

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard

Passage Based Question (Chapter 1)

Read an excerpt from ‘Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard’ below and answer the questions that follow.

- 1 ‘What on earth is she doing?’ shouted Mr Chawla as he watched his wife disappear down the road to the marketplace again and again, as he surveyed the emptying cupboards in the house, the missing items, the gaps on the shelves. ‘What have you married me to, Amma?’ he demanded ferociously of his mother, who looked worried as well. However, since she was responsible for the marriage, she put her worry as far from herself as possible, clucked her tongue and said soothingly: ‘She is at a very delicate stage. Wait a little and maybe she will come out of it.’ 5
- 2 ‘Come out of it.’ He snorted. “She is not going to come out of it. And if the baby takes after her, we are really in for trouble.’ 10
- 3 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, the sticky humanness of things. He intended to keep his own involvement with such matters to the minimum, making instead firm progress in the direction of cleanliness and order. He went to the public library to look for books about babies and waited in line outside the Mission School to enrol the baby well in advance, for he knew how long the waiting lists were. He collected vitamins and tonics from the government clinic. 15
- 4 “You must take care to boil your drinking water for twenty minutes.’ He followed Kulfi about the house reading aloud from his library book as she ignored him. He held one of his fingers up in the air. Despite his young age and slight build, he felt a powerful claim to authority. “You must sit down and rest after any 20

exercise,' he advised. And: 'You must stand up and exercise regularly and diligently' And: 'Don't eat raw fruit any more.' And: "Don't sing songs and tire yourself out. Don't drink tea on an empty stomach. Keep yourself extra clean. 25
Wash your hair, take a nap, put your legs up in the air and do bicycling exercises.' He wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief and continued following his wife, even though it was clear she had no interest whatsoever in what he was saying.

5 Ammaji had her own ideas of how a woman's pregnancy should be managed. 30
She fussed with pillows and herbs, with hair brushes and bottles of strong-scented oil for massages. 'Sing songs to improve the baby's mood,' she advised. 'Go to the temple. Say the right prayers. Make sure the baby is healthy. Make sure the planetary configurations are good. Make sure you have no lice. Make sure you smell nice, and the baby will smell nice too.' 35

6 Everywhere there was the feeling of breath being drawn in and held, as if it wouldn't be let free again until the baby was born and it could be released — released happy and full of relief if the baby was a boy; released full of disappointment and resentment if it wasn't.

7 In Kulfi's stomach Sampath was at first quiet, as if he weren't there at all. Then, 40
as if excited, he grew bolder and more full of life, until he kicked and turned and even leapt. Kulfi paced up and down, up and down, with her hands upon her belly and thought she might soon begin to scream, and that, whether she wanted to or not, she might continue to scream all the way up until the birth and maybe even after. Her stomach grew larger, her dreams of eating more 45
extravagant. The house seemed to shrink. All about her the summer stretched white-hot into an infinite distance. Finally, in desperation for another landscape,

she found a box of old crayons in the back of a cupboard and, with a feeling bordering on hysteria, she began to draw on the dirty, stained walls of the house. She drew around the pictures of babies Ammaji had put up. Babies eating porridge, posing with dolls and fluffy yellow chicks, attempting somersaults. Babies fat and fair and male that Ammaji hoped would somehow, through some mysterious osmotic process, influence the formation of her grandchild. Kulfi drew around these pictures and sometimes over them. She drew a pond, dark but leaping with colourful fish. A field of bright pineapples and pale, dangling snake-gourd. Big lumbering jackfruit in a jackfruit tree and a scratching bunch of chickens. As her husband and mother-in-law retreated in horror, not daring to upset her or the baby still inside her, she drew a parade of cooks beheading goats. Others running to a marketplace overflowing with things to bargain over. Some standing over steaming pots with ladles or pounding whole spices on a grinding stone. She drew creepers and vines that climbed in at the window and spilled a wilderness of leaves upon the walls. She began to draw fruit she did not know; spices yet to be discovered in hidden pods or sequestered in the heart of unknown flowers. She drew dishes that she had never eaten: a black buck suspended over a fire with a row of ingredients destined to transform it into magnificence; a peacock cavorting among cloves of garlic; a boar entangled in a jungle of papaya trees. Onions grew large beneath her feet; creepers burst from the floorboards; fish swam beneath the doors.

8 In the next room was the sound of Mr Chawla pacing up and down. 'What have we got ourselves into?' The sound of Ammaji whispering: 'Just wait a little, beta, wait and see.' Outside, in the barren sky, the drone of the Red Cross 70

planes.

- 9 When there was almost no space left to draw on any more, when the walls, floor and ceiling were full, packed tight to the point of bursting, Sampath was 75 born. And he was born in such remarkable circumstances they were remembered forever afterwards by the people of Shahkot.

Refer to the passage given and answer the questions which follow.

- (a) What are your impressions of Mr Chawla's behaviour? Explain with reference to the text provided.
- (b) What do you find striking about the way Kulfi and her actions are described?



SUGGESTED ANSWERS

- (A) - Mr Chawla tends to avoid disorder/trouble/emotional concerns
 - Mr Chawla is thorough with his research/concern for his wife
 - Mr Chawla is insensitive to Kulfi's state of mind/does not understand her

- (B) - Kulfi's actions reflect her as bordering on hysteria
 - Kulfi's hunger is described in vivid diction
 - Kulfi is described as being seemingly oblivious to her surroundings and family