



KIRAN DESAI'S "INHERITANCE OF LOSS": A STUDY ON GLOBALIZATION, IMMIGRATION AND POSTCOLONIALISM

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Abstract:

Kiran Desai's most notable novel, "The Inheritance of Loss" (2006) is set in Kalimpong, which is situated at the foot of 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 won several awards, including the Man Booker Prize in 2006 and the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award in 2007. Desai wrote the book in the seven years following her 1998 debut, *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. Kiran Desai who has personally undergone experiences of multiculturalism, cultural clash, displacement and dislocation, presents situations in which characters find themselves rootless and lead a life of loneliness and solitude.

Key words: immigration, globalization, marginalization, exploitation

Introduction:

The novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* is the second novel by Kiran Desai which was first 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 was written over a period of seven years after Kiran Desai's first book *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Among its main themes are migration, living between two worlds, and between past and present. *The Inheritance of Loss* explores the lives of characters who are trapped in India's class system—both the lower class and the upper class. The characters' hopes and dreams are conveyed in the novel, along with their ultimate dream of immigrating to America and finally escaping the rigid caste system of their homeland. In India, he became an itinerant civil service judge and, typical of Anglicized, middle-class Indians, somewhat estranged from his native culture. The absence of an address

protests to have fixed identity. As man is having 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 article gives an insight into their sacrifices and dedication they render as to achieve their minimum wanting for a basic living. The paper also is designed to unravel the interior of the novel's characters as entwined with expectations and dreams to achieve the material zenith.

Major Issues :

Many of the characters of Desai, in fact, do deal with "The Great American Dream" particularly well and prefer not to avoid challenges to the things they believe to be true. It resulted from globalization, economic disparity between nations, and consumer-driven multiculturalism. Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* depicts a cross-section of Indian society in characters such as Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, Panna Lal, Gyan, Biju, Saeed-Saeed, Sai Mistry, Haresh-Harry and the two sisters, Lolita and Nonita, to highlight how the simultaneous experience of the colonial, the global and the local, creates "ambivalence" in the individual's perception of his/her identity and imparts behaviour in the local institutions of Kalimpong. In the novel "Inheritance of Loss" Kiran Desai illuminates the pain of exile and the ambiguities of post-colonialism with a tapestry of colorful characters.

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. Kiran Desai who has personally undergone experiences of multiculturalism, cultural clash, displacement and dislocation, presents situations in which characters find themselves rootless and lead a life of loneliness and solitude. In such traumatic phase, it is only their values, which they have inherited since birth, helps them to cope up. The novel deals with the losses the characters of the novel went through. They suffer from emotional and intellectual loss as the title of the novel suggests. This novel seems to be the perfect peace of artistic perfection. The novel unfolds many trends of globalization, terrorism and post colonialism. Desai's "Inheritance of Loss" not only shows how people who move out of India and migrate to countries like England and America feel rootless and alienated in a strange land but it also reveals how people in their own mother land feel isolated and suffer from loss of identity.

In her novel "The Inheritance of Loss" Kiran Desai tried to dive deep into the sea of human psychology and immortalise the literary work. She minutely discusses the issues without suggesting and stressing any particular issue. Though she has not given priority to any specific issue yet we find in her novels the issues of globalism and American dreams most prominently. Kiran Desai's book, "The Inheritance of Loss" presents the picture of a cross-section of Indian society in characters such as Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, Panna Lal, Gyan, Biju, Saeed-Saeed, Sai Mistry, Haresh-Harry and the two sisters, Lolita and Nonita, to highlight how the simultaneous experience of the colonial, the global and the local, creates "ambivalence" in the individual's perception of his/her identity and imparts behaviour in the local institutions of Kalimpong. 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.

(The Journal of Indian Writings in English. P.19)

"Inheritance of Loss": A Critical Review

The 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” tells the story of an embittered Indian judge, his orphaned granddaughter and their foolish and saintly cook. It moves 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 barely surviving on slave wages. The mansion in the novel was inspired by a house, now restored, which Ms. Desai’s aunt, a pediatrician, 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. After setting the scene with a moment of such high drama, Desai shows how the lives of Gyan and Sai and her grandfather, along with their cook and his son, intertwine before and after this horrible turning point. She casts her net wide, and scenes in which the cook’s son, Biju, tries to make a life in the US are paralleled by the judge’s experience studying in England in the 1940s.

In both situations, we see a young Indian man setting off full of idealism about the cultural and material opportunities of the west, only to find himself ground down by the reality of being a second-class citizen. However we hear about the judge as a young man, 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 ... 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 hear about the young Biju, working in 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 the novel, 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 stand against their personal spheres with larger issues of political turmoil, racialism, immigrant experiences, and regionalism. Kiran Desai clams all these experiences of the characters in one story. They are in their own journeys. The personal identity of each character is revealed. Yet these are related to global issues. Almost all the characters have encounters with the West. Gyan, who confesses that he was only human and so sometimes weak, echoes the other characters too. The anglophile Judge had only turned into self-hatred. When Sai saw Gyan in the rebellion, she walked home slowly. Situations like this foiled the personal hopes of love and affairs. The revolution was threatening the personal joys of Sai, a minor girl. The cook tried to remind Sai that the capabilities of Gyan were not bright. Sai is affected by Gyan, who gets involved in the ethnic, Nepali revolution.

It is observed often that love takes place amidst unequal partners. The result of this love also is unequal. Their bash-up adds to her loneliness too. The extremist rebellion has dented their kinship and spurted out the repressed differences. Both Sai and Gyan suddenly start becoming aware of the class of each other. The turmoil of the public agitation seems to unearth many truths about the characters. 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 Biju is blood relation, there is a border line in between them. 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 only emotional connection that endures is that between the cook and his son, and even this is so uncertain, despite a momentarily hopeful ending, that it hardly lightens the book. Otherwise, we are left with Sai, and her sense, 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: "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 Desai allows her protagonist Sai to experience romance, friendship, trust and betrayal she empathies her a lot. Sai experience romance with a young tutor, who has conflicting loyalties to progressive thuggery and conservative decency. She learns to cope with compassion and rejection, and to comprehend the reasons for prejudice; she learns as well that to accept the prejudice she has come to comprehend a continuation of that prejudice.

Internal conflicts are complicated elements in the novel exemplified through the characters such as Saeed. He certainly thinks people have a choice. He strongly encourages Biju to change the way he thinks and to accept change. 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. She also resists becoming an anglophile who despises Indian culture like the judge, who also demonstrates a degree of agency, actively maintaining his staunch rigidity and suppressing his own potential for change. Saeed succeeds in New York precisely because differences do not bother him. His (Saeed's) attitude towards his religion illustrates how he manages to avoid the kinds of internal conflict that paralyze Biju. There is a concurrent telling of the story of 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. Both Diasporas face challenges of a normally globalized society that is paradoxically fraught with increasingly exclusivist, separatist, and nationalistic agendas. Diaspora collapses the boundaries between the first world and the third world while simultaneously enforcing them. Earlier, Britain could not hem the gaps as the colonizer of commonwealth nations. Today, the United States has failed too and the apparel only tatters further.

Conclusion:

I observe that 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. 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. After reading the book I come to the conclusion that throughout in the novel "*The Inheritance of Loss*", victory of Indian culture and values is celebrated. Desai contributes to debates about American Dream, Globalization and Identity in *The Inheritance of Loss* by advocating neither the preservation of cultural distinctiveness nor assimilation, but rather ambivalence and flexibility. She shows that the real issue facing post-colonial and immigrant people are not whether they should assimilate but how clinging to cultural certitude leads to disaster. *The Inheritance of Loss* deals with three worlds— Europe, India and America—simultaneously at the same time. Of these three worlds, Desai finds an opportunity to go through the concepts of globalization, multiculturalism, modernization, terrorism and insurgency. Kiran Desai had proved that wherever one goes, he carries the value of his /her culture and tradition. *The Inheritance of Loss* is set partly in India and partly in the USA. The regional settings in the novel are much relevant if we judge it from the cultural perspective. Desai describes it as a book that "tries to capture what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant". The narrative captures the political milieu in which identities are negotiated through a continual collision of institutionalised national narrative with minority narratives as its "discontents."

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