Chapter IV

A Psychoanalytic Study of Kiran Desai’s characterisation

Kiran Desai is undoubtedly one of the most original and remarkable writers of her generation. Her much heralded first book, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) made its debut with a lot of accolades and praise from literary greats such as Salman Rushdie and others. Despite the lush humour and comic story telling technique applied in this book, Desai’s touching sensitivity towards her characters dominates above all, as she talks about her experience after finishing *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. “You live with these characters for years and you live in the settings...I lived in the little village that I created for so long that at first I was bereft when the book was finished” (Desai. www.randomhouse.com). As well received as Desai’s debut book was, it is her second book, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), which enabled her to set a firm foot on the literary world. This marvellously imaginative novel went on to win the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2006 as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, amongst others.

*The Inheritance of Loss* is a stunning literary marvel, set during the mid 1980s and traces the lives of the downtrodden and the upper middle class. It is an ambitious novel with parallel stories stretching from illegal Indian immigrant Biju in New York and the rest of the characters in the more remote north east corner of India. A young independent India is still reeling from the after effects of colonialism and this creates an intense psychological trauma in
Anglophiles. The novel is written with an original humour; full of stylistic playfulness and comic relief. Desai deftly shifts from New York and India; past and present, and the grim and comic. The inner mindset of her characters is magnificently depicted. The author also employs a stream of consciousness technique which aids in depicting the multifaceted psyche of her characters.

The book begins with sixteen year old Sai, a young orphan girl who resides with her Anglicised grandfather, Jemubhai Patel, who is a retired judge. The novel is set against the backdrop of the historic Nepalese insurgency movement for an independent state. Sai lives with her grandfather Jemubhai Patel at Kalimpong, located at the foothills of the Himalayas where the borders of several Himalayan states including Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet, meet. There is also a cook who resides with them. After his retirement, Jemubhai Patel had lived alone with only the company of a cook and Mutt, his beloved pet dog Mutt in “Cho Oyu”, the isolated and crumbling house in Kalimpong. He is estranged from his family and has never met his granddaughter Sai as he had disowned her mother a long time ago. When Sai’s parents pass away in a tragic vehicle accident in Russia, the nuns in the convent where she is raised decides to send her to her grandfather. Sai’s arrival upsets her grandfather but he grudgingly tolerates the situation. The beginning of the story also introduces Sai’s budding romance with Gyan, her young Nepalese maths tutor. In this same hill station, we are also presented with a coterie of Anglophiles in the form of the Bengali sisters Noni and Lola who live in a cottage called, “Mon Ami”. There is also Mrs Sen, Uncle Potty, Uncle Potty and various other colourful characters.

In a parallel narrative, Desai also presents the life of Biju who is the son of the nameless cook who works for Jemubhai Patel. Biju is an illegal immigrant in New York and is struggling to make a new life. Through Biju, we
are also introduced to similar immigrant characters such as Saaed Saaed from Zanzibar and various others. Biju’s father as well as everyone in India speaks highly of him as he is in the United States and they imagine him to be living the “American dream”. However, reality is a stark contrast and the truth is that Biju is hopping from one place to the other, struggling to make a living and surviving by washing dishes in shady restaurants that are not too particular about verifying the profile of their employees. Biju and his friends constantly talks and dreams about ways to avail the coveted green card.

*The Inheritance of Loss* subtly but effectively presents the internal conflicts in India between different groups of people hailing from different social strata. This conflict is intrinsically linked to the past colonialism and present independence. With both sets of characters in Kalimpong and New York, we see that there is the rejection and yet awe of the English way of life. This creates an internal conflict within the character with his or her own self as well as with the social environment. The fragility of the lives of the characters is powerfully depicted by how the Nepalese Gorkha Revolution upturns their lives. This revolution also stymies the fledging romance between Sai and Gyan as unknown to Sai, Gyan becomes embroiled by the rising insurgency movement, if only temporarily.

Jemubhai Patel is arguably the most enigmatic character in this book. He is an embittered old man who is alienated from everything and everyone around him, except his beloved pet dog, Mutt. The singular, most definitive characteristic that stands out in Jemubhai Patel is that he is a blatant Anglophile. This has shaped the course of his life completely. The judge is a man who is so anglicised that Indian customs and way of living disgusts him and he even eats his chapattis with a fork and knife on the rare occasions that he eats Indian cuisine. He hates all Indians, which makes up everyone around him and has broken off ties with his own family.
The judge had left for Cambridge, England, from his ancestral home of Piphit, India, in the year 1939, when he was twenty years of age. His departure was serenaded by two retired members of a military band, hired by his father in law. He had just gotten married through an arranged marriage to Nimi, his fourteen year old child bride. Up till then, Jemubhai had been a simple village boy. However, his departure to Cambridge seemed to mark the beginning of a drastic personality transformation. Perhaps unconsciously, his psyche had already begun to warn him. An awareness came over Jemubhai as he sat in the train with his father.

The very fact that they were sitting in the train, the speed of it, rendered his world trivial, indicated through each window evidence of emptiness that stood eager to claim an unguarded heart. He felt a piercing fear, not for the future, but for the past, for the foolish faith with which he had lived in Piphit ([IL 36]).

As Jemubhai’s ship set sail for the distant overseas, the traditional customs were observed and he was supposed to throw a coconut into the sea. When his father reminded him to throw the coconut into the ocean, Jemubhai hesitated. For the first time, he viewed his father as a half educated man from the village. “Jemubhai looked at his father, a barely educated man venturing where he should not be, and the love in Jemubhai’s heart mingled with pity, the pity with shame” (37). Unknown to his father, the son that he had lovingly sent overseas to avail the opportunity for a better life would never return as remembered. “Jemubhai watched his father disappear. He didn’t throw the coconut and he didn’t cry. Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn’t adulterated by other contradictory emotion” (37).

A young Jemubhai seemed to have been an intensely sensitive and neurotic personality. He also has an inferiority complex which makes him
behave unreasonable and illogical. Jemubhai becomes increasingly incensed as he unpacks the food so lovingly packed by his mother for the journey. Besides the bundle of puris and pickle, there was also a banana which had become overripe in the course of the ship’s voyage. He is convinced that his mother had done so because she knew that, “he lacked the courage to go to the dining salon on the ship, given that he couldn’t eat with knife and fork” (38). His mother’s thoughtfulness evokes a negative reaction. Instead of being touched, Jemubhai becomes incensed. “He was furious that his mother had considered the possibility of his humiliation and thereby he though, precipitated it. In her attempt to cancel out one humiliation she had only succeeded in adding another” (38). Jemubhai’s private fears take over his psyche and although unreasonable, he imagines that every kind gesture of a loved one has a diabolique intention. This kind of suspicious behaviour is typical of psychological neurosis in a person.

The neurotic feels basically inadequate and insecure in a world which he perceives as dangerous and hostile. Consequently, he sees many everyday situations as threatening—situations which would not be so evaluated by most people (Coleman 218).

Jemubhai’s neurosis is not something that evolved out of his experience with western culture. The fact that Jemubhai’s paranoid behaviour occurred even before he reached English shores and consequently became an anglophile, reveals that the neurotic tendency in Jemubhai was always present. A colonial education in India had made a deep and lasting impression on Jemubhai since he was a child. As India was under British regime during that time, the school building in India where Jemubhai studied had a portrait of Queen Victoria on the entrance. Everyday little Jemubhai would study the portrait and feel deeply influenced by the picture. The strange looking woman which the fringed cape and peculiar hat impressed his young mind. “The more he pondered this oddity,
the more his respect for her and the English grew” (IL 58). Although the author does not delve too much into Jemubhai’s childhood, there is a sense that he is a peculiar child who suffers from emotional detachment. This tendency became gargantuan after being exposed to western culture which leads him to detest everything Indian in nature. Jemubhai’s thoughts are vicious as he threw the food so tenderly packed by his mother into the sea.

Jemubhai picked up the package, fled to the deck, and threw it overboard. Didn’t his mother think of the inappropriateness of her gestures? Undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love— the monsters of the ocean could have what she had so bravely packed getting up in that predawn mush (38).

The fact that the retired old Jemubhai retreats into an isolated and crumbling house in Kalimpong after severing all ties with family and friends, and also, the fact that he hates all humans and feels affection only for his dog gives reason to suspect a psychological imbalance in Jemubhai. His cruelty towards his estranged wife Nimi and the resulting course of events is immeasurably tragic. Before his imminent departure to England, a young Jemubhai was married to Nimi, the beautiful fourteen year old daughter of a rich man named Bomanbhai in their village. The newly married couple were practically strangers and Jemubhai had left for Cambridge shortly after the wedding. In England, Jemubhai Patel experiences racial discrimination and experiences a culture shock. Without ever experiencing the loveliness of the English countryside or the beauty of a different culture, Jemubhai worked twelve hours at a stretch and late into the night continuously. He studied tirelessly. “He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow” (39). It is here in Cambridge that Jemubhai’s delicate psyche
undergoes a grim and massive transformation. As his inferiority complex increased, Jemubhai became obsessively paranoid and neurotic in nature. His behaviour is directly connected to psychological reasons.

Thus, Jemubhai’s mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to life his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn’t bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth...He began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling, and each morning he scrubbed off the thick milky scent of sleep, the barnyard smell that wreathed him when he woke and impregnated the fabric of his pyjamas (40).

The above extract which describes Jemubhai’s obsessive washing is indicative of a mental ailment obsessive known as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) which makes the sufferers obsessively repeat an action. His increasingly obsessive cleaning continues after returning to India after clearing his ICS exams. “He followed his ablutions with a clinical measure of whisky, as if consuming a disinfectant” (170). More than the physical signs of psychological anxiety, Jemubhai’s emotional health becomes alarmingly fragile. “Eventually he felt barely human at all, leaped when touched on the arm as if from an unbearable intimacy, dreaded and agonized over even a ‘How-do-you-do-lovely-day’ from the fat woman dressed in friendly pinks who ran the corner store” (40). Jemubhai would also burst into tears of self pity at the minutest acts of casual courtesy or affection and therefore, began to isolate himself from anybody familiar. While in England, he would search out for anonymous shops as he could not bear the familiarity of the corner store.
Jemubhai is overcome with emotion when the shop girl comments that her husband uses the same shaving cream which he had just purchased. “The acknowledgement of their identical human needs, the intimacy of their connection, shaving, husband, he was overcome at the boldness of the suggestion” (40). It would be justified to state that Jemubhai is a victim of neurosis and schizophrenia. “To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly” (40). Soon, the hard work pays off the Jemubhai clears the ICS exams. Jemubhai’s extreme reaction upon discovering the good news is evident that he suffers from a severe psychological disorder and is unable to control his emotions.

Looking neither right nor left, the newest member, practically unwelcome, of the heaven born, ran home with his arms folded and got immediately into bed, all his clothes on, even his shoes, and soaked his pillow with his weeping. Tears sheeted his cheeks, eddied about his nose, cascaded into his neck, and he found he was quite unable to control his tormented ragged nerves. He lay there crying for three days and three nights (116).

The neurotic judge eventually becomes emotionally detached over everything. He refers to himself in the third person and isolates himself from everything familiar. “He had learned to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen” (111). The judge’s complete and utter alienation began in England and this remains throughout the rest of his life.
Jemubhai Patel clears the Indian Civil Service and returns to India after five years. He is greeted with brass bands, garlands and flower petals upon arrival. He also meets his forgotten wife Nimi Patel who shyly comes to receive him. He is now twenty five and she, nineteen. Before marriage, Nimi had lived a strict purdah existence in her father’s home. Nimi’s father, Bomanbhai Patel is a self made man who had acquired his wealth by doing business with the British regiment. He is a notorious character who indulges in immoral and questionable activities, including flesh trade. However, he keeps his wife and daughters under strict purdah behind the high walls of his haveli.

Here they lived an idle existence inside the women’s quarters, the strictness of this purdah enforcement increased Bomanbhai’s honor in the community, and he began to acquire little fancies and foibles, to cultivate certain eccentricities that, just as he plotted, reiterated the security of his wealth and reinforced his honor all over again (90).

The above extract reveals that Bomanbhai had acquired his little idiosyncracies and eccentricities only after acquiring wealth. This lends an interesting insight into a person’s personal philosophy which influences him or her to develop a certain personality. Bomanbhai was an ambitious man and ensured that Jemubhai was made a son in law when he first heard of the latter’s imminent departure for England. Jemubhai would become one of the most powerful man in India if he succeeded and Bomanbhai attempted to preserve his legacy by marrying his daughter to such a man.

Psychological ailments are invisible and thus, Jemubhai’s family is unaware of the change in him. They smother him with their familial love and while lauding him, treat him as they had done before he had left. But Jemubhai
is no longer the person they had known. “He sat up, fidgeted, looked at the winged dinosaur, purple beaked banana tree with the eye of one seeing it for the first time. He was a foreigner- a foreigner- every bit of him screamed” (166). The judge also discovers an unreasonable hatred towards his innocent wife who had long cherished their reunion.

He did not like his wife’s face, searched for his hatred, found beauty, and dismissed it. Once it had been a terrifying beckoning thing that had made his heart turn to water, but now it seemed beside the point. An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one (168).

Nimi’s once romantic dreams are crushed and she gradually becomes used to her husband’s cruel and aloof manners. “She grew accustomed to his detached expression” (170). Jemubhai is shocked and disgusted by the act of sex. “Yet he repeated the gutter act again and again...this distaste and his persistence made him angrier than ever and any cruelty to her became irresistible” (170). Jemubhai’s loathing of sex and viewing it as a grotesque act reveals his increasingly unhealthy psyche. This thought process is also reminiscent of a reaction formation. According to psychoanalytic explanation, reaction formation is a defence mechanism whereby a person represses his real desires and develops opposite behavioural patterns.

Thus he may conceal hate with a facade of love, cruelty with kindness, or desires for sexual promiscuity with moralistic sexual attitudes and behaviour. In this way the individual erects obstacles or barriers that reinforce his repression and keep his real desires and feelings from conscious awareness (Coleman 126).
Jemubhai, who is now a judge received his place of posting in Bonda and himself and Nimi travels two days by train and car to reach their destination. There, the judge rents a bungalow and also hires an English companion named Miss Enid Pott in order to teach the English language to Nimi Patel. His wife’s failure to learn the language incensed him and his unreasonable hatred for his innocent wife grows. He would take away food from Nimi’s mouth if she could not describe it in English. Jemubhai never took his wife along with him on tours like the other officers. “She was uncared for, her freedom useless, her husband disregarded his duty” (*IL* 171). She was left alone most of the time and the only time he paid her any attention was to abuse her, both verbally and physically. From being a vivacious young girl, Nimi gradually became withdrawn and detached.

She had fallen out of life altogether. Weeks went by and she spoke to nobody, the servants thumped their own leftovers on the table for her to eat, stole supplies without fear, allowed the house to grow filthy without guilt until the day before Jemubhai’s arrival when suddenly it was brought to lustre again, the clock set to a timetable, water to a twenty minute boil, fruit soaked for the prescribed number of minutes in solutions of pottasuim permanganate (172).

Everything about Nimi triggered the judge’s revulsion. “Even her expressions annoyed him, but they were —gradually replaced by a blankness, he became upset by their absence” (172). Her physical appearance, the tinkle of her bangles, the colours of her sari, the smell of her hair oil; such attire which were typical of Indian women angered him. In time, Nimi stopped looking into the mirror and let herself go completely. “She couldn’t bear to spend a moment in dressing and combing, activities that were only for the happy and the loved”
When Jemubhai saw her (Nimi) cheeks erupting in pustules, he took her fallen beauty as a further affront and felt concerned the skin disease would infect him as well. He instructed the servants to wipe everything with Dettol to kill germs” (173).

A particular incident which depicts Jemubhai’s Anglophilism as well as his destructive hatred is when he discovered Nimi’s footprints on the toilet seat and realised that she had been squatting. In his monstrous rage, he pushes Nimi’s head against the toilet bowl (173). Miss Enid Pott finally gave up on attempting to teach Nimi and tells the judge that Nimi had deliberately made up her mind not to learn the language. “She (Nimi) will not argue- that way one might respond or have a dialogue- she just goes limp” (172). It is important to note that Nimi’s refusal to learn is not due of stubbornness or dullness, as claimed by Miss Pott. The judge’s abuse and neglect has affected her and she seems to have withdrawn into a dark place, a deep confinement within her own psyche.

After a point, Nimi, made invalid by her misery, grew very dull, began to fall asleep in heliographic sunshine and wake in the middle of the night. She peered out at the world but could not focus on it, never went to the mirror, because she couldn’t see herself in it...” (173)

The above description of Nimi’s behaviour is hauntingly evocative of schizophrenia. Nimi appears to have retreated into a private world where no one could hurt her. This defence reaction is referred to in psychoanalytic terms,
as emotional insulation. At the same time however, she has lost the courage to face life and feels no emotion herself. “Psychotic rupture is perhaps the worst and the most regressive aspect of female subjectivity” (Tandon 24). From being a vivacious and spritely young girl with a zest for life, Nimi had now become a passive recipient of whatever life brings her. This transformation is due to her bitterness and frustration with her doomed marriage.

In certain mental disorders, too, such as schizophrenia, there is often an extreme use of insulation that apparently protects the individual from emotional involvement in a life situation and world that have proved unbearably hurtful...Emotional insulation provides a protective shell that prevents a repetition of previous pain, but it reduces the individual’s healthy, vigorous participation in life (Coleman 127).

Although hard to comprehend, a psychoanalytic understanding leads us sufficient reason to believe that the judge is also as much a victim as his wife, at least psychologically. Within a year, the judge and Nimi are a pair of psychologically damaged couple whose dread and bitterness over each other seems limitless. “They belonged to this emotion more than to themselves, experienced rage with enough muscle in it for entire nations coupled in hate” (IL 173). Ultimately, the judge sends a pregnant Nimi home in disgrace to her home in Piphit. This final act had been triggered by a particular incident. While Jemubhai was out, Nimi had involuntarily been part of the Nehru welcoming committee. Nimi never stepped out of the house but had been compelled by Mrs Mohan, a neighbour and passionate congresswoman. Jemubhai, who was a member of the British Raj was enraged when informed of his wife’s involvement as it compromised his career. His rage was not minimised by the knowledge that Nimi was innocent and had been duped by a politically astute
Mrs Mohan. At home, he poured himself a glass of scotch and taunted Nimi with cruel questions while she remained mute as usual. Finally, Nimi replied when he asked whether she was plain stupid. “To his amazed ears and her own shocked ears, as if waking up to a moment of clarity before death, she said, ‘you are the one who is stupid’ “ (304). Jemubhai responded by hitting her and emptying his glass on her head.

Then, when this wasn’t enough to assuage his rage, he hammered down with his fists, raising his arms to bring them down on her again and again, rhythmically, until his own hands were exhausted and his shoulders next day were strained sore as if from chopping wood. He even limped a bit, his leg hurting from kicking her (304).

Jemubhai Patel is a person who is mentally sick and he vents out his anger on Nimi in devastating violence. His violence against Nimi has nothing to do with her. “She soon realised that whatever she did, or didn’t do, the outcome was much the same” (305). Soon after the incident, he resolves to send Nimi to her family and informs her of his decision. As wretched as she is, Nimi refuses to leave as this would disgrace her family. “She could take it for herself- in fact it would be like a blame, a dark place to hide herself- but for her family- well, the thought of their shame on her behalf was too much to bear” (305). For the first time, Jemubhai talks to her in a kind tone and tells her that sending her back was a kindness as he might kill her if she remained. The terrible irony in this statement is not lost on the reader. Study into the psyche of hardened criminals often reveals mental illnesses of various natures. This statement seems to explain the horrifying intensity of Jemubhai’s hatred which could lead to cold blooded murder.
The anger, once released, like a genei from a bottle, could never again be curtailed... His hatred was its own creature; it rose and burned out, reappeared of its own accord, and in her he sought only its justification, its perfection. In its purest moments he could imagine himself killing her (305).

Nimi gave birth to a daughter six months after being sent to Piphit. When Jemubhai received a telegraph about the news, he got drunk but not out of joy. “Without seeing his child, he was sure what it would look like: red as a blister, going off like a kettle, spilling liquids, waves of heat and anger emanating from it” (305). His dreadful imaginings of his own flesh and blood reveals a psychotic nature. Jemubhai refuses to take back or even see his wife and child despite appeals from his father in law and father, who even arrive in Bonda to talk to him. Jemubhai is defensive when his father tells him that sending him to England was a mistake and that he has become a stranger.

He had been recruited to bring his countrymen into the modern age, but he could only make it himself by cutting them off entirely, or they would show up reproachful, pointing out to him the lie he had become (306).

The two men barely talk and Jemubhai does not ask after anyone in Piphit. His father barely stayed for two nights and that was the last that Jemubhai had any contact with his family. Somewhere during the years, a telegraph arrived to inform about Nimi’s death. She had caught fire over the stove. “The judge chose to believe it was an accident” (308). Nimi Patel is not one of the major characters in this book and details about her life are brief. With a few lines and excerpts, Desai deft fully manages to make Nimi Patel
one of the most heartbreaking figures in the book. Her tragic life is all the more compelling for this act.

Nimi’s tragic life and the sense of pathos surrounding the loss of beauty and joy in her life is poignantly portrayed through a historical account. During her brief life with the judge, a despairing Nimi would often climb up the roof and watch the ruins across the Jamuna river. It was a hunting lodge dated to the Mughal Emperor, Jehangir, which now consisted of a few arches with carvings of irises.

The Mughals had descended from the mountains to invade India but, despite their talent in waging war, were softhearted enough to weep for the loss of this flower in the heat; the persistent dream of the iris was carved everywhere, by craftsmen who felt the nostalgia, saw the beauty of what they had made and never known (172).

The contrasting description of the bloodthirst of the Mughals intermingled with their compassion for a flower is evocative of the judge’s brutality towards Nimi’s soft fragility. Psychoanalysis gives importance to the use of symbols and metaphors to decipher hidden meanings. “Psychoanalysis finds in art a system of symbols, representing a hidden reality, and by analysis it can testify to the purposive genuineness of the symbols...” (Singh 174). Describing Jemubhai Patel as simply an Anglophile is too mild a description. His fixed paranoia over English culture and how this obsession rules his personal life reveals a person who suffers from a serious psychological disorder. The judge is alienated from his own self all the more as he is aware that for all his cultivated colonial mannerisms, he still remains a native to the English. Jemubhai frequently goes hunting but is a terrible hunter. The cook
would salvage his reputation by cooking a chicken and presenting it as the shot of the day. The dish would be proclaimed a “Roast bustard”, which was evocative of the Englishman’s favourite joke book of incorrect English by natives. “But sometimes, eating that roast bustard, the judge felt that the joke might be on him, and he called for another rum, took a big gulp, and kept eating feeling as if he was eating himself...” (IL 63). After retirement, the judge who is now alienated from everyone, relocates to Kalimpong at the foot of the Himalayas to live a life of isolation. He buys a house named Cho Oyu, which had been built by a Scotsman. It is no coincidence that the judge purchases a colonial house. The Scottish builder apprises him about the house he was purchasing and tells him that the land has potential. “The judge was not interested in agricultural possibilities of the land but went to see it, trusting the man’s word- the famous word of a gentleman- despite all that had passed” (28). The judge’s blind faith in the word of an Englishman reveals his Anglicism. The judge surveys the house and views it as an escape. “The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language” (29).

Used to a certain standard of lifestyle acquired during his years of service under colonial government, Jemubhai employs a cook and lives with Mutt, his beloved dog. His granddaughter Sai enters his life much later. The judge’s lifestyle is typical of an Englishman. Jemubhai Patel dresses in western attire, relishes afternoon tea with biscuits, has hunting rifles, eats western cuisine most of the time and cannot do without dessert. “The judge ate even his chapattis, his puris and parathas, with knife and fork. Insisted that Sai, in his presence, do the same” (176). The judge would also meticulously observe a typically western mode of formal dining with different courses. When the cook serves only plain biscuits during tea time, the judge becomes upsets. “Never ever was the tea served the way it should be, but he demanded at least a cake or
scones, macaroons or cheese straws. Something sweet and something salty. This was a travesty and it undid the very concept of tea time” (3). When Sai first arrived, the cook, in his excitement had forgotten to serve the soup. “The judge brought down his fist. The soup after the main course? The routine had been upset” (33). This reveals the severely obsessive tendency of the judge. With an eye for detail, the narrator meticulously describes the judge’s very English way of dining. “The judge speared a bit of meat with his fork, dunked it in the gravy, piled on a bit of potato and mashed on a few peas, put the whole thing into his mouth with the fork held in his left hand” (109).

Jemubhai sleeps with his dog Mutt and his extreme affection towards the animal presents a stark dichotomy to his revulsion for humans. He uses baby talk while conversing with Mutt and feeds her the choicest food. The judge becomes mad with grief when Mutt is stolen during the height of the bloody uprising of the Gorkha insurgency. He actually steps out of the house to search for her and asks neighbours to search for his missing dog. The situation is revealed in the lines below. “He received blank faces, some angry laughter. ‘Saala Machoot... what does he think? We’re going to look for his dog?’ People were insulted. ‘At a time like this. We can’t even eat!’ ” (289). The judge does not realise the inappropriateness of his request. It was a time when Kalimpong was in complete chaos; shops were closed, there was starvation, people were being killed and the gutters in the street were a bloody mess. “On the road to the market, the trees were hung with the limbs of enemies- which side and whose enemy?” (295). He even visits the SDO who becomes angry and replies, “A dog! Justice, just listen to yourself. People are being killed. What can I do?” (291). The judge finally returns homeward in a daze. He behaves in a delirious manner and calls out to Mutt tenderly and also begs whoever had stolen Mutt to return her.
He shouted all the language that was between Mutt and himself, sending nursery words of love flying over the Himalayas, rattled her leash so it clinked the way that made her jump-whoop!—up on all four legs together, as if on a pogo stick. “Walkie, baba, muffin...Mutt, mutton, little chop... he cried, then, “forgive me, my little dog...please let her go whoever you are...” (292).

As a curfew was strictly imposed, a soldier follows the judge and urges him to return home. The judge angrily tells the man to leave him alone in a British accent, imagining that his accent would make a difference and continues his display of mad grief. The soldier continues to follow the judge and notes his strange behaviour. “Something indecent was happening” (293). Later at home, the soldier tells his wife about the bizarre behaviour of the judge. “‘God knows what happens, these senile men and their animals... you know’, he said, ‘all kind sof strange things...’” (293). The manner which the soldier describes the judge suggests that perhaps he is viewed as peculiar and maybe even a tad round the bend by the locals. Madness is after all, often subjective and based on socially accepted ideas or concepts. As for Mutt, she had been sold to a family who did not really care for her but just wanted to own a pedigree dog. “She was just a concept” (321).

Jemubhai Patel’s devastation over the disappearance of his pet dog Mutt is understandable. However, there is reason to believe that his grief is an underlying facade for something much more complicated which only a psychoanalytic study may grasp. The agnostic judge gets down on his knees to pray to God for the return of Mutt. His anguished mind then wanders to his past actions and decisions.
For sins he had committed that no court in the world could take on... Yet he thought of his family that he had abandoned. He thought of his father, whose strength and hope and love he had fed on, only to turn around to spit in his face. Then he thought of how he had returned his wife, Nimi (302).

The judge thinks of Nimi and how he had left her. “Stolen her dignity, shamed his family, shamed hers, turned her into the embodiment of their humiliation” (302). His long buried conscience surfaces and he ponders distraughtly over her demise; whether he had caused her death by abandoning her. He thinks of Sai’s late mother, the daughter he never knew. The judge had condemned his daughter to a life in boarding school after Nimi had died tragically under mysterious circumstances. He had been relieved when, “she (Sai’s mother) reached a new height of uselessness and absurdity by eloping with a man who had grown up in an orphanage” (308). His daughter and son in law had tragically died in an accident and that is how an orphan Sai had come to live with him. The judge seems to have locked away his painful memories and these long suppressed recollections of pain and guilt were triggered by Mutt’s disappearance. There seems to be a displacement of grief.

In displacement there is a shift of emotion or symbolic meaning from a person or object towards which it was originally directed to another person or object. Often displacement involves difficult emotions, such as hostility and anxiety. In some instances the individual whose hostility has been aroused by an outside person or event may turn the hostility inward, engaging in exaggerated self accusations and recriminations, and feel severe guilt and self devaluation (Coleman 126)
Jemubhai Patel is a man who is one of the elite Indians, having served in the Indian Civil Service and had a successful career. His psyche however, remains a chaotic mess and this affects his personal life. He has bottled all his painful memories for so long and refuses to address or come to terms with his past. However, in his old age, this long held repression appears to be forcing itself through little slips and incidents. “His memory seemed triggered by the tiniest thing” (IL 113). Despite his resolve, he recalls his psychologically tumultuous past.

The judge picked up a book and tried to read, but he couldn’t. He realized, to his surprise, that he was thinking of his own journeys, of his own arrivals and departures, from places far in his past...Many years had passed, and yet the day returned to him vividly, cruelly (35).

According to psychoanalysis, “The unconscious memories of urges continue to seek expression and may emerge in the form of ‘accidents’, ‘slips’ or neurotic symptoms” (Morgan 589). Basing on outward behaviour, he appears to be an aloof and sadistic man who abuses his servants and is incapable of kindness or love towards his fellow human beings. However, a psychoanalytic analysis into his psyche helps us to understand him better. The judge is in fact, a victim of his own neurosis; a severely unhappy figure haunted by repressed and painful memories. “The judge felt old, very old, and as the house crumbled about him, his mind, too seemed to be giving way, doors he had kept firmly closed between one thought and the next, dissolving” (IL 110). These lines create a moving image of the crumbling old house which beautifully symbolises the disintegration of the judge’s psyche.
The judge appears to be fighting against his recollections of the past as his fragile psyche cannot handle it. Against his better judgement, he agrees to meet an old colleague called Bose who had also been in the ICS. Bose tries to reminisce about the past as old men do but the judge is unwilling. “Bose was drinking peg after peg, desperate to wrangle something—a common memory, an establishment of truth that had, at least, a commitment from two people” (205). Bose is struggling with his own frustrations and demons as well. It is interesting how Bose needed a confirmation of memory from another man to know that it was real; as if he did not trust his own psyche. Bose comes to the wrong man as the judge’s demons are of a different nature. He does not wish to open the floodgates of memory. “He wouldn’t tumble his pride to melodrama at the end of his life and he knew the danger of confession—it would cancel any hope of dignity forever” (208). Unlike Bose, Jemubhai does not wish to revisit the past. “It was possible to forget and sometimes essential to do so” (308). Jemubhai has consciously repressed his memories as he feels that it would destroy him to face them. “In this life, he remembered again, you must stop your thoughts if you wished to remain intact, or guilt and pity would take everything from you, even yourself from yourself” (264). Jemubhai is not a cruel man by choice. “Sai arrived, and he was worried that she would incite a dormant hatred in his nature, that he would wish to rid himself of her as he had her mother, her grandmother” (210). The judge is a slave to his own hatred and is incapable of controlling his emotions. However, he found that Sai was a westernized Indian like him and he saw something achingly familiar in her. “The granddaughter whom he didn’t hate was perhaps the only miracle fate had thrown his way” (210). A psychoanalytical analysis of the judge convinces the reader that he is a figure to be pitied. This is probably because the judge hates himself as much as he dislikes the entire human race. Through a psychological study into the delicate mental condition of Jemubhai Patel’s psyche, we realise that he is a man who is in pain, trapped within the confines of his own psyche.
and is in the brink of a mental and emotional breakdown. Psychoanalysis tells us that the Id cannot stay repressed forever.

The underlying assumption is that when some wish, fear, memory, or desire is difficult to face we may try to cope with it by repressing it, that it is, eliminating it from the conscious mind. But this doesn’t make it go away: it remains alive in the unconscious, like radioactive matter buried beneath the ocean, and constantly seeks a way back into the conscious mind, always succeeding eventually (Barry 100).

Seventeen year old Sai is an Anglophile like her grandfather, Jemubhai Patel. She remains one of the most endearing characters in the book. Unlike her grandfather, Sai is kind towards the cook and has a natural empathy for people in distress. She is also in the middle of a romantic relationship with Gyan, who is her Nepalese Math tutor. Unknown to Sai, Gyan is seduced by a group of Nepalese insurgents, some of whom, as the book opens, are marching to Sai’s house to steal her grandfather’s old rifles. Sai realises later onwards that Gyan must have informed his friends about the guns as Sai had shown him around the old house during the course of their romance. To Gyan’s credit, he had unwittingly revealed the guns to the others and had not known about the planned robbery. Their brief romance is cut short by the Insurgency movement.

Sai is the only child of Jemubhai Patel’s only daughter whom he had never seen. Sai’s parents, Mr and Mrs Mistry had been scientists who worked in Moscow, Russia. This was during the close of the Indo-USSR romance and Sai’s father had been picked from the Indian Air Force as a possible candidate for the Intercosmos program. Before the couple went off to Moscow, they hastily put their six year old Sai in the same convent which her mother, Mrs
Mistry had attended. Tragically, their lives were cut short when one day, a speeding local bus ran into them and the young couple died under the wheels of a foreign vehicle in a foreign land.

It is pertinent to delve into the psyche of little Sai in order to be able to understand the young woman she becomes. Seventeen year old Sai appears to be a very sensitive girl, mature beyond her years and has only adults for company. She is unable to forge friendships with her contemporaries and instead spends time with her elderly retired neighbours, the sisters Noni, Lola and Father Potty and Uncle Booty. Sai has experienced complex emotions such as death and loss since a tender age. While in the convent, Sai would communicate with her parents through letter writing. “But the letters seemed like book exercises. Sai had not seen her parents in two whole years and the emotional immediacy of their existence had long vanished” (IL 28). Sai’s grandmother, Nimi Patel, had gradually been ostracised by her own family after her marriage failed, although for no fault of hers. Her mysterious death is troubling and there are strong hints of foul play. It is probable therefore, that Sai’s mother did not have good relations with her mother’s family. Furthermore, her eloping with Mr Mistry had caused irrevocable damage to an already estranged relationship and she was ultimately disowned. Little Sai, hence, does not have any emotional support and has no blood ties with anyone besides her parents, who has left her in a convent. We are therefore given reason to believe that young Sai suffers from a feeling of abandonment and possibly, trauma.

Sai is informed of her parents’ tragic death by dour faced nuns who try their best to be sympathetic. Emotional detachment is often the sign of a traumatised psyche and this is reflected in the fact that Sai did not mourn her parents. “She tried to cry, but she couldn’t” (28). Her fragile psyche seems to
be numbed and the lines below are revealing. “‘I’m an orphan’, Sai whispered to herself, resting in the infirmary. ‘My parents are dead. I am an orphan’” (27). She seems to be willing herself to mourn and is making a conscious effort to remind herself of the tragedy that had befallen her. After Sai is orphaned, the nuns discuss the practical consequences. “This month there would be no Mistry bank draft in the convent coffers, no mandatory donations to the toilet renovation fund and bus fund, to fete days and feast days” (28). The women notice the single listing in the emergency contact for Sai and they decide to pack the girl off to the now retired Chief Justice, Judge Jemubhai Patel. He was her grandfather after all. It is heartbreaking to imagine the rioting emotions which Sai had to deal with at a very tender age. To lose her parents suddenly and then, to have to deal with a completely new environment and meeting a grandfather she had never known. The traumatic experience would have been compounded by the fact that her grandfather is a bitter man whose only act of kindness is that he does not turn her away from his house. Through Sai and her grandfather, Desai presents a tragic picture of two people, who are very different from each other but share a common link of suffering from severe emotional disability.

Another aspect that Sai and her grandfather had in common was their English education. Having been raised in a convent, the white culture was so ingrained in her that she is completely anglicised.

The system might be obsessed with purity, but it excelled in defining the flavour of sin...This Sai had learned. This underneath, and on top a flat creed: cake was better than laddoos, forkspoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than
garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi (30).

Sai’s Anglicism eventually alienates her from Gyan but it causes Jemubhai Patel to tolerate her better. When the robbery at Cho Oyu occurs and the GNLF boys demand that tea and snacks be arranged, Sai struggles to prepare tea in the kitchen. “Sai, her hands shaking, stewed tea in a pan and strained it, although she had no idea how to properly make tea this way, the Indian way. She only knew the English way” (6). Soon after Sai’s arrival, the judge decides that sending Sai to the local government schools would be too risky as she might come up speaking the wrong accent (Indian) and therefore, decides to hire a private tutor instead. Not surprisingly, the judge is unable to provide his orphan granddaughter with the affection she desperately craved. Instead, it is the simple, nameless cook who pampers her and gives her affectionate pet names. The cook also entertained Sai by regaling to her, concocted stories of her grandfather in the old days.

Sai’s attachment to the cook and her craving for affection is touchingly expressed over how she envies Biju, the cook’s son, who is presently struggling to make a living in America. The cook and his son Biju shares a very close father son relationship and enjoys each others’ company. “They hadn’t noticed Sai, then aged thirteen, staring from her bedroom window, jealous of the cook’s love for his son” (103). Sai had been overjoyed when Biju’s visa had been approved by the American embassy. “If his son were around, he (cook) would pay only the most cursory attention to her. She was just the alternative, the one to whom he gave his attention if he could not have Biju, the real thing” (187). This is reminiscent of the psychoanalytical concept referred to as, “Displacement”. “In displacement, the motive remains unaltered but the person substitutes a different goal object for the original one” (Morgan 590). To
appreciate the terrible poignancy of Sai’s jealousy, we have to understand the stark social and economic divide between Sai and Biju. Sai belongs to the cream of Indian society and has had the best education that money can buy. Her grandfather is one of the first few Indians who have served under the elite Indian Civil Service. Her late parents were also a part of the intellectual set in post independence India. Despite such a privileged lineage, Sai envies Biju, the son of the cook. Biju’s mother had died when he was small and the boy had experienced nothing but abject poverty his whole life. His father’s devotion appears to be the only thing of worth in his life.

Although Sai herself does not realise it, she suffers from a sense of utter loneliness and has a crippling lack of self esteem. These are psychological issues which can only be understood from a psychoanalytical perspective. At age seventeen, she talks to herself and often views her own mirror image like that of a stranger. This echoes her feelings of alienation from her own self.

Sai, walking to the kitchen, caught a glimpse of herself being smothered and reached forward to imprint her lips on the surface, a perfectly formed film star kiss. “Hello,” she said, half to herself and half to someone else (IL 2).

While looking at her mirror image, Sai thinks about the fact that no human had ever seen an adult giant squid alive. “Their was a solitude so profound they may never encounter another of their own tribe. The melancholy of this situation washed over Sai” (2). These lines convey the terrible loneliness of young Sai which enables her to empathize with an elusive sea creature. Whenever Sai spots children with doting parents, she wonders, “Had her mother been like this? And her father? Sai felt suddenly bereft and jealous of these children” (213). At one instant, she chance upon a happy Tibetan family
in a restaurant cooing over a baby and this happy scene depressed her. “Why couldn’t she be part of that family? Rent a room in someone else’s life?” (213).

It is significant that Gyan had entered Sai’s life at a time when she is most vulnerable; the prime of her adolescence. It is not surprising that young Sai who is already a mini adult, suffers from a loss of self and has low self worth. She would often scrutinise herself in the mirror and struggle to find beauty.

She sometimes thought herself pretty, but as she began to make a proper investigation, she found it was a changeable thing, beauty. No sooner did she locate it than it slipped from her grasp; instead of disciplining it, she was unable to refrain from exploiting its flexibility. She stuck her tongue out at herself and rolled her eyes, then smiled beguilingly (74).

Sai’s Anglicism also drives a wedge between herself and Gyan. She has inherited her grandfather’s revulsion for the Indian custom of eating with one’s hands. “Eating together they had always felt embarrassed - he, unsettled by her finickiness and her curbed enjoyment, and she, revolted by his energy and his fingers working the dal, his slurps and smacks” (176). This literary wonder traces the life of Sai from childhood to early womanhood and explores the most intimate moments of her life. Although Sai’s psyche is a riot of complex adolescent feelings and emotions, there is not a single incident where she betrays her feelings either through words or deeds. On the contrary, she is always well behaved and calm. Sai tells Gyan about her parents and the past but never confides her dark thoughts. It is evident that Sai represses her emotions well. This unhealthy repression of her feelings comes into play once again after her romance with Gyan comes to an end. Soon after the robbery, Sai had spotted Gyan in an insurgency procession and figured that he must have instigated the robbery. The two lovers quarrel bitterly and harsh words are
exchanged. She does not express his sorrow to anyone and conceals the symptoms of heartbreak under the common cold.

Her rescuer was the common domestic cold. Heroically, it caught her common domestic grief in the nick of time, muddled the origin of her streaming eyes and sore throat, shuffled the symptoms of virus and disgraceful fall from the tightrope of splendid love. Shielded thus from simple diagnosis, she enveloped her face in the copious folds of a man’s handkerchief (251).

Sai mourns over the loss of Gyan’s affections and begins to question her previous feelings. “Was her affection for Gyan just a habit? How on earth could she think of someone so much?” (252). Mutt goes missing not long after. Sai, who is always kind but not particularly over fond of Mutt goes berserk with grief over the missing dog. “When Mutt went missing, Sai, who had hidden her loss of Gyan first in a cold and then in the madness of the hillside, found a disguise so perfect, even she was confused as to the origin of her misery” (309). Instead of addressing the real cause of her grief, a broken Sai searches for Mutt in despair. Her confusion over the real cause of her misery suggests a psychological imbalance. This displacement of grief echoes psychoanalytical issues of repression, suppression and displacement. Sai is a young girl who is struggling with herself and has a lot of emotional baggage which she suppresses, however unintentionally. Her actions and behaviour can only be best understood through a psychoanalytical reading.

Gyan, the twenty year old Nepalese tutor is essentially a good but simple person with no particular political aspirations or beliefs. He is influenced by the fervour of the Gorkha liberation movement and in a singular
moment of passion, inadvertently betrays Sai by informing the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) members about the guns at the judge’s residence. It is significant that Gyan hails from a poor family whose ancestors had served under the British army as soldiers. When Gyan was a small boy, the last family recruit had returned, a broken man.

There was nobody who could remember him, but finally, their father’s childhood memories were resurrected and the man was recognized as an uncle. He had lived with Gyan’s family until he died, but they never discussed where he had travelled to, or which countries he had fought against. He came of a generation, all over the world, for whom it was easier to forget than to remember, and the more their children pressed, the more their memory dissipated” (142).

Gyan remembers his astonishment as a small boy when he learned that his grandfather had never been to England although he had committed his whole life to the cause of British Empire. During the height of their fleeting romance, Gyan and Sai exchange their past as confidantes. Gyan doesn’t answer when Sai asks him about what his father had been like and she wisely didn’t press him. “Sai asked, but she didn’t press him. After all, she knew about stories having to stop” (143). Gyan tells Sai that Tenzing Norway was the real hero when the two make an excursion to see the socks of the man, displayed at a Darjeeling museum. “Tenzing was certainly first, or else he was made to wait with the bags so Hilary could take the first step on behalf of that colonial enterprise of sticking your flag on what was not yours” (155). There is a sense of loss, colonial exploitation and bitterness that pervades Gyan’s ancestral history. Gyan’s grandfather, the last family recruit in the British army had returned to Kalimpong with a missing toe when Gyan was quite small and it
took a while for the family to recognize him. Gyan’s family never discovers what this relative had been through as a soldier. In the event of painful memories, the mind often blanks out or represses the past. This defence mechanism may either be conscious or subconscious.

In addition to the heritage of sadness and loss that Gyan bears, he also struggles to come to terms with the issue of social divides and the reason for his family’s terrible poverty. Gyan is a young and ambitious man whose psyche is disturbed by such grave concerns. The fervour of the Gorkha movement triggers these feelings which have remained suppressed. It is interesting that Gyan becomes powerfully stirred by the protests considering the fact that he does not possess any political ideology for the Gorkhaland movement. Gyan seems to have transferred his anxiety for the future towards the liberation movement. This could also be true for many of the Nepali protestors. “Were they taking their cues from old protest stories or from the hope of telling a new story” (157). While in the market, Gyan chances to witness a procession of the Gorkha Liberation Army. A man stands up and expounds on the many injustices suffered by the Indian Nepalese who were treated like minority in a place where they were majority. He passionately urges the Nepalis to unite under the banner of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Gyan is intensely swayed by the fervour of the speech. “It suddenly became clear why he had no money and no real job had come his way, why he couldn’t fly to college in America, why he was ashamed to let anyone see his home” (160). Suddenly, Sai’s Anglicised behaviour and privileged lifestyle sickens him and he views her as the enemy. “For a moment all the different pretences he had indulged in, the shames he had suffered, the future that wouldn’t accept him—all these things joined together to form a single truth” (160). His frustration with life and underlying bitterness over colonial exploitation was redirected towards Sai and her grandfather who represented colonial dominance with their
English customs. At a subconscious level, both Gyan and Sai appear to be aware that his anger towards her was misplaced. Sai even tells him, “‘You hate me,’ said Sai, as if she’d read his thought, ‘for big reasons, that have nothing to do with me. You aren’t being fair’ ” (260). However, being unable to understand his frustrations, Gyan chooses to ignore his instincts. He needed an object to direct his deep rooted anxiety.

He realized Sai could not be the cause of what he felt, but as he left he slammed the gate shut...She was defining his hatred, he thought. Through her, he caught sight of it—oh—and then he couldn’t resist sharpening it, if only for clarity’s sake” (174).

And so Gyan voiced an adamantly opinion that the Gorkha movement should take the harshest route possible. “So, in the excitement of the moment, he told. Of the guns and the well stocked kitchen, the liquor in the cabinet, the lack of a phone and there being nobody to call for help” (177). The following morning, Gyan’s fervour quiets down and he feels terribly guilty and frightened. But it was already too late. Gyan’s betrayal appears to be an unforgivable thing. A psychoanalytical study into his psyche helps up to better understand the reason behind what had led to his betrayal.

Desai has cleverly allowed the cook to remain nameless throughout the story. This symbolises his nonexistent social standing in the world. He resides in a little hut nearby Cho Oyu with only a few meagre belongings and has been with the judge since he was fourteen years of age. This poor man represents the en masse of the nameless downtrodden. The cook is not an Anglophile himself but he has the similar mentality which believes in white superiority. His father had served as a cook under the British Raj and had helped to get him his present job under the judge. He had not been impressed with his Indian
employer and considered it a step down from his father who had served white men only. “The ICS was becoming indianized and they didn’t like it, some of the old servants, but what could you do?” (63). The cook often regales Sai about the glory days of the past, most of which are concocted. He mentions a special hen which provided eggs for them. “They were a foreign breed and that hen laid more eggs than any other murgi I have known” (60). It makes little sense that a foreign hen would lay more eggs than a local one. However, this naive statement reveals that the Britishers may have left but the psychological impact in the minds of the natives have remained. The cook is a simple and kind man whose one true joy in life is his son Biju, who is in America. He doesn’t mind his own pitiable living condition as long as his son prospers. Contrary to what he imagines, Biju is struggling to survive in America and bouncing from one restaurant to another as a dishwasher and doing other odd jobs. The cook is affectionate towards Sai and regales her with elaborate fabricated tales of her grandfather’s supposedly grandiose past. He went so far as to claim that the judge had been born in a palace and that he had desperately loved his late wife, also that the judge had been a superb hunter whom everyone admired. The poor man seems to enjoy his fictitious tales as much as Sai enjoyed listening to them. “The cook couldn’t help but enjoy himself, and the more he repeated his stories, the more they became truer than the truth” (225). The cook would also spin similarly tall yarns about the glorious past to other people whenever he visits the market place. “He fanned a rumour of the judge’s lost glory, and therefore of his own, so it flamed and prospered up and down the market” (55). His present miserable condition is appeased by an enviable past, however illusionary.

The cook appears to be delusional and lives in an imaginary world. After a peaceful political procession for Gorkhaland turns violent, the cook walks about the market place in a daze. He had been a part of the procession as
it had been made compulsory to participate. The cook views the aftermath of the chaos; the pool of blood, odd slippers, broken spectacles, even a tooth, scattered on the ground and the traumatic experience affects him powerfully. He brokenly reassesses the delusional life he had been living and suddenly a fear overtakes him. He wonders if his son is real after all. “The letter had had come to him all these years were only his hope writing to him. Biju was just a habit of thought. He didn’t exist. Could he?” (278). It is obvious that the cook is suffering from trauma after witnessing the terrible event.

The power of the psyche is demonstrated by the cook’s behaviour when Mutt is stolen. The judge behaves like one mentally deranged and ends up blaming the innocent cook for his beloved pet’s disappearance. He threatens to kill the cook unless Mutt is retrieved. The judge issues an ultimatum to the cook and says,

Find her. It’s your fault. Mutt was in your care! I will kill you. Wait and see. You didn’t do your duty. You didn’t watch over her. It was your duty and you let her be stolen. How dare you? How dare you?? (313).

The judge’s conviction that the cook was to blame for Mutt’s disappearance affects the latter’s psyche and he begins to believe that he was actually responsible.

The cook wondered if he had done something wrong and his guilt began to grow. Had he indeed been negligent? He had failed in his duty, hadn’t he?... He began to weep without looking at anyone or anything and disappeared into the forest (313).
The bereaved cook is unable to find Mutt. His fragile mind, already weakened by an imaginary guilt, wanders and the thin line between reality and imaginary blurs. He wonders whether the light of his life, his son Biju is real. “he had none...he’d never had one...it was just his hope writing to him...Biju was nonexistent” (321). The cook returns to Cho Oyu in a drunken haze and implores the judge to beat him. The judge is enraged, “How dare he lose Mutt how dare he not find her how dare he presume to come and disturb the judge” (318). The cook falls at his employer’s feet and confesses petty misdemeanours of the past which incites the judge’s rage and he rains blows upon the poor man. Alerted by the sound of ruckus, Sai runs inside and tries to stop the men in vain. The cook invites his ‘punishment’ and brokenly implores the judge to kill him. The disturbing ugliness of the scene is expressed below.

The judge was beating down with all the force of his sagging puckering flesh, flecks of saliva of flying from his slack muscled mouth, and his chin wobbled uncontrollably. Yet that arm, from which the flesh hung already dead came down, bringing the slipper upon the cook’s head (321).

The above extract presents a vivid picture of a mentally deranged man whose rage is dangerously uncontainable. However unconscious, the dawning of something not quite right with them, the realisation of a flawed psychosis is suggested in Sai’s helpless remark. “‘There’s something filthy going on’, Sai wept and covered her ears, her eyes, “Don’t you know? Can’t you tell? Something filthy is going on’. But they didn’t stop” (321). Sai fled the terrible scene and wallows in her own cocoon of misery. She continues to hear the dull thuds from the two men and wonders, “Could it really be for Mutt’s sake...?” (321). This statement has the ring of a dawn of realisation. This breakthrough happens towards the end of the novel, an awakening of the realm of the
subconscious. The merging of bouts of sanity with insanity; the clarity of thought mingled with the mind’s nefarious tricks is expressed in the nature of the rabies sickness. “In between the madness of rabies came moments of lucidity, so the victims knew exactly what was happening to them, exactly what lunacy looked like, felt like” (290).

The cook’s son, Biju is frantic with worry as news of the Nepalese movement for an independent state reaches him in America. Daily life had descended into chaos with the insurgency uprising and phone lines in Kalimpong are cut. Unable to ring his father to check on him, Biju is determined to return to India to ensure that his father is safe and sound. Everybody warns him not to return and that he will regret his decision but Biju is adamant. While shopping for gifts to take home to India, nostalgia takes over Biju and he fondly reminisce his idyllic pastoral life in rural India. “He remembered bathing in the river, feeling his body against the cool firm river muscle, and sitting on a rock with his feet in the water, gnawing sugarcane...” (270). Biju’s memory is very selective as he recalls life in India. “He didn’t think of any of the things that had made him leave in the first place” (270). Memory is a seductive creature, often deceiving a person into thinking that the past is always glorious. Biju recalls how himself and his father would reminisce about their faraway village near the Jamuna. “How peaceful our village is. How good the roti tastes there! It is because the atta is ground by hand, not by machine...because it is made on a choolah, better than anything cooked on a gas or a kerosene stove...Fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo...” (103).

Biju’s concern for his father is genuine. Nevertheless, it is not the primary reason for his decision to return. Biju is miserable and lonely in America and he longs to return home. However, he is unable to do so as he will
be deemed a failure and as he does not want to disappoint his father. He is an illegal alien in New York, living in squalor along with other illegal immigrants like him. Biju has entered the United States by dishonestly applying for a tourist visa. Desai hilariously narrates the tactics that Biju and other hopeful applicants deploy while applying for visas at the United States embassy in India. Psychoanalysis has a way of detecting when a person is telling a lie and the applicants would try to master the art of body language.

Look unafraid as if you have nothing to hide. Be clear and firm when answering questions and look straight into the eyes of the officer to show you are honest. But when you are on the verge of hysteria, so full of anxiety and pent up violence, you could only appear honest and calm by being dishonest (184).

Biju tries whatever he can to convince as well as impress the person behind the counter at the embassy. The desperate hopelessness, responsible for the exodus of natives to foreign shores for a better life is conveyed in the following lines. “Biju noticed that his eyes, so alive to the foreigners, looked back at his own countrymen and women, immediately glazed over, and went dead” (183). Biju struggles to make ends meet through a string of odd jobs. He remains as much in awe of the modern world is he is disillusioned by it and is desperately homesick. “Biju was so restless sometimes, he could barely stand to stay in his skin...A homeless chicken also lived in the park. Every now and then Biju saw it scratching in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a pang for village life” (81). Though desperate to return to India, Biju is aware of his difficult predicament. “Biju couldn’t help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn’t have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either” (82). Desai hilariously presents how Biju, representative of a typical struggling third world immigrant, resides
in a world filled with racial clichés and stereotypical prejudices. Biju is relieved as well as alarmed when he spots a Pakistani applying for the same job in America. “But oh, surely not Pakistanis! Surely they would not be hired. Surely Indians were better liked” (22). Both Biju and the Pakistani are hired and the two, strangers to each other, constantly bicker on behalf of their countries. This reveals how a person’s psyche and his mental make up influences the physical world he resides in. Biju’s simple mind is assaulted with so many racial stereotypes and traditional beliefs in the globalized world that he suffers from a loss of identity. “He tried to keep on the right side of power, tried to be loyal to so many things that he himself couldn’t tell which one of his selves was the authentic, if any” (148). The mental make up of a person is moulded by ideas and concepts which are not always logical or rational. These psychological impulses are ingrained and cannot be easily influenced. This is expressed in the following lines.

This habit of hate had accompanied Biju and he found that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm, and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harm to India (77).

Being a product of the colonial subjugation, Biju is convinced of the superiority of the Western influence. He appraises them in awe, as if they belonged to a higher, more evolved race of humans. “There was no way to fathom the minds and heart of these great Americans” (184). One night, Jeev, another illegal immigrant who worked with Biju caught a rat foraging inside their tiny cramped kitchen and cruelly doused the creature in lighter fluid before setting it aflame. Jeev had been complaining of sleepless anxiety and has projected the anger and frustrations he feels towards the animal. According to psychoanalysis, “Blaming others (in this case, the rat) or projection, is a way
of coping with one’s unwanted motives by shifting them on to someone or something else” (Morgan 289). There is also the suggestion that hate is an emotion which humans sometimes employ in order to adapt to harsh realities. Biju witnesses a butcher swearing at a goat and calling it all kinds of derogatory names before killing the animal. “You have to swear at a creature to be able to destroy it” (IL 182). This is similar to the psychoanalytical defense mechanism known as “Rationalization”, whereby a person makes an excuse to make himself feel better for an act. In this case, the butcher condemns the goat as an evil creature so as to make himself feel better for butchering it. “Rationalization is not lying; we believe our explanations” (Morgan 589). Biju and a bunch of other illegal immigrants work in the kitchen of a fine restaurant and Desai evokes a thought provoking pictorial image of the two social divides. “The sound of their fight had travelled up the flight of steps and struck a clunky note, and they might upset the balance, perfectly first world on top, perfectly third world twenty two steps below” (IL 23). Living as an immigrant takes a toll on the psyche of simple Biju. Becoming friends with other illegal immigrants was emotionally traumatic.

The men left for other jobs, towns, got deported, returned home, changed names. Sometimes someone came popping around a corner again, or on the subway, then they vanished again. Addresses, phone numbers did not hold. The emptiness Biju felt returned to him over and over, until eventually he made sure not to let friendships sink deep any more (102).

The above not only reveals the loneliness of a simple village boy in a big city but more than that, it poignantly depicts how Biju becomes emotionally detached so as to protect himself. Psychoanalysis describes this act as “Intellectualization”. “Intellectualization is an attempt to gain detachment
from an emotionally threatening situation by dealing with it in abstract, intellectual terms” (Hilagard 446). Biju is so homesick that he empathizes with a dead insect and mentally appears to see himself in the place of the insect. “Looking at a dead insect in the sack of basmati that had come all the way from Dehra Dun, he almost wept in sorrow and marvel at its journey, which was tenderness for his own journey” (IL 191). It is evident that Biju is consumed by self pity and loneliness and is in the brink of a mental breakdown.

Meanwhile, the cook, who has no inkling about Biju’s increasing despair, brags to anyone who listens, about his son in America. Biju, with all kind intentions, encourages his father’s pride. The cook naively believes that everyone in America prospers and hence, grows fat. “The cook knew about them all growing fat there. It was one of the things everyone knew” (233). Biju writes to his father and sweetly proclaims that, “when you see me next, I will be ten times myself” (233). Father and son laughs over these lines across continents. “He laughed as he wrote the lines and the cook laughed very hard when he read them; he lay on his back and kicked his legs in the air like a cockroach” (233). The reality is a stark contrast and a struggling Biju is,“shocked when he went to the ninety nine cent store and found he had to buy his shirts at the children’s rack” (233).

Rationalization is a common psychological term, referring to when a person consciously justifies his actions in a manner that seems to him, socially acceptable. Similarly, Biju has rationalized to himself and others that his father is the sole reason for returning home to Kalimpong, India. As previously stated, Biju’s concern for his father is indeed genuine. Nevertheless, a psychoanalytic study into Biju’s emotional state reveals that this is simply a front for the increasingly powerful homesickness and urge to return home, which has always prevailed in his subconscious. “This (Rationalization) defence
mechanism substitute an acceptable conscious motive for an unacceptable unconscious one” (Morgan 589). Biju ultimately returns to India. He feels overwhelmed as he steps out of the airport in Calcutta “He looked about and for the first time in God knows how long, his vision unblurred and he found that he could see clearly” (IL 300). This statement is obviously metaphorical and not to be taken literally. Biju had been so miserable and isolated in America that his psyche had retreated into a corner and he did not have the courage to face the world. However, he feels at home in his country and this has made all the difference to him.

Inheritance of Loss presents a coterie of other Anglophile characters like the sisters Noni and Lola, as well as Father Booty and Uncle Potty. They are the fortunate few who are educated, well read and used to the finer things in life like tinned ham, cheese, ponds cold cream, Marks & Spenser’s undergarments, English tea, and pastries etc. However, they are also lost in their privileged world and oblivious to the hopeless poverty and frustration of the en masse around them. Noni and Lola are two elderly sisters who live in a well managed rose covered cottage called “Mon Ami”. Lola is the widow of an aristocratic Indian gentleman and Noni is her spinster sister. The two comfortably live off Lola’s late husband’s sizeable persion. Noni had initially tutored Sai on Maths and Science when the later had first arrived in Kalimpong. Noni confessed her helplessness as the subjects grew more complicated in time and the judge was forced to hire Gyan to tutor Sai. During the height of the Nepalese Gorkha movement, the insurgents encroach the sizeable property of “Mon Ami” and set up camps outside their yard. When Lola goes to complain to the Pradhan, the head of the GNLF, she is cruelly mocked and humiliated. On learning the French name of her cottage, the Pradhan exclaims, “I didn’t know we live in France. Do we? Tell me, why don’t I speak in French then?” (243). The very fact that Lola goes to the head
of the GNLF to complain proves that she is completely unaware of the rising resentment of the underprivileged. When the sisters learned about the robbery at Cho Oyu, they become fearful for themselves as well. They have a watchman, sweeper, maid and gardener, who are all Nepalis and this makes them even more fearful because of their distrust of the lower class. When Sai absentmindedly reminded them that they have a watchman, Lola replies, “Budhoo? But he’s Nepali. Who can trust him now?” (43). Lola and Noni are both anglophiles. Lola has a daughter Pixie who is a reporter at the British Broadcasting Centre (BBC) and this makes her even more enamoured of the English. Every now and then, Lola goes to England to visit her daughter and comes back completely re-committed to the superiority of England.

Her suitcases were stuffed with Marmite, Oxo bouillon cubes, Knorr soup packets, After Eights, daffodil bulbs, and renewed supplies of Boots cucumber lotion and Marks and Spencer underwear— the essence, quintessence of Englishness as she understood it. Surely the Queen donned this superior hosiery (46).

Noni and Lola relish British shows such as To the Manor Born, Yes, Minister and devours Jane Austen books. There is an empty jam jar, saved for its prettiness. “ ‘By appointment to Her Majesty the queen jam and marmalade manufacturers,’ it read in gold under a coat of arms, supported by a crowned lion and a unicorn” (44). As Noni appreciates the writer of a book titled, A Bend in the River, Lola expresses her opinion of the writer.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Lola said, “I think he’s strange. Stuck in the past...He has not progressed. Colonial neurosis, he’s never freed himself from it. Quite a different thing now. In fact,” she said, “chicken tikka masala has replaced fish and chips as number one
take out dinner in Britain. It was just reported in the *Indian Express* (46).

Noni talks about colonial neurosis in another writer but is oblivious to the fact that her description perfectly defines the lifestyle and psyche of herself and Lola. They are the ones who have not progressed and are stuck in the past. It is apparent that the ghost of colonialism still hovers in the little cottage named Mon Ami in the remote North East region of India. By comparison, Noni is the more level headed of the two sisters and she even understands the plight of the insurgents, even sympathizing with them at times. She appears to be a thoughtful woman with repressed desires. Noni, who is a spinster, has never been in love in her entire life. Her widowed sister Lola who had been much indulged by her late husband often behaves childish and freely throws tantrums. On the other hand, Noni thinks about her own emotions which were always in check, not free and irrepressible like Lola. “What did she have? Not even terrible hatreds; not even bitterness, grief. Merely irritations over small things” (68). To her horror she had realized that she felt jealous of their maid, Kesang’s affair with a Sherpa. It speaks volumes that Noni is the only one who appears to sense Sai’s loneliness and emphatises with the young newcomer.

When Sai had first arrived, Noni had seen herself in her, in Sai’s shyness. This was what came of committing a sensitive creature to a mean spirited educational system, she thought. Noni, too, had been sent to such a school- you could only remain unsnared by going underground, remaining quiet when asked questions, expressing no opinion, hoping to be invisible- or they got you, ruined you (68).
The above lines reveal a colonial educational system which suppresses and represses the native students, breaking their spirits until they became isolated from their own people. This comes about with a re education, a brainwashing of young mouldable psyches. Noni had been broken like Sai and she had been very lonely. “Noni recovered her confidence when it was too late” (68). Noni is a sad figure with regrets and unfulfilled desires which she subconsciously suppresses. She has a deep rooted anger towards the colonial subjugation and discrimination which she carefully conceals. She reads a book titled, The Indian Gentleman’s Guide to Etiquette by H Hardless, which is full of racially patronizing advice for the Indian gentleman and it stirs her rage. “A rush of anger surprised her. It was unwise to read old books; the fury they ignited wasn’t old; it was new” (199). Noni sees her younger self in Sai and encourages the latter to meet people her age. Sai is extremely shy around her peers but she confesses to Noni of her desire to travel. “Books were making her restless. She was beginning to read, faster, more, until she was inside the narrative and the narrative inside her, the pages going by so fast, her heart in her chest- she couldn’t stop...the feeling they created was so exquisite, the desire so painful” (68-69). Along with the political uprising and unstability, there is a strange restlessness within Sai and Noni, a repressed Id which refuses to remain suppressed anymore. “ ‘Now and again, I wish to live by the sea,’ sighed Noni. ‘At least the waves are never still’ ” (69). Noni urges Sai to follow her dreams and take a chance in life. She tells Sai, “Look at me, I should have thought about the future when I was young...You must do it on your own, Sai” (69). There is a terrible and bitter sweet poignancy in this statement. Sai feels a deep loss of identity and tries to capture a truthful physical image in mirrors but even this seems to elude her.

But how did she appear? She searched in the stainless steel pots, in the polished gompa butter lamps, in the merchants’ vessels in
the bazaar, in the images proffered by the spoons and knives on the dining table, in the green surface of the pond. Round and fat she was in the spoons, long and thin in the knives, pocked by insects and tiddlers in the ponds; but the mirror, fickle as ever, showed one thing, then another and left her, as usual, without an answer (74).

This is evocative of the “Mirror Stage” article, propounded by the renowned French psychoanalyst and Psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, who famously stated that the mirror reflection is the first and earliest stage where the human child acquires the concept of self. “The child is captivated by its reflection in the mirror which gives it the illusion of wholeness and of control over its body and the environment” (Palkar 170). Although Sai is not a child but in fact, a young woman, she still struggles to find herself as a whole unit in mirror reflections. Desai has marvellously exploited this literary theory to reveal Sai’s sense of alienation from her own self. “The projecting space of mirrors is, of course literally and metaphorically, of great importance for novelists and poets” (Huguet 281).

Psychological undercurrents run deep throughout the narrative and there is a physical description of the women in the marketplace in Kalimpong which comes across as deeply symbolic.

You saw women everywhere in nighties, daughters, wives, grandmothers, nieces, walking to the shops, collecting water in broad daylight as if on their way to bed, long hair, ruffly garments, making a beautiful dream scene in daylight (IL 86).
According to Psychoanalysis, dreams contain significant symbols and metaphors. Although the above extract is an active description about the women in the market place, the mention of the dream scene with woman walking about in nighties and flowing hair in broad daylight evokes a deeply psychoanalytical metaphor. It suggests fantasy; a play between reality and imaginary and the conflicted psyche of the people. There is an eccentric madness in the entire scene. Desai romantically depicts Kalimpong as a place lost in time. A despairing Sai resolves to escape from the place. “She’d have to propel herself into the future by whatever means possible or she’d be trapped forever in a place whose time had already passed” (74). This description is obviously not a physical or geographical perspective but evokes a plethora of emotions like memory and nostalgia which are psychological in nature.

Father Booty and Uncle Potty are two middle aged gay men who live together. Uncle Potty is a fun loving elite Indian who loves his alcohol and Father Booty is a foreigner who also owns a Swiss Dairy Farm. During a house visit, Father Booty is found to be residing illegally in India and is directed to leave Kalimpong within two weeks. The characters are all slightly delusional and lives in an unrealistic world of English comforts, unaware of their fragile social standing and ignorant of the unrest which would inevitably disturb their existence.

“Night Claims the Godavari” is an extract from Aids Sutra: Untold Stories from India, an anthology of short stories. This collection has been produced in collaboration with Avahan, the India Aids Initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The book which begins with an introduction by Bill and Melinda Gates, consists of sixteen short stories by leading Indian writers including “Night Claims the Godavari” by Kiran Desai.
This story is an account of Kiran Desai’s brief experience with sex workers in coastal Andra Pradesh. Though not strictly a fictional tale, the story has traces of fictitious elements in terms of superstitious beliefs and folklore. Desai has also wrought her fine imaginary twist to the lives of the sex workers. Desai begins the story with her arrival in Delhi Airport to her childhood home. There is a pervading sense of nostalgia as she eloquently describes the home she has grown up in. The writer goes through her family library and reads a story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez that her mother, writer Anita Desai had admired. The story, “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and her Heartless Grandmother”, is a fictitious tale of a young girl who accidentally sets fire to her grandmother’s house. The furious grandmother thus pimps her granddaughter to a legion of men in order to repay the debt of the destroyed house. Granddaughter and Grandmother journey across deserts and the former is carried on a grand bed carried by porters, serving client after client, but never makes enough to repay her debt. This tragic tale moves the psyche of the writer and the mood is set for the rest of the writer’s travel to the delta region of the Godavari river in coastal Andra Pradesh to meet the sex workers. The first thing the author notices on the streets of a village while driving through is the overabundance of beds. This odd observation is reminiscent of the story of Erindira, a romanticized fictional version of today’s sex worker.

Beds being delivered, new old beds, makeshift stage set beds, cheap beds being varnished in the sun, mattresses in the dust. Around this strangeness of beds proliferating, village life seemed as benign as Narayan’s Malgudi stories that had created my idea of what it meant to be Indian in this world, in the sweetest incarnation possible (NCG 41).
The above extract emphasises the blurring lines of reality and fiction and emphasises how stories affect the psyche and influences perceptions and ideas. The author arrives to Peddapuram, the village of ‘high class’ sex workers who hails from the Kalavantalu sub caste. The Kalavantalu women were hereditary courtesans and temple dancers in the past, famous for their beauty and elegance. “They trace their lineage from the days when they were protected by royalty, priests and landowners, all the way downhill to a franker prostitution as patronage crumbled in a modernising India of another shade of morality” (41). The descendants of these legendary courtesans are now in the flesh trade and work as sex workers. Because of their lineage, they consider themselves superior to the rest of the sex workers, even though the work is the same. There exists a lot of mythical beliefs that seeks to provide a facade of romanticism to this appalling trade. The author is told that each year, the priests select a poor but beautiful Kalavantalu girl and marries her to the Hindu god Shiva in a temple where the Godavari meets the sea. The girl’s family is given 2-3 acres of land by the Village council. A wedding like lavish ceremony is held and the girl spends one night alone with the deity in the temple. Afterwards, the girl is auctioned to the highest bidder. This act of “marrying off” a girl who is fated to be a sex worker gives the girl a facade of respectability and this act is therefore, very psychological in nature. “Most Kalavanthalus are not married in temples any longer- the symbolic ceremony attempts to bring a whiff of distinguished past, of religious approval, to the present” (44). As marriages in temples are no longer done, the women are instead “married off” to banana trees and even their aunts present them the mangalsutra, a traditional necklace ornament worn by married Hindu women. These sex workers enjoy talking about their illustrious ancestors and a certain family of sex workers proudly tells the author that, “They trace their lineage all the way to the three celestial dancers who tried to distract the sage Vishwamitra from his meditation” (45). Another means of enhancing their image in an
illusionary manner is how these high end sex workers are fond of naming themselves after bollywood film stars. “They have glamour and ‘colour’, name themselves Kareena Kapoor and Sonali Bendre after film stars, without it seeming absurd” (46). A peculiar and revealing observation of the writer is how the sex workers all wear the mangalsutra, a traditional necklace ornament worn by married Hindu women.

A tremendous amount of discussion about mangalsutras. It seems so sad- all the sex workers have this necklace, this sign of a married woman, about their necks. Everywhere you sense a desire for structure and ritual, for normality in lives singularly without it (44).

Even though the sex workers are single women, struggling to earn a livelihood through the flesh trade, they insist on decking the traditional mangalsutra which obviously does not make much sense. Their action can only be understood from a psychoanalytical approach which reveals the longing for normalcy which is relieved, even if slightly, by this ornament. This can be seen as a kind of voluntary self delusion. This delusional tendency is also revealed in the manner of calling a regular client a “Temporary husband”. “‘Temporary husband’ is another English phrase, always uttered with pride at having attracted loyalty within a system conjured for betrayal” (44). Freud often spoke of the defence mechanisms applied by the human mind in the continual tussle amongst the id, ego and superego. “They all involve an element of self deception” (Hilgard 442). This voluntary conscious or unconscious self deception accords a degree of emotional comfort to the person.

Superstitious beliefs and archaic customs play a significant role in the exploitation of young girls in this trade. “On the highway, truckers go
barreling through the void, their minds becoming convinced of rumours: if you sleep with a virgin and a donkey you won’t get AIDS”. (NCG 49). The author travels further to other villages and encounters similar superstitions. “If you have sex with a Dommarisani, a sex worker from the Dommari street acrobat community, your crops will be good and you will be healthy all year” (51). Like Erendira in “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and her Heartless Grandmother”, many girls are trapped into this trade due to circumstances beyond their control. The writer then meets the most pitiful of workers, the women by the sea who possess nothing of material value and lays down sacks on the ground as beds for customers. These women, in spite of their sordid tales of woe, informs the author that there are other women who are far more tragic than them. Women so unfortunate that they almost seem mythical. These are poor widows who are branded as witches and chased away from the village, their property stolen by greedy villagers. These women are seen as communal property, free for any men to enjoy. “There are mythic creatures of misfortune who actually exist” (53).

This story, with its mythic beliefs and superstitions presents a world where reality truly is stranger and certainly more sordid than fiction. A person, a community’s beliefs and its psychological influences play a dominant role in the dark underworld of sex workers.

Kiran Desai’s much heralded debut book Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard was published in 1998 and has garnered critical acclaim for its sparkling wit and rich humour. This book has been serialised in the New Yorker and also included in the Vintage Book of Indian Writing. Through her vivid imagination and fresh narrative style, Desai has managed to capture the vivid richness of the rural Indian culture in a fresh and comedic manner. Her
bold confidence has proved this much awaited literary debut into a wryly fantastical and thoroughly entertaining read.

*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is the story of Sampath Chawla who is born in Shakot, a sleepy little Indian town. The town had been subjected to severe drought and Sampath was born on the night the drought ends, when a monsoon sweeps across the little region of Shakot. Furthermore, the Swedish Red Cross also makes a food drop right in front of Sampath’s house following his birth. Initially, the roar of the planes flying overhead made Sampath’s father, Mr Chawla feel quite anxious. “Could it be that his son’s birth had coincided with the end of the world? Leaving Kulfi and the new baby, he and Amma ran to the window to investigate, and discovered that far from being the end of things it was more like the beginning” (*HGO* 11). Thus, baby Sampath’s birth appears to herald in a new era for the Shakotians and they accord their sudden change of tide to Sampath’s birth. Aside from Kulfi, Sampath’s eccentric mother, everyone else believes that Sampath is destined to become an important man.

Soon the house of full of well wishers, chattering excitedly, not knowing whether to talk of the baby or the rain or the food. ‘Wonderful’, they kept exclaiming, water dripping from their clothes to form pools about their feet. ‘What a beautiful baby...and can you believe the monsoon? Oh and the food!!... What a baby!’ ... Attempting to include Kulfi in their high spirits, the neighbours assured her that her son was destined for greatness, that the world, large and mysterious beyond Shahkot, had taken notice of him (12).
Sampath’s name is apt as it means, “Good fortune”. However, twenty years swiftly pass and Sampath has yet to fulfil the grand hopes predicted since his birth. He has led an extremely mediocre life, facing failure at school and now, working at the back desk at the Shahkot Post Office. All of Sampath’s old classmates are ahead of him, career wise. Sampath cannot seem to find interest in anything in his life and it appears as if he is not going to amount to much. He idly spends his days, day dreaming in tea stalls and singing to himself in public gardens much to the discomfiture of his father who finally manages to find him a job at the post office. Sampath is a peculiar fellow and seems to have inherited his mother Kulfi’s fantastic brand of eccentricity. Unlike Mr Chawla, his very conventional father, who thinks the world of a government job and worries a great deal about respectability, Sampath is unhappy with his increasingly conformist life. Mr Chawla’s personality is completely diverse from that of his son. He commits a common parental mistake by assuming that his dream for his son is the best one. He fails to see that Sampath is a very different boy and tries to mould Sampath into a younger version of him. Once, the ever energetic Mr Chawla sees Sampath staring listlessly at a fly on top of a fruit and feels annoyed with his son’s lack of initiative to do anything about the insect. With a rolled up newspaper, Mr Chawla swats the fly.

His son was so very annoying. He remembered how, as a young man himself, he had been so full of promise and efficiency. He had been smart, nimble and quick, the opposite of his son, who, now that the fly was dead, sat contemplating the mushrooming of milky clouds in his tea with a blank and hopeless expression in his face (24).
Sampath is compelled to take the job his father finds for him but he is extremely unhappy with his life there. His oddball of a mother, Kulfi Chawla, from whom Sampath has inherited his peculiarities, seems to be the only one who can understand his frustrations. As Mr Chawla berates and lectures his son on being more proactive and responsible, Kulfi thinks strange thoughts and sympathises with her son. “‘Pheasants, peacocks, pomegranates, potatoes...poor Sampath’ murmurs Kulfi to herself” (26). Sampath talks to himself and his mind endlessly wanders from one subject to the other. He suppresses his instinctive whims and impulses. Ultimately, the repressed emotions are expressed in a shockingly hilarious manner. The inevitable outpouring of his suppressed emotions occurs during the wedding of the post office Head’s daughter. Sampath, together with the rest of the staff were required to help out with the wedding preparations. At first, Sampath toes the line and his conventionally respectful behaviour surprises everyone, including himself. When the head of the post office gives him directives on how to conduct himself, Sampath answers in a very automatic manner, as had been drilled into his head by his father, Mr Chawla.

But, suddenly remembering the advice he had received earlier in the day, mimicking his father’s tone of voice, he chirped ‘Yes, sir. I will see to it right now, Sir.’ But once he began, the latter half of his sentence- the ‘right now sir’- amazed and shocked by the preceding words, grew shaky and trailed up thinly into the high ceiling of the room, where the fan revolved like an irregular heartbeat, cobwebs having been caught in the blades. They all turned to stare at him in surprise. Never had they heard him attempt such a sentence. It was most uncharacteristic. Realizing himself how odd he had sounded, his
face burning, Sampath turned and scuttled off to his desk in the dark depths at the back of the post office (32-33).

Sampath’s subconscious appears to revolt against this new persona that he is morphing into. He makes a half hearted effort to carry out his assigned tasks for the wedding but his mind is largely distracted. By the end of the day, Sampath is sent home with dire warnings to come early the next day before anybody else as it is discovered that he has not completed any of his tasks. But Sampath is beyond caring. “How they tormented him! He had been having such a nice time, left to his own devices” (34). Soon after, on the day of the wedding, Sampath lets loose his long suppressed impulses and does everything that he shouldn’t. He is assigned the job of filling the glasses with sherbet and Sampath helps himself to the drinks instead of serving them. He tosses choice bits of food to stray dogs and after being threatened by angry cooks, goes off snooping around the cupboards at the residence of his head, where the wedding is being held. He drapes himself with lengths of satin, puts on a nose ring and admires his reflection in the mirror. “Now he traced the outline of his face and drew in the fantastic costume. He smiled and bowed at his reflection as if he were his own honoured guest” (40). Finally, dressed in this ridiculous fashion, Sampath steps out to face the guests. He sings loudly, jumps and wades in the fountain and lastly, to the horror of the audience, begins to disrobe in front of everyone. “However, in this flushed moment, he mistook them for cries of admiration. With a style particular to himself, one by one he let the saris and dupattas draped about him fall” (41). Uncaring of the appalled shrieks and his office head, Mr D.P.S.’s stern commands for him to stop, Sampath finally pulls down both his trousers and underpants. It appears to be a moment where the id has taken complete control, uncaring of the ego’s restraints. “Its (the Id) function is to gratify our instincts for pleasure without regard for social conventions, legal ethics or moral restraint. Unchecked, it would lead us to any
lengths- to destruction and even self destruction- to satisfy its impulses for pleasure” (Guerin 130). Needless to say, Sampath is immediately fired after the stunt he pulls.

Sampath’s family is aghast at the mortifying turn of events and his father shouts that he would have to search for another job all by himself but Sampath does not care. It is also possible that he has behaved deliberately reckless for the purpose of getting fired as his father would not have allowed him to quit his job. “But he hated his job anyway. He didn’t want his job. He didn’t want it, he couldn’t do it and he didn’t want another job. He would not be able to do that either. He felt defiant.” (42). His colleagues Mr Gupta and Miss Jyotsna comes to comfort and gently berate him. Sampath feels suffocated with all the attention and longs to be left alone in peace. He is seriously depressed and wants to escape his life.

How he hated his life. It was a never ending flow of misery. It was a prison he had been born into. The one time he had a little bit of fun, he was curtailed and punished...All about him the neighbourhood houses seemed to rise like a trap, a maze of staircases and walls with windows that opened only to look into one another. He felt bitter at heart. Surely, he thought, his surroundings were detrimental to his mental health (43)

The above extract is peculiarly sane and is a sharp contrast to the rest of this fantastical book where the whole of Shakot appears to be slightly mad. Sampath wonders about his mental health and this hint at psychological imbalances suggests that his physical actions are linked with the state of his emotional psyche. Having a well meaning but domineering father had led Sampath to repress his largely eccentric behaviour and this is finally beginning
to get to him. When Mr Chawla discovers his son’s shockingly appalling behaviour which has led to him losing his job at the post office, he does not try to figure out the reason why Sampath has done what he did. Instead, he orders his son to go to the Bureau of Statistics the very next day and ask if they have any openings. Sampath goes further into a downward spiral of misery. “He did not want another job. He wanted open spaces” (44). His mother Kulfí tries to comfort him by offering him a guava fruit. Sampath takes the proffered fruit in a sulking manner but something happens as he stares at the refreshing cool greenness of the guava. “He could have sworn a strange force had entered him, that something new was circulating within him. He shuddered in a peculiar manner and then he began to smile” (47). Kulfí notices the change in her son and wonders whether the fruit had gone bad. At this point, Sampath tells his mother that he wanted his freedom. It is as if a revelation had been opened before his eyes and Sampath articulately ponders upon everything which is distasteful to him. It is revealing that his father’s lectures are amongst the things that he wants to run away from.

A breeze lifted the hair off his forehead. Goose bumps covered his arms. He thought of Public Transport, of the Bureau of Statistics, of head massages, of socks and shoes, of interview strategies. Of never ever being left alone, of being unable to sleep and of his father talking and lecturing in the room below (47).

The next day, while the rest of the family are off to attend a wedding, Sampath catches the first bus he sees and leaves Shahkot. He has no plans and does not have any idea where the bus is heading but Sampath is deliriously happy. “He thought of 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 and fear” (48). To the great surprise of other passengers, Sampath jumps out of the bus window while the bus was stalling
and he races into the wilderness, towards an old orchard. Sampath climbs up a guava tree and there, he finally feels as if he is home and at peace. “Concealed in the branches of the tree he had climbed, Sampath felt his breathing slow and a wave of peace and contentment overtook him” (50). In the meantime, Sampath’s family, along with the rest of the neighbours are busy searching for him. They gather where Sampath had disappeared to, when the town watchman reports of a man who has climbed up a guava tree outside of Shahkot and refuses to come down, or talk to anyone. Mr Chawla who is by now, well familiar with less than normal behaviour, finds no difficulty in believing the story. He states, “If someone in this country is crazy enough to climb up a tree, you can be sure it is Sampath” (53). Sampath is distressed when his family tracks him down and implores him to come home. While the rest of the family shouts and pleads with him, Sampath’s mother Kulfi empathise with her son and almost seems to envy him. She is also a victim of desperate loneliness like her son as she is made to repress her eccentric but true impulses by having married into a “respectable” family who frowns on unconventional behaviour.

Looking at her son, Kulfi felt the past rushing back to her, engulfing her in the memory of a time when she was young, when her mind was full of dark corners...She looked at her son sitting up in the tree and felt her emotion shift, like a vast movement of the spheres, and then she said, “Let him be” (54-55).

Mr Chawla is furious with his wife and attempts to think of strategies and means to get his son down from the guava tree. He consults a holy man for advice and when asked about Sampath’s affliction, Mr Chawla replies, “He is suffering from madness” (57), in a matter of fact manner. Amongst the many tactics attempted, a bride was also brought to lure Sampath down from up the
Marriage as a remedy is a common psychological euphemism for sexual activity to calm down a high strung person. The girl is encouraged by the gathering crowd to climb up the tree and touch his feet. As she does so, Sampath leaps in horror which makes the poor girl lose her balance and fall to the ground in a heap. Mr Chawla loudly laments the fate of his son while the onlookers look on in curiosity and sympathy. Sampath wants to shout that he be left alone and in peace but is unable to do so. Instead, he looks down below and spots Mr Singh, a familiar face amongst the crowd. Unknown to anyone, he had been opening and reading private letters while working at the post office before he got fired. On spotting Mr Singh, Sampath remembers a particular letter which contained personal information and loudly enquires Mr Singh regarding the same. Naturally, Mr Singh is amazed as to how Sampath could have known such private information and Sampath, encouraged by the astounded reaction, reveals information about other people present, without letting them know about their letters which he had read.

Soon after, Sampath is regarded as a spiritual man with unfathomable wisdom. “Clearly, there was more to this post office clerk than to ordinary mortals. In his eyes they had detected a rare spirit” (67). The next day, Mr Chawla reads about his son’s new found fame in the local newspaper and he is filled with fresh hope and a plan of action is set in motion. A shrewd Mr Chawla decides to earn money off Sampath’s fast gaining reputation as a holy man. He recruits his entire family and they relocate near the guava tree to be closer to Sampath to look after his needs. Sampath is no longer urged to come down. On the contrary, a cot is hoisted up the tree to make him more comfortable and also lend him an appearance of grandiose. “Thus Sampath was gradually provided with all sorts of comforts and, the more elaborate his living arrangements, the happier he was” (70). As more and more devotees gathered

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to pay their respects, Sampath would astonish them by revealing bits of information and also spout nonsensical rhymes which leave them in wonder at his supposedly hard to grasp wisdom.

As Sampath’s fame as a holy man grew, he is visited by devotees from all over and his family who had once berated him for his peculiar habits now claim that they had always known his streak of genius.

‘Oh’, said Ammaji, chiming in delightedly as she rolled a betel leaf, ‘he was born with spiritual tendencies. Everybody was saying maybe he is a little mad, maybe he is a little simple minded, but it is just that he could never interest himself in the material world (96).

Just when Mr Chawla imagines that all is well, a troupe of monkeys invades the orchard and particularly, Sampath’s tree. Oddly, the monkeys do not bother Sampath or behave remotely aggressive towards him, but they create chaos for the devotees, including Sampath’s family. Mr Chawla who is having a gala time making money off generous devotees and visitors, attempts to talk Sampath into moving into a proper hermitage as the monkeys were creating a ruckus and driving away visitors. Sampath, who feels a kind of endearment towards the monkeys is distressed by this suggestion and declares that he would never move from his tree. Sampath feels angry with his father for even suggesting such a thing. He is ready to live the life of a hermit, removed from all human contact. This reveals the intense emotional detachment that Sampath suffers from. From this point onwards, the whole of Shahkot appears to have turn right around the bend. In order to take care of the monkey menace, a series of plans, each nuttier than the next is conjured. The town’s big wigs including the Brigadier, the Superintendent of Police, the District Collector and Chief
Medical Officer, all contribute elaborate plans for this purpose. The devotees had also divided themselves into two groups; one against the removal of the monkeys and the others for it. On his part, Sampath has become attached to the monkeys and amidst the chaos, he longs for the peace that he had enjoyed briefly.

Sampath remembered his early rapture in the orchard. It had been a love affair; how he had bloomed and blossomed, how his joy, his playfulness had shone upon his face. He remembered, regarding the remains of his collection, how he had spent hours stringing necklaces of seed pods about himself. How he had put flowers behind his ears, sipped their nectar. He had unzipped pods with his teeth and prised open buds to uncover parasols of pink (167).

It is apparent that Sampath’s mind is becoming increasingly removed from the previous life that he had once lived. While the world below him is in a state of utter bedlam, Sampath’s psyche seems to be drifting into a flight of fancy. “Sampath stared up into the fountains, tilting his head all the way back, to look upon where there was not a trace of civilization...There there were no villages, no houses, no people” (185). His devotees gathered below look at his trance like demeanour and admiringly imagine that he is immersed in deep meditative wisdom. Sampath looks at the creatures teeming around him and envies them.

Jealously, he looked back at the birds that fluttered about him searching for crumbs: these small creatures with their delicate ribs, their beating wings that scooped hearts light as snow
through the clarity of air. His face bore a desperate hunted look (186).

Ultimately, a daring plan to get rid of the monkeys was devised by the town brigadier. On that morning, the people come to the orchard with nets to trap the monkeys. That was when Mr Chawla, along with the rest, discover that Sampath is no longer sitting on his cot. Instead, they discover an unusually large guava fruit on the exact spot up the guava tree where Sampath reclines.

Upon the cot lay a guava, a single guava that was much, much bigger than the others: rounder, star based, weathered. It was surrounded by the silver languars, who stared at it with their intent charcoal faces. On one side was a brown mark, rather like a birthmark (207).

Before anyone has the chance to reach the fruit, a large monkey grabs the fruit and escapes, along with the entire troupe of monkeys. The saga of Sampath ends at this point, along with the story. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is undoubtedly a highly hilarious and fantastical story and not to be taken seriously. However, as comical as the characters are, there are common and pertinent psychological issues which however fictitiously magnified, still rings true enough in everyday human experience.

Kulfi, Sampath’s mother is another strong character whose psyche is almost as fascinating and as unfathomable as her son, the protagonist Sampath. Her own husband has given up on trying to understand her and the couple live separate lives though they reside under the same roof. Mr and Mrs Chawla are the epitome of a mismatched couples who are completely alienated from each other. Kulfi is the only person who does not raise her eyebrows towards
Sampath’s peculiar and strange behaviour. This is because she shares her son’s frustrations with life as she is stuck in a marriage where she cannot indulge her intrinsic nature. When Sampath is born, his bizarre appearance pleases Kulfi. Her loneliness is achingly revealed by the sense of peace she derived through baby Sampath’s odd appearance. While other mothers might have reacted adversely, Kulfi experiences a sense of solidarity with her baby’s strangeness and feels less isolated.

She looked at the tiny creature in her hands, a creature that looked as if he had come from another planet altogether, or had been discovered in the woods, like something alien and strange. The baby’s eyes were red and his skull pointed. She looked at his strangeness and felt a sense of peace and comfort descend upon her (12).

The above reveals Kulfi’s sense of alienation from the people around her and the loneliness that she feels in being the only one who is regarded as “strange”. Kulfi is not the typical traditional wife and her husband as well as everyone else knows it. “By this time, it had been generally acknowledged that she was a little eccentric to say the least” (21). The fact that she once drew pictures but has now abandoned this hobby reveals that she once had cherished dreams of her own. “On the walls behind her were traces of the drawings she had made so many years ago, still visible from behind a thin layer of whitewash” (21). Mr Chawla is not an unkind man but he is incapable of understanding or appreciating his wife. He clings on to the societal definition of “normalcy” and sees himself as the advocate for normal behaviour in his family. “Oddness, like aches and pains, fits of tears and lethargy, always made him uneasy and he had a fear of these uncontrollable, messy puddles of life...” (6). As time passes, Kulfi withdraws into her own private shell and is oblivious
to the hustle and bustle of life around her. It is her daughter and mother in law who looks after the needs of her husband.

As the years progressed, she grew more peculiar. Ignoring completely the hullabaloo created by her husband, she continued to stare out of the window while her daughter complained about the choice of news item being read aloud (21).

Kulfi appears to be a rather tragic character, a woman who has never been understood by anyone, before or after marriage. Instead of trying to get help or attempting to understand her, Kulfi’s family had washed her off their hands by hurriedly getting her married to a most unsuitable man.

Kulfi had been even younger, so alarming her family with her weird ways, they were worried that if her marriage were delayed any longer, she would be left on their hands for ever, her sanity dissipating, the sense scattering from her like seeds from a poppy pod (62).

This blatant reference to mental insanity in both Kulfi and later, her son Sampath is terribly disturbing. Amidst the hilarity of this highly imaginative read, Desai has effortlessly managed to tackle common but no less grave human issues which affects the emotional psyche of a person. The subject of mental illness is touched upon again and again. In fact, Kulfi directly hails from a family with a history of mental illness and eccentricity.

Clearly she was going mad. Yes, there it was- the eccentricity that had plagued her mother’s side of the family for generations
bubbling up yet again, just when they hoped the culprit genes had finally run into some dead end and been laid to rest (63).

Kulfi’s family has actually tricked the Chawlas by getting Mr Chawla to marry her without revealing her mental illness. “When it became apparent that Kulfi too had inherited this familial strain of lunacy, her father knew he had not a moment to lose” (64). Kulfi hailed from a much higher social class than Mr Chawla but owing to her mental state which devalued her worth in the marriage market, she was married off to Mr Chawla, along with a huge dowry to ensure that she was not rejected. Kulfi’s fate does not turn better after marriage. After her husband realises that his bride is not mentally sane, he tells her, “If it were not for the family name, straight away I would take you to the mental home” (103). Likewise in reality, the stigma of mental illness is so grave that victims are often made to suffer in silence rather than be openly treated as it would bring “shame” to the family. In time, Kulfi’s new family learns to ignore her oddness, even when she makes outlandish and nonsensical statements. During the beginning of the novel, Kulfi’s mother in law asks her son, Mr Chawla what he would like packed for his tiffin, to which Kulfi responds by muttering about peacocks and pomegranates. Nobody pays attention to her. Again, Kulfi states, “ ‘Peasants, peacocks, pomegranates’...But again, nobody heard her and Mr Chawla addressed his mother” (25). It appears that Kulfi has been sidelined in the family as no one bothers to listen or react to what she says. Mr Chawla is not a bad husband and initially attempts to communicate with his wife but soon gives up in the face of her incapacity to interact or socialise like normal people.

Mr Chawla had learned to shrug his shoulders at her. All his early attempts to teach her to interact normally with the world had made as much impression on her as rain on waterproofing and instead, as soon as Sampath was old enough, he had turned his
attention to his son, for his greatest responsibility, he felt, was to pummel him into being at least minimally functional in the world (77)

Kulfi is always lost in her own private world and is consistently dreaming of the strangest food dishes which she attempts to recreate in real life. Her culinary efforts are often met with failure and this is a frustration that grates on her. “The frustration inside her would grow into an enormous cloud that blocked off everything else and her eyesight and hearing would go blurry” (77). This reveals the extent of her psychological damage and how it has finally begun to affect her physical form. It is often the case that when mental illnesses are not handled carefully, they tend to affect the victim’s physical health in due time. It is apparent that Kulfi’s delicate emotional state has begun to deteriorate with the passing of time. Mr Chawla has observed this about his wife.

As the years passed, he found he understood her less and less instead of more and more. What went on inside her mind? He found himself wondering sometimes. Did she think like a human being? He saw expressions of anxiety, of happiness, of peacefulness upon her face, it was true, but was she considering how she felt, analysing and reasoning? (103).

It is apparent that Mr Chawla doubts his wife’s capacity to reason and think like a human being. Kulfi on her part is oblivious to her husband and others around her. Her life revolves around her strange dreams and visions which leaves her frustrated more often than not. Kulfi’s failure to recapture her dreams symbolises her frustration in not being able to express her true desires.
But how could she possibly have reconciled her wild dreams with her tame life in Shakot, with their tiny kitchen, their meals on the old plastic covered table? Again and again, the dishes she produced could not match the visions inside her...” (76-77)

Besides Sampath, the rest of her family is always wary of her cooking. “Sampath would taste what she made, and smile and nod his admiration, but she would be inconsolable” (77). Kulfi becomes most prolific and successful in her gastronomic experiments after Sampath climbed up the guava tree and became revered as a holy man. While Sampath relished his mother’s complicated and weird dishes, Mr Chawla on the other hand, worried that his wife might accidently poison their son. Nevertheless, Sampath grew increasingly plump, happy and healthy with his mother’s cooking; so much so that the devotees began to crave Kulfi’s cooking as well. “Far from consigning her to a mental home, they hovered above her greedily, trying to peer into the bubbling pots, to draw their fingers through the piles of spices on the grinding stone” (103). Towards the end of the story, before Sampath mysteriously vanishes, Kulfi journeys into the nearby forest in search of the strangest of ingredients for her dishes. While exploring the forest, Kulfi day dreams and becomes even more delusional than she already is.

No new scents enlivened the air and she wandered farther and farther away. As she wandered, she began to daydream. She was the royal cook of a great kingdom, she imagined. There, in some old port city, ruthless hunters, reckless adventurers, fleets of ships and whole armies lay at her beck and call, were alert to her every command, her every whim. (154).
Kulfi’s daydream about an army which is alert to her every whim and fancy reveals her desire to be heard and understood. There is something intensely tragic about Kulfi and Sampath; this mother and son duo. Kulfi’s loneliness is achingly revealed by the sense of peace she derived through baby Sampath’s odd appearance. While other mothers might have reacted adversely, Kulfi experiences a sense of solidarity with her baby’s strangeness and feels less isolated. They are the only two people who understand each other completely. Sampath, who by all standards, is considered mad actually mothers his mother during her moments of distress. “It took her weeks to calm down, sitting with Sampath on the rooftop in complete silence” (77). They share a poignant camaraderie. Even in a place where the entire population appears to be eccentric, Sampath and Kulfi are still not accepted as they possess a different brand of eccentricity which is deemed improper and objectionable by the Shahkotians. Through a psychoanalytical reading of the characterisation of Kulfi and Sampath, the reader discovers their repressed desires which are suppressed by societal norms of accepted behaviour which may be the super ego. Psychoanalysis seeks “An understanding of the human spirit by directly observing man’s actions and words as manifestations of his inner most needs conditioned by the exigencies of his body and of the world he lives in (Fraiberg 1960). The true character i.e., the spirit of Sampath and Kulfi can only be grasped by not brushing aside seemingly insignificant actions or words but by paying attention, observing and according meaning to each word and deed. This ultimately reflects the person’s inner most needs and desires, which in turn allows us a glimpse into the person’s true character.

As absurd as the residents of Shakot appear to be, it has to be said that there is a semblance of purposive intent in their illogical behaviour. “Freud showed, too, how the mind, in one of its parts, could work without logic, yet not without that directing purpose, that control of intent from which, perhaps it
might be said, logic springs” (Trilling 47). This humorous tale is a fantastic play of Freud’s Id, Ego and Superego. It illustrates, albeit in a hilarious manner, the consequences of a situation when the line between a person’s Id (pleasure principle), Ego (reality principle) and Superego (morality principle) becomes blurred. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is unique for combining the diverse elements of comedy, fantasy and the issue of psychological imbalances.


