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The Commercialization Of Religion And Superstitious Elements In Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur* and Desai's *Hullabaloo In The Guava Orchard*: A Critical Study

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Abstract:

This research article critically examines the commercialization of religion and superstitious elements in V.S Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* and Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. It is both critical and comparative study of novels in which the theme of commercialization of religion and superstitious elements are explored through the character of Ganesh Ramasumair and Sampath Chawlain their respective novels. Both Naipaul and Desai are prominent authors of Postcolonial literature. They are conscience of the problems of society. The novels give a deeper insight into the problems of religion, commerce and superstition in their writings. These issues are the great problems which hinder the progress of nation. Both Naipaul and Desai have a critical eye on society. While Desai living in the U.S.A and U.K and Naipaul living in Trinidad and U.K., they have a better understanding of India's problems. Both novels deal with the theme of a quest of religious identity, freedom from mundane world and superstitions.

The commercialization of religion and superstition are recurring themes in the novels of Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur* and Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Both Naipaul and Desai are products of Indian society and they are great critics of Indian problems. They have highlighted and raised the problems of commercialization of religion and superstitions in their works. These problems are ruining nation and hindering the path of progress. India is a beautiful country and the beauty of India lies in diversity of religions. Though we have a number of religions, even though we are one.

Keywords: commerce, post-colonial literature, religion, social problems, superstition, etc.

Introduction:

V.S Naipaul was born in Lion House at Chaguanas in Trinidad and Tobago. While living at Chaguanas with grandparents, he was admitted to the Canadian Mission School for primary education for two years. He was admitted to Tranquility Boys' School at the Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad. In addition to Queen's Royal College he was admitted to the Oxford University in 1950.

Kiran Desai is a prominent author of 21st century. She is the daughter of the celebrated author Anita Desai. She has inherited literary talents and the craft of writing from her mother, Like Naipaul. Kiran Desai was born in a reputed family on 3rd September, 1971 in Chandigarh. She received her early education in New Delhi. Subsequently she was admitted to John Cannon School in Mumbai. Before leaving India, she spent some of her time in Kalimpong, Darjeeling (West Bengal.) She lived in England for one year with her mother. Soon after she finally settled in the U.S.A permanently. She got high school education at Massachusetts and Bennington College Vermont.

The Mystic Masseur is the debut novel which is written by V.S. Naipaul in 1957. It is the story of Ganesh Ramsumair, a young man from Trinidad of Indian heritage who rises from teacher to spiritual leader and a distinguished personality in his community. Initially he starts his career as a primary school teacher. Teaching is no longer a flourishing profession for him. He loses his interest in teaching. Soon, he changes from one profession to another. Finally, he becomes a successful person when he becomes a religious healer or a successful masseur. He earns name, fame, glory and wealth when he starts to cure illness through his mystic massage. As soon as he gains eminence and he becomes an eminent politician.

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard is the first novel written by Kiran Desai in the year 1998. It is the story of Sampath Chawla, a young boy from Shahkot who rises from an abnormal person to a monkey Baba. Sampath was a dull, low witted and an abnormal person in his family. Everybody hates him because of his sluggish nature and abnormality. He is fed up with worldly life and wants freedom from mundane responsibility. He wants to lead isolated and peaceful life. Mr Chawla is the father of Sampath. He is an active and man of action. Mr Sampath gets a job as post office clerk by the influence of his father. He even loses it because of an abnormal activity. His father feels very sad when he comes to know the loss of job. He has been a failure both at school and at work. Sampath has become burden for his family. Dissatisfied with worldly life, Sampath migrates to guava orchard and takes refuge at the top of a guava tree. He becomes a famous Baba overnight. His father takes full advantage of Sampath. The entire family is involved in lucrative business. He has started to earn, name, fame and glory in a single moment.

The Guide is one of the popular novels written by R.K. Narayan in 1958. It is the story of Raju, the protagonist of novel who transforms from a tour guide to spiritual Baba. The story takes place in Malgudi, a fictional town in South India. Raju starts his career as a shopkeeper in the village. Besides running a shop at Railway station, he becomes a tourist guide. In the meantime he comes across Rosie the wife of Marco. He falls in love with

Rosie.As soon as Marco comes to know about the extramarital of his wife,he soon abandons her.Both Raju and Rosie start living together.Rosie had a passion for dancing .He helps him to become a professional dancer .She starts to earn name and fame .Raju was charged with forgery case.Without the consent of Rosie,he puts a fake signature and takes her jewellery.Owing to this he was put behind the bars for two years.After the release from jail,Raju never visits village and meet Rosie.Raju visits another village Mangla where he takes shelter in a temple by the river.Velan is the chief of Mangla village.He is having an issue of marriage with his younger sister.Velan brings his sister to Raju.He settles the issue.His popularity grows far and wide.Most of the villagers gather to see Swami.

It is very important to know historical and cultural background of countries namely Trinidad and India respectively where stories take place.The story of *Mystic Masseur* is set in Trinidad while the story of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is set in India.Before delving into the study of novels ,we will study how both religious practices and superstition are affecting the progress of nation.

Trinidad is an island.It was a former British colony.The Arawak and Carib are originally inhabitants of Trinidad.Their chief occupation was agriculture,fishing and hunting.In order to better life and job prospects,many Indians have also migrated to Trinidad.They have also influenced the culture of Trinidad.Both India and Trinidad are multireligious,multi ethnic and countries.

The quest for religious identity and commercialization are the recurring themes in both novels *The Mystic Masseur* by Naipaul and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* by Desai.

Religion is derived from the Latin word (religio respect for what is sacred)and religare (to bind in the sense of an obligation.)The root meaning of its Sanskrit equivalent dharma which holds.Religion is a set of beliefs,moral and values that guide human life in a spiritual manner.According to Broom and Selznick,religion is essentially constituted by ritual,emotion,and belief (373).Emily Durkheim has defined religion as,.....a unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things,uniting into a single moral community all who adhere to those beliefs and practices.(Durkheim 47)

In fact, religion is not a business enterprise however it is a way of life.India is a multireligious country in the world.It is a land of different religions, and faith.Hinduism,Islam,Buddhism,Jainism and Christianity are popular religions.The beauty of India is its secularism.It respects all religions irrespective of different faith,belief and creed.India is a land of sadhu,saint,baba and sufism, etc.Religion is a part and parcel of human life.It plays a very important role in shaping society and moulding the mind of youth.People have a high reverence for saints in India.One can bring calmness,tranquility,peace of mind,contentment,humility and success in two worlds by dint of religion.It is an irony that people are trying to build a spiritual identity in society.In the name of religion,they are making money and enjoying luxuries of life.They are using religion as a tool to gain materialistic success in society.The commercialization of religion is widely prevalent in Indian society.Religious superstition is also a social virus for society which is increasing rapidly.It is more prevalent

in middle class of society for the financial benefit. It is a very easy way to make money by imposing oneself as Baba in society than others. One can become a billionaire overnight.

Findings and Discussion:

Sampath Chawla is the protagonist in the novel. He is lethargic, dull, and irresponsible. In fact, he is good for nothing fellow for his family. He completely wants freedom from worldly life. He wants to lead a peaceful life. He is an eccentric person. In his family, everybody hates him because of sluggish nature. That is why he leaves his family and chooses guava orchard to lead his life. He is also a lover of nature. He has got the job of clerk at post office by dint of influence of his father. He has no interest in his work. He just opens letters and reads all letters all day long. "Since Sampath had started work in the post office, he had spent much of his time in this fashion. He had read family feuds and love affairs, of marriages being arranged, of babies being born, of people dying and of ghost returning, of farewells and home-coming. He had read of natural disasters, floods and earthquakes, of small trivial matters like the lack of shampoo". (Desai, 34)

He always avoids taking responsibility both at home and post office. Sampath was fired by the postmaster because of his abnormal activity in wedding party even though he has no interest in his job:

.....he hated the job anyway. He didn't want his job. He didn't want it, he couldn't do it and he didn't want any other job. He would not be able to do that either. 'Hai, hai, this boy is nothing but trouble and misfortune.'

'You are completely lacking in common sense. You are an absolute good for nothing. (Desai 42)

His father is always worried for his future. He hates worldly life and avoids the company of people. So he is in favour of isolated life. Everybody is crazy about identity in the world. The chief purpose of life is to build a strong identity so that he can feel proud of himself. Man is nothing without identity. He stands nowhere in the world without recognition. Sampath leads a very simple life. He is not in the good book of his family and society. Everybody considers him a worthless person. He is completely fed up with his town life. To attain peaceful life, he escapes from Shahkot to guava orchard.

Mr. Chawla reads in the newspaper under heading Post-office climbs tree:
Fleeting duties at the Shahkot post office, a clerk has been reported to have settled in a large guava tree. According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom. (Desai, 67)

An ordinary Sampath turns into a monkeybaba. He was in genuine search for religious identity, peace, and spiritual solace in life. Finally, a dull, abnormal, lazy, eccentric, a good for nothing fellow and eventually becomes a popular Baba in Shahkot. He assumes an important personality and holds dignified reputation in the area.

Kiran Desai has raised the problem of commercialization of spirituality in Indian society in all religions. Sampath has become a hero and started to get media hype when he was merely an ordinary person.

Sampath was longing for freedom, peace of mind, solitude and spiritual solace. Though he was fed up with town life and worldly life, he decided to run away from his family. He settled his life in the deserted guava orchard. After a lot of effort and persuasion, he could not return to his home. Mr Chawla is the father of Sampath. He was a materialistic and cunning person. He is both man of approach and man of action. He knows well how to take advantage of situation.

Mr. Chawla begins to think about the future of his son in the guava orchard. Sampath might make his family's fortune. They could be rich! How many hermits were secretly wealthy? How many holy men were not at all the beggars they appeared to be? How many men of unfathomable wisdom possessed unfathomable bank accounts? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere! (Desai, 68)

All of a sudden, he thought of a plan to set up a hermitage in the guava orchard. He projected Sampath as a hermit. A very silly and stupid person becomes a saint by mistaken. It has become a good business. The whole family got involved in the guava orchard. Sampath's mother Kulfi has become a cook. His grandmother manages a hotel. His sister pinky brings necessary items from the market. Mr Chawla has taken leave from bank and looking after entire business in the orchard. In family everybody was involved in some task to make money. The bank account should be opened in the name of a special fund for building a temple. With limited access, the popularity of Sampath and his hermit like reputation grew. The behavior of monkeys was just another proclamation of Sampath's authenticity.

The family bank account in the State Bank of India was growing by leaps and bounds and he was eager to buy shares in the VIP Hosiery Products company; they could do without a disturbance to upset this little venture he had set to sail. (Desai, 126)

A large number of devotees come to receive blessings from Sampath. He had elevated his position and started to give sermon with the people down the tree.

Sampath gave what came to be known as *The Sermon in the Guava Tree*, where he responded to people's queries with such charm and wit they were to be his trademark for ever after. (Desai, 73)

Devotees ask question and give answer to them. He knows the common problems of Shahkot because he was working at the post office. Having read letters whole day, he was well acquainted with all problems of society. All devotees are satisfied with their answers. He has started to predict about the future of people looking at people.

“Among the crowd of faces down below, he recognized that of Mr Singh, the brother- in-law of a neighbour in Shahkot. Mr Singh, whose letters he had sometimes read in idle moments in the post office.He shouted:MrSinghji’. He remembered one particular letter sent by him to his father.’Is your jewellery still safely buried beneath the tulsi plant?’ Mr Singh turned pale. How do you know my circumstances?He asked Sampath then caught sight of MrsChopra. How is that lump in your throat that travels up and down your windpipe, whispering threats and almost bursting right out of your chest? She gasped. Who told you?He jabbed his finger at a bald headed man in the crowd and said: And you sir, that secret oil you got from the doctor in Side Gulely. Clearly it is not working. Try a good massage with mustard oil and your hair will sprout as thick and as plentiful grass in the Cherapunjeerain. Ratan Sinha had been using special hair oil to no effect (Desai,66-67)

Like commercialization of religion,superstition also hampers the progress of nation.She focuses on the theme of superstition in her novel.It exists ever since the world has come into shape.The people of village are more superstitious than town.They are gullible.They easily believe in anything.In the name of religion and superstition,they are easily exploited by Baba.She opens the eyes of people through her reflective approach. Superstition is seen and reflected in the opening of novel.The novel begins with extreme hot summer in the town of Shahkot.There is paucity of water in the area.It is a complete drought hit like situation . The people of Shahkot is very much worried for want of water.As a result,the condition has become miserable.People are thinking of artificial rain.Situation is so bad that famine relief camp has to be set up.In the town ,everybody is giving an idea how to rain. ‘the police a frog wedding to be performed’ (Desai,2). In the meantime, Kulfi,the mother of Sampath is pregnant.She is also abnormal.She is married to Mr.Chawla.She feels hungry and thinks of food during her pregnancy.She sells everything in her house.Finally, She draws the picture of food on the wall of house.Ammaji is the mother of Mr.Kulfi.She is a very senior member in her family.She has a traditional knowledge of how a child is delivered.

Ammaji had her own ideas of how a women’s pregnancy should be managed.She fussed with pillows herbs,with hairbrushes and the bottles of strong –scented oil for massages.’Sing songs to improve the baby’s mood.(Desai,6)

The people of Shahkot feel extremely glad to see a heavy rainfall in the area.In the meantime Sampath was born.He has a brown birth mark on his cheek.Sampath looks like a stranger boy and his mother thinks that he has come from another planet.’ And:’ Let’s name him Sampath’they said.’ Good fortune.’ (Desai,12). The new baby’s name is kept Sampath.It means a good fortune.It is an auspicious sign that at the time of his birth ,rain comes heavily.

Pinky, the sister of Samath falls in love with hungry hop.He sells an ice-cream.The Hungry Hop family wants to get him married. He is trapped in his room and guarded by his relative. In the meantime, he receives message from Pinky to run away with the hungry hop van in April 30 when everyone is catching monkey. They should meet at 5 a.m. under the tamarind tree. Both of them agree on them. Pinky also persuades to her brother with them but Sampath refuses.‘The girl began to sneeze in tiny mouse like squeals.

It is an inauspicious sign for marriage. Pinky felt terribly scornful of this third-rate woman who had responded to this important moment by sneezing and whimpering' (Desai, 62).

The D.C. gets up at 4 a.m. to join the army to go to orchard where they plan to meet the police.

There, blocking the driveway, spread out all over, was a
huge and motley collection of bundles and bed rolls, of
broken chairs and tables, battered pots and pans galore,
some dirty quilts and old pillows with stuffing coming out of them. (Desai, 194)

Kindly move your belongings from the driveway immediately. But he is too old to do anything quickly. The cook retired from government service and going for his ancestral village. In the meantime the Brigadier also reached.

.....in the old mulberry tree by the gate, the modest green
pigeon who had so long teased, maddened and seduced him
with its liquid notes, its reminders, sweet....piercing...of the
old film songs that his mother had listened to when he
was a child (Desai, 196).

The Brigadier tries to catch pigeon but it runs away. He thinks that it is a bad sign.

The Mystic Masseur is a prize-winning novel. Naipaul wrote this novel at a very young age of twenty-three years. It received the Mail on Sunday and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1958. After the success of novel, it was adapted into film with a screenplay by Caryl Philips, the owner of the film company Marchan Ivory.

The story of the novel is both comic and satiric in nature. It is the story of Ganesh Ramásunair, a Trinidadian of Indian heritage who rises from a struggling masseur to a renowned politician. The protagonist Ganesh plays various roles of tactics such as trickery, quackery, knavery, opportunism, fatalism, tradition and modernity. The themes of novel include superstition, deception, magic, miracles, dowry, poverty, identity, and spiritual power. This novel is introduced by the nameless narrator. Technically, the story is presented in the first person however majority of parts expressed in the third person. The novel is set in Port of Spain and the rural area of Trinidad where the Indians lived and worked, and is a comic study of life in Trinidad in the face of the post-colonial rise of politics based on deception. Ganesh practices mimicry in order to be mimicry in order to be one among the Europeans in a humorous manner.

In the opening sentence of the novel, the narrator defines Ganesh's career as a success story:

"Later he was to be famous and honoured throughout the South Caribbean; he was to be a hero of the people and after that, a British representative at Lake Success"(Naipaul,7).

Initially, Ganesh starts his career as a primary school teacher. Besides teaching, he performs part time job of masseur. Soon after he becomes a spiritual guru or mystic healer. After gaining name, fame and wealth, he becomes a famous politician in Trinidad. Ramlogan is prosperous person. He is the owner of several shops.

The story opens with the anonymous narrator how Ganesh, protagonist heals the boy who had an abscess in the ankle. The boy mother claims that it is Ganesh who cured his son.

The fact is that Ganesh is not aware of healing power. N. Ramadevi, in his critical analysis of Naipaul's works pointed out that

" it unravels the humorous history of Ganesh Ramsumair ,a hero of the people"(Ramadevi,23).

The Mystic Masseur and Suffrage of Elvira is laid in rural Trinidad, with the Port of Spain providing the stepping stone to the Metropolis of London, with which every Trinidadian aspires. *The Mystic Masseur* is a success story decorated with deep satirical touches. Ramadevi further remarks that "it traces the attempts of a displaced and mediocre individual, to achieve recognition and success, in pursuit of which he changes variety of roles"(Ramadevi,23).

The novel sets in Fourways, a small village in Trinidad, 1940. Ganesh Ramsumair, completes his teacher training course. After this he attends graduation. Then he becomes a primary school teacher in the part of Spain, the capital of Trinidad.

He is not well versed in teaching. To supplement his income, he becomes a masseur. In the meantime, he loses his interest in teaching. Soon he comes to know the death of his father. Ganesh immediately returns to his native village and attends funeral ceremony of his father which is performed by his aunt, the Great Belcher. Ramesh meets a shop owner named Ramlogan. In the mean time they become good friends. Ramlogan had a 16-year-old daughter named Leela. Both Leela and Ganesh got married. This marriage was against the wish of Leela. His father has chosen Ganesh her life partner. Ganesh demands dowry from Ramlogan. He receives 1500 dollars and a house in Fuente Grove village as dowry from his father-in-law Ramlogan. Both Ganesh and Leela move to Fuente Grove. Ganesh soon meets Beharry, another book store owner. He influences him to read books. He becomes a voracious reader. He orders hundreds of books for his personal library. Then he decided to be a writer. His wife also motivates him for his personal improvement. As the years

pass, Leela though realizes that Ganesh has no potential and worthless person. She decides to leave Ganesh and goes to father house.

To prove his worth, knowledge and skills, Ganesh writes an educational book on Hinduism. He names the book *101 Questions and answers on the Hindu Religion*. He goes to give his father-in law a piece of book. However, when he comes to know that the book is dedicated to Beharry rather than Leela or himself. It makes him furious and painful. *The Mystic Masseur* is the story of Ganesh, a failed school teacher turned mystic. In the words of the narrator 'the life of Ganesha-a quack masseur, a false mystic, a phoney author, and corrupt politician becomes an allegory of the "history of our times" (*The Mystic Masseur*, 18). Here Naipaul is concerned with the survival of the individual, the postcolonial individuals getting a foothold in the New World Ganesh is a representative of a community, which according to Naipaul, is a: "Peasant-minded, money-minded community, spiritually static because cut-off from its roots, its religion, reduced to rites without philosophy, set in a materialist colonial society: a combination of historical accidents and national temperament, has turned the Trinidad Indian into the complete colonial even more Philistine than the white" (*The Middle Passage*, 89).

Leela returns to Ganesh herself. The book does not sell well. It demotivates and discourages the young author Ganesh.

Now he switches his plan to be a mystic and religious healer. At first a mother approaches Ganesh and tells him that a dark cloud is following her son. Ganesh performs a ritual over the boy. The dark cloud is gone for good. The boy is completely healed. This brings name, fame and success around Trinidad. Ganesh was sympathetic and kind attitude to each client. His kind attitude with clients made him popular and successful.

His book on Hinduism starts to sell very well in Trinidad. Ramlogan owns many taxis. His taxis bring patients to Ganesh. When Ganesh comes to know that taxis are overcharging fares from passenger to come his home. Then father-in-law wants to make money. However, Ganesh says to Ramlogan that he wishes to buy taxis from him so that he can charge affordable fare from his clients. Otherwise, he will buy new one. Initially, Ramlogan becomes furious, angry and defeated to know this eventually he agrees to sell all taxis to Ganesh.

Ganesh gains a huge amount money and invests his money in Fuente Grove's business and infrastructure. His village begins to prosper. One day Hindu approaches Ganesh and inform him C.S, Narayan has embezzled funds from the organization. They got published it their own newspaper. The matter of embezzlement has been highlighted. People have come to know the crimes of Narayan. An election was organized for the post of the President of Trinidad Hindu association. The Ganesh wants election and become the president of Trinidad "Hindu association. In this way, Ganesh popularity grows and economics status enhances and becomes the favorite person of the Trinidad. He joins political party and contest election for the legislative council of Trinidad. He campaigns and tells people that many members of the council improve their own condition, rather than improving the welfare of citizens. If he wins election, he will fight for the wellbeing of Trinidad's downtrodden. At last, he wins the election. In the meantime, Ganesh has published a memoir called *The years*

of guilt. It becomes instant the best seller.

Thus, the novel comes to an end with the magical transformation of Ganesh a struggling masseur and poverty-stricken person turns into an influential politician and successful writer.

The Mystic Masseur is an outcome of post-colonial point of view. The protagonist of novel, Ganesh Ramsumair has seen rise and fall in the life. The narrator's caustic pretence is clearly evident when towards the end of the novel he pauses to consider Ganesh's rise from teacher to member of the Legislative Council: Hence it might be well to pause awhile and consider the circumstances of Ganesh's rise, from teacher to masseur, from masseur to mystic from mystic to M.L.C...The autobiography shows that he believed strongly in predestination; and the circumstances which conspired to elevate him seem indeed to be providential. (Naipaul, 200).The protagonist Ganesh, in this novel, passes through a stage of metamorphosis from a failed school teacher, to clumsy masseur claiming some mystic healing powers and slowly taking to politics.

The Character of Sampath, the hermit in this novel has been compared with the character of Raju, the guide turned sage in R.K.Narayan's famous novel *The Guide* by K.K.Raul

While Raju becomes a saint just to purge himself of his past sins and to continue his guiding habit, Sampath does so simply to escape the dreariness of routine duties. It is noteworthy that Kiran

Desai was highly influenced by R.K.Narayan's writings might have devised Sampath's character out of Raju's rodomontade.

Sampath draws the attention of common people and media the same way as Raju does. (Raul 83)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, both V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* and Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* explore the commercialization of religion and superstitious elements in postcolonial society, highlighting the ways in which spiritual beliefs and practices are manipulated for personal gain. Naipaul presents the character of Ganesh, whose journey from a humble masseur to a self-proclaimed guru illustrates the commodification of religion, as he exploits the faith of his followers to elevate his own status. Similarly, in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Desai critiques the absurdity of religious fervor through the character of Sampath, whose transformation from a disillusioned bureaucrat to a revered figure in a small town underscores the commercialization of spiritual identities in modern society. Both authors illuminate how these practices serve as vehicles for social mobility and economic gain, reflecting the tensions between traditional beliefs and the capitalist forces shaping contemporary life. Ultimately, through their respective narratives, Naipaul and Desai

offer a sharp critique of the commodification of faith, revealing its exploitation and the contradictions inherent in a society that seeks both spiritual fulfillment and material success.

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