

Sampath (K. Desai's novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*) Trapped

Character Sampath is the main character of this whimsical novel. The son of a bank manager, he just doesn't fit into the world he is born in. We know he is special because he is born on the night of a powerful monsoon that ends a long drought. In the morning, his mother held the new-born in her arms, 'a creature that looked like he'd come from another planet altogether, or had been discovered in the woods, something alien and strange.' Feckless and bored, he seems unable to connect with anyone, with the exception of his mother. His ambition extends only as far as a menial job in the Post Office, which irritates his father.

Activities Sampath works, or at least give the impression of working, at the Post Office. He hates the routine of filing and copying documents, and actually spends a lot of the time steaming open and reading letters written to and from his neighbours. He also likes to wander in the town's only park, singing obscure songs that he's heard on the radio. He fantasises a lot, too, talks to animals and dreams about living in another world.

Illustrative moments

Self-centred Although likeable, Sampath, like most dreamers, is self-centred. A good example of this quality occurs in the opening scene of the second chapter, when he wakes up in the early morning. 'All around him, his lay and snored...What a racket! Sampath listened to each hostile inhalation. Even in sleep, he thought, disgusted, his family showed themselves incapable of pleasant displays of consideration. Self-indulgent as even, they worked their way noisily through the dreams, keeping Sampath, meanwhile, awake and tossing. Even his mother, whom he loved most of all, had forgotten his in sleep.' Sampath clearly lacks empathy, which only underlines his singularity, his incompatibility with the world around him.

Idle Sampath lacks energy to do anything, except sing exotic songs and dream about flying in airplanes. His lethargy, and its sharp contrast with his 'can-do' father, is humorously described in a scene at the breakfast table. 'Mr Chawla looked over to where his [twenty-year-old] son was slouched at the table, his breakfast a spreading untidiness of crumbs.' Mr Chawla sees a fly buzzing around his untouched food and 'taking notice of his distressing lack of initiative, brought down his rolled-up newspaper--boom!' Mr Chawla ask his son about his job at the Post Office, and Sampath can only say it is all right. 'All right!' Mr Chawla exclaimed. 'If things were all right, you wouldn't be earning the same salary as last year and the year before that.' Sampath's idleness is cured only when he eats guava in the mysterious orchard at the end of this magical story.

Trapped Sampath's problem is that he feels trapped in the world he was born into, his family and his town, and especially the soulless Post Office, where he works. He doesn't belong. He talks more to cows and crows than to people. And he wants to escape. These feelings are described in a scene when he is morose at home and taken refuge on the roof balcony. 'He didn't want another job. He wanted open spaces. And he wanted them in large swathes. Here [in this town] a person's experiences of silence and space were squeezed and warped into underground forms that were forced to hide: between the eye and the page of a newspaper that someone never turned; in a woman staring into the distance; behind muttered prayers....But Sampath was allowed no peace whatsoever.' When his mother, aware that he is unhappy, brings him a guava to eat, he snarls, 'I don't want a guava. I want freedom.'