



COCA-COLA AND THE GUAVA ORCHARD: KIRAN DESAI'S *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD* AS NATIONAL ALLEGORY

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Abstract: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* emerges as an insightful reinterpretation of Jameson's enduring assertion that "all third world literature is national allegory." The novel exemplifies how localized literature from the Global South functions allegorically as global literature, dramatizing the impact of multinational capitalism on rural and semi-urban spaces. Desai introduces themes of capitalism, exploitation, and globalization through her characters' actions, rendering the narrative an allegory of the extensive modernization projects that swept the nation and their repercussions on rural India. This paper engages with the theories of David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, and Pascale Casanova to delineate features of World Literature, incorporating aspects of ecocriticism to interpret the novel and its events as a national allegory.

Index Terms: World literature, allegory, ecocriticism

If you write a lovely story about India, you're criticized for selling an exotic version of India. And if you write critically about India, you're seen as portraying it in a negative light - it also seems to be a popular way to present India, sort of mangoes and beggars.

- Kiran Desai

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard offers us a way to consider the mode of allegory as it expresses a relationship between world literature and globalization. Damrosch's, Moretti's, and Casanova's present world literature through economic metaphors like circulation and production (Damrosch), centripetal movements towards centres of intellectual capital (Casanova), or in the uneven intersections of localized and travelling forms of knowledge (Moretti). It is then deferred that world literature is a system that exists alongside globalization as expressed by Behdad (2005), who is of the opinion that global literature should be analysed along an analogical mode to attend to the link between global literature and globalization. She states, "every world-system rests on the ruins of the previous one, and because of this, world-systems are interrelated, albeit that the new system always expands and transforms the elements that it borrows from the previous one." (69)

Hullabaloo emerges as a perspicacious rewriting of Jameson's enduring maxim: all third world literature is national allegory. It shows us that local-worlded literature is an allegory of globalization, especially, when its characters remain rooted in local spaces. He recovers allegory from its relation to the logic of equivalence and claims that it is the mode through which contemporary "third world" literature can be apprehended. Here, he uses specifically economic "multinational capitalism" paired with the economic method of international organization — "third world literature" — as if to imbue the historical moment in a particularly economic light. In this way, he offers an important insight into the ways in which the economics of multinational capitalism override the political and cultural effects of decolonization as central concerns in postcolonial literature. He finds the discontinuities produced by an allegorical signifying system to allow more than one figure to stand for the nation, meaning that the nation itself is capable of differentiated representation (73-74).

This theory of allegory as “discontinuous equivalences” (Jameson 75) is a fruitful way to think through the analogous relationship between globalization and global literature. Global literature allegorizes globalization in part by making the local not simply local, but indicative and illustrative of unequal global relations.

Hullabaloo's narrow geographical scope expands allegorically to represent a globalized center and periphery. As Sampath's father takes more and more action towards capitalizing on his son's reluctant willingness to persist in being the "monkey baba" — including publishing his photo in the newspaper — the resources and wealth in the village of Shahkot contract into the orchard. Sampath's wisdom, as a commodity, is diffused throughout the country. Building on the non-material form of spoken wisdom, the photo "brands" Sampath as the monkey baba and offers a material companion to his original commodity. Mail addressed to Sampath via this brand name begins to reach him in the orchard despite the lack of an official postal address. Because the mail is delivered, this suggests an official ratification of both title and location thus giving his unsettled retreat the imprimatur of settlement and commerce.

There are precisely two historically situated details in the novel which are otherwise set hazily sometime after independence in India. The first — a reference to a popular Bollywood film, *Love Story* — is a passing detail at best. After Mr. Chawla reads out the brief story, the narrator contextualizes it in the newspaper that "There it was — a modest column introducing Sampath to the world, along with news of a scarcity of groundnuts, an epidemic of tree frogs and the rumour that Coca-Cola might soon be arriving in India" (67). Significantly, four unrelated news stories appear in succession in this single sentence, their paratactical structure obliterating any possible relationship of causality or progression. Interpreted in this way, Sampath's appearance alongside an article about a beverage company, tree frogs, and groundnuts functions metonymically to stand in for the larger business of print capitalism at the root of modern nationalism.

Sampath's guava orchard, once Mr. Chawla initiates his designs on it, functions in a similar way siphoning common and scarce resources like water and electricity. The residents of Shahkot lived without regular access to water and electricity and yet Sampath's family enjoys an abundance of both once they move into the orchard on a permanent basis and thus Mr. Chawla's practices and plans symbolize the exploitative efforts of Coca-Cola bottling plants in rural communities.

Sampath's orchard and the contraction of resources into it for capital gain allegorizes the ways in which Coca-Cola protects its resources, including its secret formula, in the West while distributing the labor of mixing and bottling to each of the countries in which it sells its commodities. The structural inequality of labor beneath the product's veneer of homogeneity illustrates an illusory diffusion of equivalence that carries a spectre of difference as inequity. The tension between these movements can also be felt in the construction of Sampath's guru location both outside Shahkot and yet central to the profitable operations linked to the town. Sampath's orchard functions doubly allegorically in this way — his is both the site of multinational capital centrifugally expanding to the margins and the unequal redistribution of resources centripetally contracting to metropolitan centers in the global north.

Relying on the desire of Shahkot's populace to consult their local guru, as well as pilgrims travelling from more distant places, Mr. Chawla succeeds in creating something out of nothing, a kind of capitalist sleight of hand that resembles “Michael Watts's theory of fast capitalism and the petro-magic of Nigeria's oil boom that Jennifer Wenzel traces into Nigerian literature” (Fehskens 8). As Mr. Chawla surveys the orchard while calculating the growing balances in his bank account, he notes that the "advertisements hung colourfully on the neighbouring trees ... All paid for by lavish donations, boxes of nuts and more sweetmeats, yellow, green, pin and white, than anybody knew what to do with. If it was not for Mr. Chawla none of this would exist. None of it" (127). What he creates, however, mars the beauty of the orchard suggesting the damaging effects of fast capitalism in aesthetic and ecological terms. Sampath, departing from Mr. Chawla's pride in the orchard, observes that "Ugly advertisements defaced the neighbouring trees; a smelly garbage heap spilled down the hillside behind the tea stall and grew larger every week" (181).

The inevitability of capitalist modernity harbours the losses of alternative possibilities and so under the crushing inevitability of globalization as de-differentiation is the possibility for other ways of constructing community (Jameson 81). The discontinuous nature of allegory contains both inevitability (of sameness) and possibility (of difference). Thus an allegory of globalization in a novel like *Hullabaloo* brings encoded globalized forces to bear on a localized space, but it also imagines the possibilities of alternative structures of relation taking root. For Sampath, his role in the orchard catalyses his father into an allegorization of national government and multinational corporate-mismanagement of local resources. Sampath's transformation at the end of the novel and his close association with the monkeys imagines a post-human alternative liberating himself of human form and taking to the forest. The atheist spy's accidental fall at the end suggests another alternative: the gruesome possibility of cannibalism literalizing the metaphor of exploitative consumption. Thus, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* illustrates ways in which localized literature set in the Global South operates allegorically as global literature dramatizing the effects of multinational capital on rural and semi-urban spaces.

Amanda Ciafone (2012) sees a link between the local/global resonances drawn out of the Quit Coca-Cola movement and global literature: "India's rural poor have also catalysed an impressive local, national, and transnational social movement, linking their struggles with others through Coca-Cola's world system of capital, commodities, and culture that resulted in the creation of multinational pressure on the multinational corporation" (132).

The novel does not include a version of grassroots resistance to the growing capitalist endeavors of Mr. Chawla and Sampath's complicity with them. However, several characters dream of escape from the orchard imagining a new set of relations or a new community as an alternative to the increasingly capitalistic space of the orchard. Pinky thinks of eloping with the Hungry Hop Ice Cream boy, which symbolizes a retreat into local products rather than the hackneyed spirituality of guru wisdom. Kulfi imagines herself as an all powerful imperialist, drawing the most distant animals into her culinary experiments. Sampath himself transforms into a guava and is carried off by a band of monkeys who adopt him into their group.

The commodifying and wealth-accumulating forces which lure the monkeys, the atheist spy, and an ever more adventurous Kulfi into their long-term settlement in the orchard are the very forces which catalyse the radical human transformation that imagines symbolically a posthumanist alternative to the impoverishing and extractive practices of multinational capital. Just as one human finds an alternative community through a radical transformation, another human's fate literalizes the violence committed in the name of globalization's profits. Although this small novel ends with a look into a cooking pot in an orchard outside a small town in Northern India, its symbolic scope looks out onto a global horizon.

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