politics, and other social norms. In the Indian Society one could find gender as well as gender-specific definitions and roles being attributed to people; be it Man, Woman, or any other where patriarchy always lead to the strengthening of gender-based differences, and marginalization of men. Moreover, the truth about the experiences of men, who are being affected by the patriarchy and social constructed gender roles are not exclusively reflected and deliberated upon in the literary and other texts. Man has always been shown as a gender which is considered liable for everything and is subject to a particular set of attributes which includes being strong, firm and authoritative. Society has set man's image in such a way that he can't afford to cry or be anxious, miserable and depressed or else the order of things would be upset. The issues of Masculine Gender, Patriarchal Suppression and Masculine Anxieties etc are not recent but in the modern world of internet and technology rapid transitions related to men and masculinities are occurring across the world. There is a profound change in the social dynamics of men and there are diverse ways to understand the issues related to them. Therefore, in the present paper, an attempt has been made to unveil various factors adding to their anxieties, miseries and marginalization in Kiran Desai's novel Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard. The theoretical framework is based on various concepts of 'Masculine Studies' as propounded by theorists like Jordan B. Peterson, Dr. Warren Farrell, R.W. Connell and others.

Keywords: Gender, Sex, Masculine-Anxiety, Patriarchal-Suppression, Marginalization, etc.

Introduction:

From the very beginning of civilization, people have categorized themselves into genders and have given specific roles to males and females. Such roles regularly come in the way of society building which should be free of social evils of any kind; discrimination, marginalization, teasing people, especially men with words like Kinnar, eunuch, impotent, chakka, etc. Such words have

become metonyms for boys who are not fit in performing their roles as they are supposed to do. The truth behind this mindset is that people have been self-assuming as well as interpreting male gender which is destined to earn bread and stand tall. Among all such factors, a boy right from the day of his birth is entitled to perform certain duties and thereafter styled in such a manner that as soon as he starts understanding, the duties are imposed upon him by his family or society. Men are the cause of a man's issues because society has always relied on men for doing their duties well followed by giving them gender specific roles and strengthening the patriarchal institute. He has to be successful or he will be marginalized to a mere lowly life having a sad outlook which is a consequence of patriarchal suppression and his life would not be the same but full of anxiety and misery. We can better understand it through Dr. Jordan B. Peterson's book *12 Rules for Life* where he states:

It's not necessarily appropriate now. Circumstances change. If you slump around, with the same bearing that characterizes a defeated lobster, people will assign you a lower status, and the old counter that you share with crustaceans, sitting at the very base of your brain, will assign you a low dominance number. Then your brain will not produce as much serotonin. This will make you less happy and more anxious and sad, and more likely to back down when you should stand up for yourself. It will also decrease the probability that you will get to live in a good neighborhood, have access to the highest quality resources, and obtain a healthy, desirable mate. (36).

This suggests how a man is prone to suffer if he is not able to perform his job well. The job is to be at the top of every sphere in life because society has always seen men as someone whose sole purpose is to provide. In this process of providing a man who fails to fulfill the expectations of society is considered someone who deserves to be dominated by the men who unlike them fulfilled the expectations.

As we read through Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, we find that the protagonist who is a newly-born baby boy at the time of his birth is considered a lucky charm by his grandmother, Ammaji. His birth brought an end to the ongoing famine and other issues in 'Shahkot' which set his destiny of being the one who will provide for his family, but as the story unfolds we find him running away from almost everything that's imposed on him which makes him feel suppressed. This suppression is a result of his gender which he is obliged to behave like or else he would be marginalized as a man who failed in life. Desai on the other hand has shown him protest against such patriarchal suppression as she writes:

Sampath was born. As his face, with a brown birthmark upon one cheek, appeared to the cheers of his family, there was roaring overhead that almost split their eardrums, followed by a vast crash in the street outside. 'What was that?' said Mr. Chawla nervously, as the ground shuddered. Could it be that his son's birth had coincided with the end of the world? Leaving

Kulfi and the new baby, he and Ammaji ran to the window to investigate and discovered that far from being the end of things it was more like the beginning. (*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* 11).

The birth of Sampath and the coming of monsoon which ended the famine and other problems like shortage of food were solved. He is seen as one whose job is to resolve all the issues without fail, hence entitled as someone who needs to work, take responsibility for the matters in hand, and perform his duties well. This way the society works, boys are made men in the process beginning from the day one of their birth through patriarchal practices and norms supported by men as well as women.

Boys are taught from time to time how to do everything and how they are superior physically and mentally. In this context, Kaur has correctly said in her book *Exploring Masculinity in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, “Patriarchy is a term in which male is the favoured gender, and in which male hold dominion, power, and privilege. Men come to assume the dominated role”(10). In the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, it becomes evident from the following lines:

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. In great good humour, chewing on famine relief, they celebrated by the light of a roomful of candles, for the electricity had, of course, gone. (12-13).

This act of naming the little baby as Sampath which means good fortune is an embodiment of socially constructed gendered realities, where men are only seen as someone who is firm in performing his duties just because he is a male. This thought in a way strengthens the institution of patriarchy. This could be further understood through Michael Solis’s translation of Alda Facio’s research article *What is Patriarchy?* As he remarks:

By "patriarchal institutions", I refer to the set of mechanisms, practices, beliefs, myths and relationships organizing relatively stable patterns of human activity with respect to the distribution of resources, the reproduction of individuals, and the type of societal structures within a given Patriarchy. These institutions are closely linked with one another, creating, maintaining and transmitting inequality from generation to generation. Most sociologists recognize as institutions such social structures as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems” (3).

The people of ‘Shahkot’ in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, don’t only treat Sampath as a lucky charm but also give him his male identity because his birth ended their miseries, thus making him an indisputably victorious male when they say, “he was triumphantly and indisputably male” (12).

Next men have been viewed as autocratic, rowdy, muscular, and stringent both mentally and

physically, but such things are no longer define them. One could witness the real inner feelings of men through Sampath's behaviour at night as reflected through following lines in the text:

“Sampath Chawla, with spider-like legs and arms, thin and worried-looking, lay awake under a fan. It thrashed and swung above him, making as much noise as a gale, although Sampath could feel only the faintest tremor of an air current playing about his toes. All around him, his family lay and snored: his father, mother, grandmother, and his youngest sister, Pinky, swathed in quantities of flowered organza. Rrrrr, Rrrrr, Phurrrr, Wheeeee, Rrrrrrrr. What a racket! Sampath listened to each hostile inhalation... He kicked a foot up into the air with impatience... However, Sampath decided, for his own sake, it would be best to suppress his irritation. (14).

Sampath was unable to sleep the whole night due to his snorting family, and hot climate and kept wondering of the right time to sleep, but the sun rose and everyone was awake. When Ammaji saw him in the morning, her first words were: “Didn't you sleep? How will you last the day? She pinched his cheeks with tender reproach”(18). Ammaji asked Sampath about his lazy outlook affectionately but it was just to make sure whether he was ready to work properly that day because he hardly had any sleep. Sampath was mum because if he would have told the reality of his position without sleep, he was prone to humiliation. Sampath here fits the role of a sufferer or suppressed rather than a man who is trying to suppress others. Had he been a staunch patriarch, he would have awakened his mother, sister and even father or something worst would have happened. But Sampath is shown as a responsible man although in his own light where he himself and the readers could empathize with his miseries. This behavior of Sampath is an embodiment of his upbringing in such a way that he couldn't reprimand his upbringing and his basic nature of being aggressive physically as well as mentally. This position is best defined by Connell in his book *Masculinities* as:

True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies - to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action...” (45).

Sampath is trying to break free from the patriarchal system by passively voicing against women even if it is by remaining silent instead he accepts himself as one who loves his family a lot and hence doesn't want to interrupt their sleep. It might seem a small measure adapted by Sampath but it really does speak a lot about how men try to cope with his anxieties as given by Connell in his book *Masculinities* as “the moment of separation from hegemonic masculinity basically involves choosing passivity. Since all these men were initially engaged with a masculinity defined by dominance and assertiveness, this choice is likely to be difficult”(132). He thus represents his urge to adjust and not manipulate or be violent towards whosoever is stressing him and not showing the

traits of hegemonic masculinity but of subordinate or marginalized masculinities where hegemonic masculinities are further defined by Connell as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77).

In the novel people entitled Sampath as a man whose birth ended storm but it doesn't end here. Men are stuck in their roles of taking responsibility; earning, being the boss, etc, no matter how much it stresses them out. The stress of being a male is not just in dominating others but constantly reminding oneself about how a man should behave. It could be seen in the character of Mr.. Chawla (Sampath's father) who does his morning exercise everyday which according to him is what a man does and is requisite to stay active, muscular and dominant, etc over the others and therefore, he could be called a hegemonic male who is ready to take over the world. This kind of daily routine to start the morning tells about how much Mr. Chawla understands his duties as an employee. This is reflected in the text as follows:

Determined to start the day in a purposeful manner, according to schedule and habit, he spat out the last remnants of sleep and inertia in a perfectly aimed spray of spittle... ‘Ommmmmm,’ he roared, teeth gleaming in the morning rays. ‘Ommmmmm’. He informed the world that he, Mr. R. K. Chawla (B.A., Pass), head clerk at the Reserve Bank of ‘Shahkot’, was ready for a new day... He stepped out in the world firm-footed and sure, putting to shame the sorry young men who dropped about the town, ignoring their responsibilities. (19).

From the above extract it becomes evident that Mr. Chawla is showcasing his hegemony over all those young men who are supposed to do the same, or else no one would credit their existence. This fear of rejection or being entitled as idle is something which makes men anxious about what would happen if they don't earn to run their tribes, they would be held as useless.

Moreover, ‘patriarchal-marginalization’ is something that creates this fear of not earning much because if a man earns much he gets rewards. In the words of Conell, “Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend” (82) However, if they underperform, it is clear that their replacement would be sought surely by the organization they are working for and even their family would deem them unfit to live together with. Men thus, need to provide for their family or organization because the society or patriarchy has set such kind of norms for them. Men are usually expected to work, to earn and not standing tall on the expectations of society would marginalize them in a way that they will face the humiliation. of every sort as mentioned above; rejection, womanly, useless, etc. This kind of humiliation stands wholly for patriarchal ‘marginalization’ and ‘suppression’ of male- gender. This idea could be further elaborated from the theory of Lobsters given by Dr. Jordan Peterson in his *12 Rules for Life*:

Lobsters live on the ocean floor. They need a home base down there, a range within which they hunt for prey and scavenge around for stray edible bits and pieces of whatever rains down from the continual chaos of carnage and death far above. They want somewhere secure, where the hunting and the gathering is good. They want a home. This can present a problem, since there are many lobsters. What if two of them occupy the same territory... If you catch a few dozen, and transport them to a new location, you can observe their status-forming rituals and techniques. ... A lobster loser's brain chemistry differs importantly from that of a lobster winner. This is reflected in their relative postures.... (23).

Mr. Chawla in the text is representing a male lobster who once grabbed a government job as a mere clerk in the hierarchy of jobs and then only he was able to become a good son to Ammaji, husband to Kulfi, and father to Sampath and his sister Pinky. He at the same time warns the young men through his mockery that if they failed the test of getting a job or becoming successful in life, they would be like loser lobsters. Such is the nature of men who in one way or another are not able to accept how society expects them to perform. Mr.. Chawla has clarified those who are failing to fit the expectations of being a real man like a winner- lobster as given above, they would never be able to get a partner as Peterson defines it through the following lines:

Females outsource the problem to the machine-like calculations of the dominance hierarchy. They let the males fight it out and peel their paramours from the top. This is very much what happens with stock-market pricing, where the value of any particular enterprise is determined through the competition of all.

Hence a male is required to live according to what the society expects from him, he has to have an attitude like Mr. Chawla who is distinguished from Sampath as the text follows, "What good will Sampath be!... Look at him, sitting there as usual, with no raise in pay or promotion anywhere in sight." These words are from Pinky and Ammaji who are female characters in the novel and as the fate holds it, they are taking a satirical jibe at Sampath for being a loser- lobster who failed to get a good job on his own and is miserable at getting promotions.

Walum says in his book, *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender: A Sociological Perspective*, "Whether a male wants to or not, he is impelled to live up to society's expectations, or suffer guilt and withdrawal...if he fails to act gentlemanly or get a raise or support his family, his sense of masculinity is on line"(12), which has left men to face marginalization because if they protest or don't behave like hegemonic males, they mentally start feeling anxious as they enter a realm of chaos. This could also be found in the lines by Peterson *12 Rules for Life* where he claims,

Where everything is certain, we're in order. We're there when things are going according to plan and nothing is new and disturbing...Chaos is the experience of reeling unbound and unsupported through space when your guiding routines and traditions collapse....(45).

While moving from chaos to order, it requires a lot of mental courage as well as courage of every kind to stand against suppression and marginalization. Sampath in the novel is shown as a boy who is marginalized at the hands of order or hegemonic masculinity which in turn is hindering him to break from traditions which Desai in the text writes as,

Mr. Chawla turned back to Sampath, Get ready for work. Why are you still sitting here like a potato? ...What's the matter with this family?...If it wasn't for me, Sampath would be sitting in a special museum for people who are a cross between potatoes and human beings...(26).

These lines suggest that Sampath is always considered a failure by his family based on the fact that as given by Connell in *Masculinities*, "Researchers discover biological 'mechanisms' in behaviour. Brains are 'hardwired' to produce masculinity; men are genetically 'programmed' for dominance; aggression is in our 'biogram'" (48). Now, Sampath doesn't want to run like everyone who is running in order to dominate, settle down, start a family or do so, may-be he does want it all but his priorities are nowhere close to doing the same job, marry or to fulfill what his gender wants, which of course wants him to be aggressive. Mr. Chawla because of his personal fears is trying to suppress Sampath's urge to do things which are not the likes of a man, therefore, making him anxious and more marginalized.

Conclusion:

From the above study it becomes clear that Mr. Chawla, Sampath's father is perfect blend of a man who lives in the current society and has accepted the ways of patriarchy and is himself stressed about performing his duties of a man although implicitly. The novel in discussion highlights all the notions that society has predetermined. Mr. Chawla is representative of male accepted behaviours which are hegemonic in nature. Sampath, on the other hand, is shown as contesting against hegemonic patriarchy embodied by his father, Mr. Chawla. He thus fails to respond to patriarchal expectations and shows a kind of silent protest of a man who is fed up with his image already fixed in the eye of society. It must be noted that Sampath is always held responsible for not fulfilling what his destiny holds based on patriarchal thought. He shares everything in common with what other men face in society including the fear of not getting marginalized or suppressed and the urge to break the patriarchal order and define things differently. All the attributes of Sampath stand in contrast to Mr. Chawla where the former is well aware of his failing nature and still fails to keep up with patriarchal institution and whatsoever it demands, whereas the latter is depicted as an example of what hegemonic masculinity is all about and how it's taking a toll on Mr. Chawla himself in a way that he needs to perform and keep reminding himself of his prerogatives as a man. Men have been marginalized, suppressed and made anxious in the novel as in the case of Sampath and Mr Chawla to an extent, but their miseries and anxieties are ignored

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