

CONFLICT OF CLASS AND CULTURE IN KIRAN DESAI'S

“THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS”

Mrs G.Saritha

Asst.Prof of English

Bon Secours College for Women

Thanjavur

Abstract:

Kiran Desai, daughter of eminent Indian author Anita Desai, carved out her name in the literary world as a novelist by winning prestigious “Man Booker Award in 2006 for her novel “The Inheritance of loss”. Among several contemporary issues, this novel probes on the issues of conflict of class and culture through three classes of people namely the Judge and his family – a representative of elite class, the cook, his son and others struggling for establishing their identity which were crippled because of poor economic conditions and the third class Noni and Lola, the middle class who are dependent on various jobs for their lively hoods. She gives a clear picture of class and cultural conflicts, the people from various sections of life under go. Though the novel is set in India with some scenes in U.S and U.K. It portrays the suffering of migrants and their struggle to live unbearable and subaltern lives. Further it also depicts the struggle that each character undergoes to create their identity in migrated land.

Key words: Identity, migration, alienation, globalisation, rootlessness, multi culturalism, East West conflict.

Inheritance of loss, kiran Desai's second novel shook the literary world with her maturity in understanding of cultures, psychology of people and awareness of post-colonial chaos and despair. Jemubhai, the judge, an elite class was always conscious of his position and proud of his English education. His pride in colonisation is so high that he never treated his family members cordially. We have come across so many people like judge who are unwanted anachronism in postcolonial India, where long suppressed people have begun awaken their exploitation, to express their anger and despair. The judge's training at Cambridge includes all forms of discrimination. A portrait of Queen Victoria is hung above the entrance of Mission school premises, where the judge studies. This portrait is a symbol of imperial power which inspired judge to have more respect and adoration towards British culture, the queen and her people. Recruited as an Indian civil service member, he makes great efforts to be an official “keeping up” the British “standards”. (IOL, 119). The pursuit of British standards reflects his attempts to get into the imperial centre that represents a superior society in India. Homi Bhabha rightly said that “The powerful influence of a different culture will cause a tension between desire of identity status and the demand for a change in identity; and mimicry represents as a compromise to their tension”(86) . It is true with the judge .He studies had to obtain more knowledge about the western culture. In addition he also keeps up the British standards

in his daily life: to have an afternoon tea every day, to speak English with an English accent and to cover his brown skin with powder puff. But all his efforts are futile; he cannot be accepted by the Centre, he works in ICS, only to reinforce the domination of Britain and he is never regarded as equal by the British administrators. Though he is last in the list of successful candidates of ICS, he tries to hide his inferiority complex by showering his anger on his native background

His attempts to demonstrate his mettle makes him end up as “robot-like and sterile”. On his return to India, the judge is a foreigner to his own family, an awkward man with a habit of powder of puffing. The powder puff is a symbol of self degeneration. He uses puff not for improving his looks for protecting his skin, but for covering his brown skin colour- a cosmetic cover-up resulting from the racial discrimination he had suffered during his studying Cambridge. But back in India, the family members fail to understand the judge’s behaviour and some even mock at him. Sumitha Parmar further adds: “Thus although Jemubhai crosses the borders to return to his native country, he actually never returns. HE crosses to another domain— a domain of self-hate, where he is at odds with himself. He banishes his innocent wife to her home where she gives birth to a daughter, languishes and finally dies tragically”(103). Therefore the judge suffer from a kind of double isolation. On one hand, he is cut-off from the colonial centre. On the other hand, he is cut-off from his culture and his family, and this double isolation traps him in the “identity crisis”.

In India too Jemubhai wanted to live like an English man. He distanced himself from everyone in the family. He bothered less about his daughter who eloped with a Zoroastrian pilot and brought disgrace to the family in Gujarat. He did not even bother or even tried to find out them. Further, even the cook, who had been living and working with him since long time, didn’t have any knowledge about him. The judge comes to realise how addicted he had been to power. When he is alarmed by the insurgents in his own house and his gun has been robbed, the missing of his favourite pet, Mutt increases his anger. He realises too that his past actions too mocked at him.

This novel gives an idea that, the fate of the Indians who were trapped in the East West counter in the current age of multi culturalism and globalisation seems to be doomed since the age of colonisation. This continuous dominance of western culture created a mind-set among the young generation that it is more advanced than our own culture. Conflict of class and culture also affects love between Sai and Gyan, who come close to each other in course of coaching. Sai the judge’s orphaned granddaughter falls in love with Gyan, her tutor. Gyan, the young Nepali boy, is a victim of poverty and comes from poor background who hates judge and his ostentatious life style. For jemubhai everyone from weaker section was inferior and lacking in common sense. So, he doubts Gyan’s sincerity when he comes to teach Sai in bad weather. In their romantic relationship, Sai finds herself that she has become a symbol of status and wealth as she had her schooling in an English medium and knows the language well. Their relationship breaks up when Gyan feels inadequate in western culture where Sai and her grandfather are immersed in retreats to his own culture and refuses the intrusion of any other culture. Among Nepalese, he recovers a feeling of identification by mocking on the judge’s mimicry of western style. Sai breaks up the ties with Gyan when she comes to know the Gyan has joined GNLFF (Gorkha National liberation Front). It brings an abrupt

changes in Gyan. The political turmoil comes out at time when he wants to find the meaning of his life. While seeking to create National borders, he also solidifies his personal boundary. When Sai unable to infuse into Gyan as before, their romance was cut shot.

The conflict of identity crisis is found in other characters such a Biju, the son of cook who sets off to New York to make his fortune. He comes across so many challenges in America. He moves from one job to another and sends false letters to his father about his wellbeing. America, a multi-cultural land, the immigrant's plight frustrates the dreams of Biju... While he struggles hard to find his own living, he becomes more anxious of his father welfare who lives in India during discontent times. Frustrated, Biju comments "no jobs here anymore"----- "if I were a young man I would go back to India, more opportunities there now,too late for me to make a change, but you should listen to what Iam saying. Everyone says you have to stay, this is where you'll make a good life", but much better for you to go back" (IOL98).

Biju's identity crisis does not end here. The green card was another impediment in his way. He join's Gandhi cafe owned by an Indian, who also remains indifferent to the sufferings of Biju and further slaps him for slipping over a rotten egg. Thus we see that how the Indian migrants were looked down by our own people living in a America because of their cast, culture and status of life.

Other characters of the novel namely Noni, Lola, and uncle Booty also undergo conflict of class and culture in the novel. Lola and Noni live in Kampong and are proud to be a neighbour of judge. They were fond of English life and read English books. When the insurgency reaches to its peak, their life becomes intimidated. The worst of all happens when there is an encroachment of their own land. Lola approaches Pradhan, local head of GNLF wing, her pleads falls on deaf ears. Lola and Noni never thought that the local people may someday become aware and could claim rights. Father Booty also lost his Swiss dairy and faces the same identity crisis's Biju in America, when the local people demand their own lands, he feels that residing in India is illegal.

Most of the characters have their own conflicts. This is true that in the light of globalisation, the characters personal conflicts attain bigger canvas. They try their best to regain their identity. Thus we see that even in this contemporary world people suffer with identity crisis and struggle with their cast, culture, language and place to regain their identity.

WORKS CITED:

1. Desai,Kiran. "The Inheritance of Loss", New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2006.
2. Bhabha,Homi K. "The Location of culture". London and New YorkRoutledge.1994.
3. Parmar, Sumitha. "Of Borders and Boundaries: Kiran Desai: The Inheritance of Loss".Kiran Desai: The Novelist--- An Anthology of Critical Essays,ed.P.D. Nimsarkar. New Delhi: Creative Books.2008.99-111.