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THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS: A Story of Losing Lives in search of Identity

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ABSTRACT

Man has been in search of opportunities and convenience for a better living, from the time immemorial. The Bible says “The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children” (Exodus 12:37). The Israelites had been into the slavery under Egypt and they hoped to escape from that. Following the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, lakhs of people have already migrated to other countries. ‘6,60,000 Ukrain citizens have migrated to the neighboring countries following the Russian invasion over Ukrain (‘Deepika’ Daily, March 2, 2022). This sort of migration , happens by chance and by choice, at times. The historic westward movement of people began centuries ago. America, being the biggest financial power in the world, has a history of accommodating the migrants who reached there by choice and by force.

Thousands of people were brought from African countries to the U.S, as slaves during the 15-16 centuries. The United Kingdom being once the biggest Imperial Power had their colonies worldwide. After the end of the colonial rule in many countries, including the U.S.A, world has come to a new phenomenon called the Globalization. It is a social, cultural and political phenomenon. It causes much social interaction between the peoples of the world. America, being the biggest financial power in the world, hosts people from all parts of the world. The migrants get good job opportunity over there. But, at the same time division in the name of color and race has been a problem for the migrants. Back home, India had been into the imperial hold of the British for years until it gained the independence in the year 1947. India faced many internal threats such as the insurgencies of the Gorkha activists, for so many years. *The Inheritance Loss* is a Novel which speaks about the multiculturalism, identity crisis etc. which happen due to the Globalization process across the world. It deals mainly with the stories two characters, Sai and Biju. Sai goes through the alienation due to the internal restlessness in the country due the strikes and insurgencies by the Gorkha liberation Front activities and her multicultural interactions at home. Biju is in confusion in the U.S.A, as he does not have a Green Card for the permanent stay and job in the country. He is facing a lot of racial problems there.

Key Words: Migration, invasion, globalization, multiculturalism, identity crisis

THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS: A Story of Losing Lives in search of Identity

Kiran Desai was born in 1971 at Chandigarh. Her mother, Anita Desai is a very popular writer. Kiran Desai spent her childhood in Delhi, Pune and Mumbai. She left India at the age of 14, for England and after one year she, with her mother, migrated to the United States. She studied creative writing at Hollins University, Virginia and Columbia University in New York City. Desai's first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in 1998. Her Second Novel *The Inheritance of Loss* was published in 2006.

The Inheritance of Loss is set in Kalimpong, a small town in the north eastern Himlayas in Darjeeling District of West Bengal. Darjeeling was under the British East Company since 1835, quite for a long period. The Gorkhaland Movement which took momentum since 1986 has been demanding a separate Gorkhaland state as Gorkhastan comprising of Darjeeling District, Sikkim and Nepal. The suppression of the East India Company followed by the rule of the British put the ethnic people in pressure and identity crisis. Again, the story is in the backdrop of the political turmoil suffered by one of the protagonists, Sai –a girl of sixteen, who had lost her parents and could not continue her schooling at St. Augustine's Convent in Dehradun and came to stay at Cho Oyu in Kalimpong with her maternal Grandfather, Jamubhai Patel. Patel is a retired ICS officer under the British. Other inmates at Cho Oyu are the judge's cook and Mutt, the dog of the judge. The story of the novel develops centering another important spot, ie., the New York city. It is the place where Biju, the son of the cook is staying illegally. He is doing odd jobs for his survival. He shifts his job from one to another as he is not allowed by the employer to stay for long because he doesn't possess a Green Card. He is trying hard to get the card for his legal stay in the U.S.A.

Kiran Desai connects the stories of both Sai and Biju with the thread of Postcolonialism which talks about the identity crisis faced by the citizens of the once colonized nations. Sai by her birth, education and life style is half Anglicized. Biju is facing alienation and going through insults due to his place of origin and color. Desai brings out even the minute events connected to both the protagonists, from her own living experience in the three countries-India, U.K and The U.S.A. The issues such as identity crisis and multiculturalism are the burdens of the

colonized people. They are forced to continue a life style which is not according to their wish choice. Pt. Jawarlal Nehru, in his book *The Discovery of India* explains about another era of Imperialism saying that ‘...and rulers exploit the goodness and nobility of man for evil purposes and take advantage of the fears, hatreds, and false ambitions of the people’ (P.612). Sai, through her English education and style of living at convent school at Dehradun, is faced with so many problems at Cho Oyu. The agitations by the Gorkha people, is a matter of much concern. Biju, in the city of New York is facing the trouble of getting a permanent job and the Green Card. These are certain issues left over in the minds and politics by the colonialists.

The opening chapter of the novel shows the restless condition prevailing in Darjeeling. At Cho Oyu, there came a band of boys who belonged to the GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front). “They had come for the judge’s hunting rifles”(P.4). The chapter also throws light on the westernized style of living attitude of the judge. He wanted cake and not biscuits for his evening tea. He does not see any excuse for the leave taken by the baker who didn’t provide him cakes on that day. “How dare he go for a wedding?”(p.3). On the other hand the cook is worried of his son, Biju who is in America. Being an illegal migrant, he ‘changed jobs so often’. Biju has no work permit in the U.S. No dignity was given to such workers over there. Biju was ‘like a fugitive on the run- no papers’ (p.3).. After the death of her parents in Russia in an accident, Sai’s school authorities in Dehradun contacted her maternal grandfather to take care of his granddaughter. Sai’s arrival marks the beginning of conflicts. And Gyan, who is Sai’s Nepali tutor also appears in the first chapter as a central character. Sai’s affair with the tutor, who is a man from Nepal, gives rise to the matter of ethnicity and postcolonial issues connected to the judge’s house at Cho Oyu.

The GNLF insurgents attack the judge’s house and stole his rifle which is sign of western styles and education. Gyan, also joins the insurgency. “ Gyan !! In his tomato red sweater, yelling lustily in a way she couldn’t recognize’ (p.215). Sai got held up between the war of class and caste. She understood that Gyan and his people considered her as wealthy and of high class. Due to these developments, the cook got confused. He became a person of no worth as he felt himself to be neither in the class of his master nor the insurgents.

Biju, the cook’s son is struggling very hard to keep his identity. Shifting his job from one to another, Biju understood that the U.S.A is not as big as his thoughts, at least for a person like him. Though he had less poverty in the U.S., he is finding it very hard to cope up with the manners and matters he came across in America. His expectation of getting a Green Card on one side and his father’s wish on the other, made the condition much complicated. Actually he led an ‘invisible’ life doing menial jobs and shifting to basement kitchens in New York, that too on slave wages. Once Biju slipped on some rotten spinach and fell down. He asked his employer Harrish-Harry of the Gandhi Café for help to meet a doctor. He asked Biju to take some rest and go back to India. ‘...go home. Doctors are very cheap and good in India’ (p.189).

Desai presents the identity crisis faced by the judge and Gyan as well. Judge was Cambridge educated and had done the coveted ICS. He was an Anglophile in all his habits and life style. He married at the age 20 and his wife was 14. Both had an uncomfortable married life. The Judge punished her for not knowing how to use the British WC. Once she joined a Congress women’s welcome committee for Nehru. The judge became very angry on his wife’s move to join the Congress party program to greet Nehru because it caused much anger of the British officials and affected badly the judge and his promotion in the job. “He could bear her face no longer, bought her a ticket, and returned her to Gujarat’(p.305). The judge had been living an ‘isolated’ life and had only the cook, and granddaughter with him. He was between his anglicized habits and his own poor state of living, in the

cold and old house at Cho Oyu. "Jamubhai was glad he could disguise his inexperience, his crudity, with hatred and fury" (p.169). He was a man of deformed identity due to the multiculturalism and identity crisis.

Kiran Desai further brings the example of identity crisis through the character, Gyan. He, being a Nepali, got trapped between his love for his country and love for Sai. In the opening scene itself we see that Sai is waiting anxiously for Gyan, her Maths tutor, on a rainy evening. 'But it was 4:30 already and she excused him with the thickening mist" (p.2). But still, the basic demand and thirst for better education, healthcare and jobs for ethnic Nepalese, put Gyan in the activities with GNLF. He was totally divided between his loyalties to Sai, his family and insurgency. He, at a stage, ignored the request of Sai and his family members and he stood for certain other causes of improving the living condition of his people in Nepal.

CONCLUSION

The Inheritance of Loss can be described as a Tragi-Comic Tale. It deals with various matters like morality, justice, globalization racial, social and economic inequality, alienation and multiculturalism. Desai has made the story very skillfully to expose the Gorkha problem as a background of the story. Gyan, though a Gorkha activist, happens to come to the life of Sai and thus to the mainstream of the society. Feeling fed up with the so called new identity as a Maths tutor, he is going back to the attitude and activities of a typical Nepali man who stood for the demands of theirs. Desai brings the problem faced by the people in the independent India through the characters of Sai, the judge and the cook. Biju, is another character who experiences the discrimination and isolation in the name of race, job and color. Biju came back to India. In a way, Biju tried to solve his problem of Identity crisis and alienation.

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