

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 One day, as Kulfi was at the bedroom window looking at the street, prepared to sit through another seemingly endless stretch of time until Ammaji finally cooked and served her dinner, all of a sudden a shadow fell across the sun and magically, as quickly as a winter’s day tumbles into smoky evening and then night, the white-lit afternoon deepened into the colour of old parchment as the sky darkened. Curtains billowed white out of every window. Bits of newspaper and old plastic bags turned cartwheels in the indigo streets. The air thinned and stirred in a breeze that brought goose bumps out upon her arms. ‘Look!’ Kulfi shouted. ‘Here comes the rain!’ 5
- 2 She could hear the sound of cheering from the bazaar. And she watched the children in the streets leap like frogs, unable to keep still in their excitement. ‘It’s getting cold,’ they shouted, and pretended to shake. ‘It’s going to rain.’ They wrestled and tussled with each other in an exuberance of spirit, while the grown-ups hurried, in this shifting, shadowed light, to get to the market and back, to bring in washing, to carry in string cots. They raised their hands in greeting to each other: ‘At last! The monsoon!’ Who knew whether because of the giant fan, the wedding of frogs, the Pied Piper, because of mercurial powers or magician’s marvels? And in the end, who cared? The rain had come to Shahkot. The monsoon was in town. Kulfi watched with unbelieving elation as the approaching smell of rain spiked the air like a flower, as the clouds shifted in from the east, reached the trees at the town’s edge and 15 20

moved in.

- 3** In the Chawla household, Mr Chawla bustled about with plastic sheeting, while 25
Ammaji placed buckets outside to catch the rainwater and brought out candles
and kerosene lanterns in preparation for the inevitable breakdown of electricity.
They paused, though, to test the growing strength of the wind against their
cheeks; looked up to check the progress of the clouds. When they were finally
prepared for the downpour, they watched from the windows like Kulfi and 30
the rest of Shahkot's residents, leaning from balconies and verandas, from
beneath the flaps of scooter rickshaws; the entire town, with anxious, upturned
eyes, until an especially strong gust sent the leaves flying like birds
before gunshot and brought the first drops of water to sound loud 35
against the parched earth.
- 4** Kulfi watched the rain. It came down fast and then faster yet. It filled up
every bit of sky. It was like no other sound on earth and nothing that was
ever suggested by the thin trickles from Shahkot taps. It came down
black with dust from the sky and dirt on the trees, and then clear. But 40
always louder. She stretched out her hands to feel the weight of the
drops on her flat palms and then put her face out too, holding it,
luminous, pale, in this town enclosed within the dark heart of the
monsoon.
- 5** As she did so, she felt Sampath kick inside her stomach. Her heart 45
jumped in rhythm. He kicked harder and harder. The jamun tree in the
courtyard thrashed and creaked. The rain streamed down Kulfi's hair
and washed over her face. Her husband shouted: 'Get away from the
open window.' She paid no attention. He wrapped her in a square of

- plastic, but she shrugged it off. The rain descended in great sweeping sheets. 50
- 6 The neighbours withdrew in quick, sharp movements, slammed their windows, barred their doors, but Kulfi stretched out farther still, farther and farther until the rain took up all the space inside her head. It seized her brain, massaged and incorporated her into the watery sounds, until she felt that she herself might turn to storm and disappear in this blowing, this growling, this lightning flutter quick as a moth's wing. If she would only let go of the metal window frame, she could take all those tedious days of summer and crash them to the ground, transform them into water and wind and pounding. 55 60
- 7 She felt her muscles contract as a clap of thunder echoed about her. Again, the thunder roared. Kulfi, soaking wet, opened her mouth wide and roared back. Below her, the ground had disappeared. Ponds formed, joined to make lakes and ran down streets to make rivers. Rivers took the place of roads. A mere two hours later, Mr Chawla and Ammaji running back and forth with cloths and hot water, the storm still raging, rain pouring through windows that would not stay closed and flooding in beneath the doors, Sampath was born. As his face, with a brown birthmark upon one cheek, appeared to the cheers of his family, there was a roaring overhead that almost split their eardrums, followed by a vast crash in the street outside. 65 70
- 8 'What was that?' said Mr Chawla nervously, as the ground shuddered. Could it be that his son's birth had coincided with the end of the world? Leaving Kulfi and the new baby, he and Ammaji ran to the window to

- investigate, and discovered that far from being the end of things it was 75
more like the beginning. Caught in their old jamun tree, they saw a crate
of Red Cross supplies that had been dropped by a Swedish relief plane
befuddled by the storm in a move that must surely have been planned
by the gods. The departing plane rose high into the sky and vanished
among the swirling clouds, unmoved apparently by the townspeople 80
jumping and waving down below as they ran out despite the downpour
to greet this unexpected largesse. Draped in the foliage of the ruined
jamun, they discovered containers full of sugar and tea, of rehydration
mixes, dried milk powder, raisins and digestive biscuits. There were
unidentifiable powders in packages covered with pictures of smiling 85
foreign women. There were nuts, sweets and baby-food tins galore.
- 9 Climbing high into the tree, the street urchins tossed down what they
found lodged in the broken branches. Mr Chawla ran back and forth like
a silly chicken, filling a shopping bag with supplies, while Ammaji alerted
neighbours to the birth by shouting out of the window near Kulfi's 90
bedside. Soon the house was 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!' 95



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

- (a) With close reference to the text, describe the setting and atmosphere depicted.

- (b) What is striking about Sampath's birth and people's reactions to it, and how is this effectively conveyed by the author? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.



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SUGGESTED ANSWERS

- (A) - The weather changes suddenly, turning from light into darkness rapidly
 - A sense of urgency is created amongst the people
 - The rain is described with vivid language the emphasizes its unique appearance

- (B) - Kulfi is described as immersing herself in the rain at the point when her labour begins, showing how the storm she feels within is reflected without
 - The weather when Sampath is born is described with vivid diction
 - Sampath's birth appears to coincide with a number of other fortuitous events