

Agony of Exile and the Ambiguities of Post-Colonialism: A Study on Kiran Desai's "Inheritance of Loss"

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ABSTRACT: Kiran Desai's most appreciated novel, "The Inheritance of Loss" is set in Kalimpong, a hill area, which is situated at the foot of the mount Kanchenjunga in the North Eastern part of post -Independence India. This novel explores immigration, relationships and identity on both the interpersonal and international scale. Spanning India, England, and the United States, the novel details the conflict between traditional Indian ways of life and the shiny opulence of Western nations. The book has bagged many awards to its credit. Besides the book has won the 'Man Booker Prize' in 2006 and the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award in 2007. The writer, Kiran Desai wrote the book in the seven years following her 1998 successful book, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. The novel highlights some of the outstanding issues of contemporary society such as globalization, marginalization, subordination, economic inequality, exploitation, poverty, nationalism, insurgency, immigration, hybridity, racial discrimination and political violence. The basic aim of this paper is to highlight "The Inheritance of Loss" as a novel that deals with diaspora. Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" is an excellent example of diasporic novel in the first decade of the twenty-first. The textual study of the novel has multiple meanings and explanations according to a number of readers as well as a number of readings. Desai has experienced the hurdles of multiculturalism, cross-cultural conflicts, displacement and dislocation in her life. She presents situations where characters mainly discover themselves rootless and by leading a difficult life of loneliness and solitude in this modern society. Desai has observed that the characters in the novel have gained traumatic experiences followed by material loss. But they have a spiritual gain towards the end that is the realization of real happiness and prosperity in life. In the novel the author, Kiran Desai has presented major losses that have been inherited by almost all the major characters and their search for Indian culture and values.

KEYWORDS: relationship, identity, conflict, society, immigration, globalization

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I. INTRODUCTION

Kiran Desai is the daughter of the most famous novelist, Anita Desai, a legendary figure in the annals of Indian English literature. *The Inheritance of Loss* is the second novel by Kiran Desai that was published in 2006. This book bagged many awards for the author including the Man Booker Prize for that year, the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award in 2007, and the 2006 Vodafone Crossword Book Award. This novel has been written over a period of seven years after Desai's first book *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, which has also brought tremendous success. Major themes of the book deal with migration problems, living between two worlds, and between past and present. The novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* presents the lives of characters those who are entangled in class system in India. Here I refer to both the lower class and the upper class system prevalent in India. The writer has wonderfully presented hopes, aspiration and dreams of characters that are portrayed in the novel. She has also conveyed their ultimate dream and hope of immigrating to America and finally escaping the critical class and caste system of their homelands. In the novel we see that main character, Jemubhai became an itinerant civil service judge and, became typical of middle-class Anglicized Indians, somewhat alienated from his own native culture.

The absence of an address protests to have fixed identity. As man possesses a limited existence, he has to keep something behind him to remind him. The individual has to live according to the societal norms. This endeavour will be falsified in certain cases, as there is an inner self against him. It creates the loss of faith in one's own country and its values. The detailed study of *The Inheritance of Loss* gives us the feelings that there is a note of compassion in the delineation of various characters in the novel. Almost all the characters Sai, Gyan, the retired judge, the cook, the tutor, and the cook's son living in abroad- all get the compassionate feelings of the author. All these characters dwell in the context of compassion and pathos. The present paper presents a story about their hard work, effort, dedication and sacrifices that they render as to achieve their minimum needs

for a normal daily living. The paper also brings out interior of the novel's characters as combined with utmost expectations and dreams to gain material growth and success.

II. MAJOR ISSUES OF THE NOVEL

Kiran Desai's art of characterization is painted by her deal with "The Great American Dream". The characters created by Desai are well presented and they prefer not to avoid challenges to the things that they believe to be true. This has resulted from globalization, cultural conflicts, ethnic troubles and economic disparity between countries, and consumer-driven multi-culturalism. Desai's novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* highlights the story of a cross-section of Indian society dealing with characters such as Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, Panna Lal, Gyan, Biju, Saeed-Saeed, Sai Mistry, Haresh-Harry and also the two sisters – Nonita and Lolita. The novel depicts how the simultaneous experience of the post-colonial, the global and the local, creates "ambivalence" in the individual's perception of his/her identity. And this problematic situation imparts behaviour in the local institutions of Kalimpong, the main area or location where the book gets its base. In the novel "The Inheritance of Loss" Kiran Desai depicts the difficulties and agony of exile and the ambiguities of post-colonialism with a gallery of multi-coloured characters. Desai's novel highlights some of the major issues of today's modern society such as globalization, marginalization, subordination, social unrest, economic inequality, political violence, exploitation, poverty, nationalism, colonialism, insurgency, immigration, hybridity, class-discrimination and caste system. Kiran Desai has experienced and observed the pain of class-system, cultural clash, displacement, ethnic dislocation and multiculturalism in her life. She presents situations in which characters discover themselves as very helpless leading a life of loneliness and alienated. In such critical situation, it is only their values, which they have inherited since their birth that helps them to adjust with time. The novel deals with the losses the characters of the novel went through.

As the title of the novel suggests, the characters suffer from emotional and intellectual loss. This novel seems to be the perfect peace of artistic perfection. The novel unfolds many trends of post colonialism, globalization, cultural conflicts, ethnic troubles and terrorism. Kiran Desai's book "The Inheritance of Loss" shows how people who move out of India and migrate to countries like England and America feel rootless and alienated in a strange land. At the same time the book n also depicts how people suffer from loss of identity in their own home land and feel lonely, alienated, and isolated. In her novel "The Inheritance of Loss" Desai tried to explore deep into the phantom of human psychology and immortalise the literary work.

She very carefully discusses the issues and problems without giving any solution for particular issues and problems. Though she has not given emphasis to any particular issue or problem yet we discover in her works the issues and problems of globalism, terrorism, class issues, caste problems and American dreams most vividly. Kiran Desai's book, "The Inheritance of Loss" can be viewed as a Diasporic novel. This novel presents the picture of a cross-section of Indian society through varied characters like Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, Panna Lal, Gyan, Biju, Saeed-Saeed, Sai Mistry, Haresh-Harry and the two sisters, Nonita and Lolita. The issues and conflicts cited in the novel are depicted in a subtle and intriguing manner through the central characters. Writers like Vikram Seth, Sulman Rushdie and Kiran Desai have given insight into what it means to travel between the West and the East. The paradox of globalism is put forward in these following words by Desai: ... "Each of them (Sai, Father Booty, and Uncle Potty) separately remembered how many evenings they'd spent like this... how unimaginable it was that it would soon come to an end. Here, Sai had learned how music, alcohol, and friendship could create a grand civilization...." While analysing the thematic concerns in the novel Ragini Ramachandra observes: Made up of various strands the novel presents not merely a kaleidoscopic picture encompassing different countries, continents, climes, cultures, peoples, their struggles and their conflicts, their dreams and their frustrations but also a mature understanding of life itself at various level.

III. CULTURAL DIASPORIC CLASHES

Kiran Desai's notable novel - *The Inheritance of Loss* follows the stories of several generations of different immigrant families as they try to come to terms with a brand new world and how to find an identity in America. There are many types of loss, most prominently in terms of material wealth, identity, and culture, and these trends are carried through the generations—inherited by the second and third generations. "The Inheritance of Loss" opens with a teen age Indian girl, an orphan called Sai, living with her Cambridge educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, in the town of Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas. The narrative also resolves around the inhabitants of Kalimpong like cook and pet dog of the judge. The story starts from a decaying mansion built by a Scotsman in the lush, damp landscape of Kalimpong, in the Himalayas, to the rat-infested basements of Indian restaurants in New York where the cook's beloved son, Biju, works as an illegal immigrant. He works in the foreign land barely surviving on slave wages by losing and hiding his identity as an Indian due to expiry of his visa. We come to know that the mansion in the novel was inspired by a house, now restored, which Ms. Desai's aunt, a paediatrician, owns in Kalimpong. Like the judge, Ms. Desai's paternal

grandfather journeyed from Gujarat to Cambridge University, a penniless student learning the English dictionary by heart.

The writer after setting the scene with a moment of such high drama shows how the lives of Sai, Gyan and her grandfather, along with their cook and his son, Biju, intertwine before and after this horrible turning point. She depicts her plan and very artistically sets scenes in which Biju, (cook's son) tries to make a life in the US are paralleled by the judge's experience while studying in England in the 1940s. Here in both situations, we see a young Indian man setting off full of idealism about the cultural, social and material opportunities of the west, only to find himself ground down by the reality of being a rented or second-class citizen in a foreign land. However we hear about the judge that as a young man he had been alienated by the coldness of Cambridge society. Despite his attempts to hide, he merely emphasised something that unsettled others. For entire days nobody spoke to him at all there in Cambridge. ... "elderly ladies ... moved over when he sat next to them in the bus, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction that it wasn't even remotely as bad as what he had." We also come to hear about the young boy, Biju, who had already worked in and around filthy restaurants for exploitative employers, drifting from job to job, and then "Slipping out and back on the street. It was horrible what happened to Indians abroad and nobody knew but other Indians abroad. It was a dirty little rodent secret."

In Kiran Desai's present novel, "Inheritance of loss", families of immigrants from India are explored both as newcomers who try to hold fast to Indian culture and as later generations who eschew the traditions of their motherland. The newcomers feel they have lost their homeland and their wealth, which is devastating. All the while, they are mocked for holding onto antiquated traditions by the more adapted immigrant families. On the other hand, the families with some history in America have essentially lost their culture because they no longer act like traditional Indians. The characters in the novel stand against their personal spheres with larger issues and problems of class system, social unrest, racialism, political turmoil, regionalism and immigrant experiences. Kiran Desai gathers and correlates all these experiences of the characters in one story. She paints them as if they are in their own journeys. The personal identity of every character is revealed. Still, these are related to global issues of the time. Almost all the characters have come face encounters with the interference of the West. One of the important characters, Gyan, who confesses that he was only human and so sometimes weak, represents the other characters too. The Anglophile Judge, Jemubhai had only turned into a self-hated man. The time when Sai discovered Gyan in the rebellion gang, she walked home slowly and got mentally disturbed thinking about her relationship with Gyan. Heart breaking situations like this affected the personal hopes and stability of love affairs. The revolution as seen in the book was quite threatening the personal joys of the growing up minor girl, Sai. The cook tried to remind the young girl, Sai that the initiatives of Gyan were not good at all. By this situation Sai is affected by Gyan, who involves himself in the ethnic, Nepali revolution for getting freedom and establishing their nativity in a free land without interference of Indian government. It has been analysed and experimented that love always takes place between partners of equal grade and status. Here the result of this love is quite unequal. Their bash-up adds to her unhappiness and loneliness too. The Gorkha Movement has dented their kinship and spurted out the repressed differences. However both Gyan and Sai suddenly start to remind and recount the class and social status of each other and Gorkha revolution appears to uncover many hidden facts about globalization and migration.

The prominent of cultural diasporic clashes is the varieties of food according to the country. The food is different from one another culture to traditions. New York is the very big city. There is enough food for everybody. Desai meant the American popular food the hot dog as cultural encounter. Biju ask the lady from Bangladesh while serving: "You like Indian hot dog? You like American hot dog? You like special one hot dog?" (23). There are so many rules to how to eat food in India. Sai who brought up in western culture enjoys her food by using fork and knife where in it is hatred by Gyan, who is a Nepali tutor. Only on rainy day we all enjoy the food much rather than other days. Desai did not miss that beautiful event also: "After the rains, mushrooms pushed their way up, sweet as chicken and glorious as Kanchenjunga, so big, fanning out. People collected the oyster mushrooms in Father Booty's abandoned garden. For a while the smell of them cooking gave the town the surprising air of wealth and comfort. (Desai 289). Even though the cook and his son, Biju possess blood relation, there is a gap between them linking to their identity. This gets its proof as we read following lines in the book "The cook had thought of ham roll ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices, of tuna fish soufflé, khari biscuit pie, and was sure that since his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian".

The main and major emotional connection in the novel that takes place between the cook and his son, Biju is very uncertain. Despite a momentarily hopeful ending, it hardly lightens the book. As we observe the characters, we discover Sai, and her sense of loneliness. Sai feels frustrated feeling about her relationship and love affair with Gyan, which is also the sensation experienced by the reader, of being battered by overlapping stories that drown out her own desire for the reassurance of love and relationship between two love birds:

"Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it."

Though Kiran Desai allows her protagonist Sai to experience love, romance, friendship, trust and betrayal she still empathies her a lot. It is because she has fallen a prey to the sufferings of loneliness since her child wood days. Sai experiences and also enjoys the love and romance with a young tutor, Gyan who has involved himself in Gorkhaland movement to progressive thuggery and conservative decency. Sai learns to adjust with reverse situation and bitterly accepts rejection with Gyan, and to comprehend the reasons for prejudice. She also learns to accept the prejudice. It is observed that internal conflicts are always complicated elements in the novel that are exemplified through the characters like Saeed who certainly thinks that people have a choice. Saeed daringly prompts Biju to change the way of his thinking. He says that Biju should accept the change in his life to sustain. However, Sai seems to do likewise with Gyan. She challenges him to accept the contradictions in which he finds himself and not to see them as problems. In the mean time she too resists her voice becoming an anglophile who despises Indian culture, Indian class system, Indian political system and ethnic disorders like the judge, Jemubhai who also advocates and demonstrates a degree of agency, actively maintaining his adamant behaviour and self ego and suppressing his own potential for bringing a change in life as well as society. Saeed excels his life well in New York very manageably because differences do not matter for him and attitude towards his own religion depicts how he is able to manage how to avoid situations of internal conflict and ethnic difference that hampers Biju's life style in US.

Kiran Desai writes an elegant and thoughtful study of families, the losses each member must confront alone, and the lies each tells himself or herself to make memories of the past more palatable. It is also true that the book does not have a sense of movement that has shaped the continent's history- in this case the freedom struggle and the movement for Gorkhaland. There is a message of the story about two different kinds of Diasporas - that of undocumented and thereby exploited blue-collar immigrants in New York and an ageing, elitist cluster of Indian professionals settled post retirement in a remote Gurkha hill station that is Kalimpong . Here both Diasporas face challenges and hurdles of a modern globalized society that is paradoxically fraught with increasingly exclusivist, separatist, and nationalistic agendas. Diaspora disorders the borders and confinement between the first world and the third world when enforcing them to a great height. The book has growing sense of decay as if the people, like the houses they live in and the property they own, are succumbing to the damp mould of a monsoon season.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Kiran Desai's novel, "*The Inheritance of Loss*" is a literary masterpiece with a perfect blend of Indian culture and values. The overall study of the book gives us the feelings that there is a note of compassion, fellow feeling and rivalry followed by love and hatred in the delineation of various characters in the novel. Here in the novel almost all the characters like Sai, Gyan, the retired judge, the cook, and the cook's son living in abroad- all get the compassionate feelings of the author. After reading the book I come to the view that in the entire novel victory of Indian culture and values is celebrated with great importance the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* deals with cultural conflicts of Europe, India and America simultaneously at the same time. The writer gets an opportunity to run through the concepts of globalization, multiculturalism, modernization, terrorism and insurgency. She has proved that wherever one goes, he/ she carries the value of his /her culture and tradition. *The Inheritance of Loss* has been set partly in India and partly in the US. Internal issues and conflicts in the novel are quite complicated elements that have been exemplified through the characters like Saeed, who minutely thinks that people have a choice in living their life as immigrants. He also advocated and motivates Biju to change his way of thing and his style of living by accepting the change that comes on his way. Meanwhile Sai seems to do likewise with Gyan, challenging him to recognize the contradictions in which he finds himself and not to see them as problems. Kiran Desai depicts that the Gorkhas in Kalimpong protested to get a new land that is The Gorkha Land, which like Pakistan should be segregated from India. The GNLF Movement brought several losses which destroy the beauty of Kalimpong.

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