



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

Dr. D.R. Maharana

**U.N Autonomous College of Sc. & Tech.
Cuttack**

ABSTRACT:

Indian literature, today, has assumed larger significance than any time before. Indian literature is changing rapidly with world literatures. It is vast as it includes geniuses from both sexes in different regions. Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" represents many shades of modernism and feminism as it gives voice to the problems of: race, gender, globalization, man woman relationship and problems of illegal immigration. The novel also represents the productive thinking of a woman writer in voicing her characters' concerns. These concerns come under constant question due to the nature of their work, race, their new lived experience and the expectations associated with them. Among those who have realized a work on the target writer, I mention those who consider the themes of migration, alienation, gender, separatism, hybridity – human, literary and cultural, multiculturalism and globalization. The need for such a study is proved by a number of important facts. At the outset, historians and scholars are agreed about the marked rareness of comprehensive studies on the postcolonial socio-political fiction. Secondly, the Indian English writers constructively engage debates over Indian experiences while rewriting of the history from their viewpoint. The study evokes a number of feministic concerns. It is an attempt to examine Desai's representation of gender and masculinity in particular. It concentrates mainly on the representation of male characters in postcolonial milieu.

KEY WORDS: migration, alienation, separatism, multiculturalism, globalisation

INTRODUCTION:

Kiran Desai, in her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) sets Indian society in its backdrop and writes the novel based on her experiences when she has travelled between diasporic identities and displacement. She has written the novel in English language rather than in Indian English. She expresses the new voice of modern Indian fiction in her novels and depicts something of absolutely her own. A famous Indian English writer, Salman Rushdie has said that she is a terrific writer in expounding the sufferings of exiles. She has a place among the great contemporary Indian authors

who study life and society in India. He also expresses the human breadth and political shrewdness that have been incorporated in the novel. Kiran Desai, in *The Inheritance of loss*, addresses variety of identity crises issues such as cultural hybridity, nationalism, identity and the connection between place and culture. Most characters of the novel experience great influence of the non-native culture. The author shows various aspects of the split identity on a different life stories faced by people who are trying to face a strong foreign influences and the characters of the novel are representatives of various issues regarding confused identities.

The novel, “*Inheritance of Loss*” 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. The chapter two of the novel describes the formation of Indian Diasporas. It presents the diasporic formation of the characters, judge and Sai. Chapter Three describes the formation of diasporas in New York. This chapter is composed in three parts. The first part describes the formation of the Diasporic character, Biju, an illegal immigrant in New York. The second part portrays the formation of the diasporic person, Saeed. The third part delineates the formation of the diaspora Harish-Harry, a lawful permanent immigrant.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN “INHERITANCE OF LOSS”:

The newness of this topic is said to be resided in the novel under study as a new strategy of women writers to recognize that the theme of the subjugated masculinities have considerably affected recent thinking about men. The concept of gender has also provoked reasoned debates from several directions. As we start asking ourselves what broader considerations these debates could give rise in public awareness about masculinity as a body of thought that helps understand gender identities.

In the view of the vastness of themes, this study considers the ways in which the writer gives voice to masculinity and inhabits it in her novel. Male characters are constructed to reflect her views on the role of race, colonization, class and illegal immigration, globalisation. In this sense, the present work primarily probes the following questions:

1. What are the strategies adopted by male characters in their quest for masculinity in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*?
2. How are masculinities constructed on the grounds of colonization, caste, ethnicity and illegal immigration?
3. What makes Kiran Desai's representation of masculinity different from the focalization of women issues?

To support the previous stated research questions, this research work is fuelled by the following hypotheses:

1. The quest for masculinity is manifested in *The Inheritance of Loss*'s male characters rebellion against all kind of oppressions. In their attempts at asserting their individualities, male characters develop precautionary strategies to employ a focus of exploring alternate means available of achieving a sense of masculinity.
2. Masculinities are constructed by the writer with different levels of anxiety according to the social and cultural dictum. Characters strongly put across their views about their masculinities with regard to their situations. Some of them seem to question their situations while others dare openly rebel at their imposed circumstances.

MAIN THEME: GLOBALIZATION, MARGINALIZATION, SUBORDINATION

The story is set in a small Indian town Kalimpong in North-East Himalayas where the author grown up. The novel shows not only the lives of the main characters but also the development of the region with growing social unrests of Nepali nationalists who are a large diaspora living in the region, and also the impact of such changes on the inhabitants of the region. The beginning of the novel introduces a retired judge who lives with his grand-daughter and his cook. The judge is an old man who was as a young bright man sent to Britain to become a judge to serve the British government. However, the British society of 1940’s was not prepared to encounter foreign culture and young Jemubhai Patel had to face racist behavior which had devastating effect on his self-esteem.

In the novel, Gyan points out Sai’s belonging, as she does not belong to Indian culture, but at the same time is not part of the British culture either as Gyan believes she will not be accepted by it. The cook, who is actually called by his

name only once at the end of the novel, on the other hand represents a person from a lower class that follows Indian traditions but sees the Western world as something of a higher standard and is proud of his son Biju, who lives in New York: 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 (Desai, 2006, p. 17).

The sense of displacement is caused by loss of cultural connections with the place which further causes the loss of one's identity. This novel demonstrates this problem in the character of judge who does experience of dislocation twice and both times he has a great influence on his behaviour. The first time, the judge's experiences of dislocation happens when his parents decide to send him to England so he is able to work for the British government in India, this happens during the Raj period in early the 1940's. During his journey and his stay in Cambridge, he experiences a variety of events which shapes his diasporic self and identity. From the beginning, he experiences many racial prejudices and he gradually starts to believe in them and these beliefs turn into his self-hatred: He grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely managed to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact he could barely let himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. ... To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight may reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly (Desai, 2006, p. 40).

The displacement and lack of cultural understanding caused the judge to live a very lonely life. He had no cultural connections with Britain and since he was not accepted for his otherness, his loss of self-esteem caused him also to lose his self-respect. He turned all his hopes to his studies but when he came to the ICS entrance exam he was only ridiculed by the examiners. Even though this event was very important for him, it did not improve his self esteem as he still referred to himself as "one" when he was saying to his landlord "One is done. One is finally through" (Desai, 2006, p. 117). After being accepted for the program he moved to a new boarding house with other students where he met his only friend in England: Bose. They had similarly inadequate clothes, similarly for lonely empty rooms, and similarly poor native's trunks; "...a look of recognition had passed between them at first sight, but also the assurance that they would not reveal one another's secrets, not even to each other" (Desai, 2006, p. 118). As the judge met someone of the same cultural background, he immediately found a bond with him on the ground of the same cultural understanding. The judge, together with Bose, tried to become as English as possible and they avoided Indian students at work to establish his new identity. He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn't – a man of dignity.

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 piece 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.

CULTURAL CONFLICTS:

One can see that Desai describes the humiliation and helplessness of their characters against aggressors' behaviour. The clash appears between the two cultures of Hindus and Nepalese and it clearly declares the fact that violence and injustice are skilfully disguised under false pretences of freedom and public interests. Since Desai's novel does not contain such a big amount of story lines as Rushdie's novel, this whole Cultural conflict is a description of Biju's life, divided into separate situations Biju is an Indian immigrant living in America. He left India with a dream of having better life in America. In this multicultural conflict, Biju works in the restaurant called Brittany. He washes the dishes with one Achootan man in the kitchen and listens to his swearing. "These white people shit! but at least this country is better than England

The relationship between Sai and Cook is another multicultural conflict. Sai spends plenty of time with the cook but both of them are aware of the fact that their social status is different. After the incidents in Cho Oyu, the cook's hut is ransacked by the police. Sai witnesses thoughtless attitude of police towards the cook. "Here they felt comfortable unleashing their scorn, and they overturned his narrow bed, left his few belongings in a heap". (TIL 13) The cook is a poor man without any dignity. He even agrees with the approach of the police. "Well, they have to search everything naturally. How are they to know that I am innocent?"

The racial tension he feels gradually leads to Jemubhai's retreat within himself. He studies twelve hours a day and talks to nobody. He starts to feel uncomfortably. His "mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar." (TIL 40) After he passed the examinations into Indian Civil Service (ICS). This experience ruins him for the rest of his life. These years spent in England made him angry and arrogant man who pretends to be English gentleman but in fact he is Indian who never found his identity. The conflict arising between Sai and Gyan appears to be another multicultural conflict. Their background and style each of them is brought up in will be the essential problem causing them many troubles. Their love affair carries on until the upcoming political dissatisfaction. That is indicated by the sense of strikes and processions.

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS:

Kiran Desai, in her attempt to deconstruct socio-political constructs, struggles sharply with the oppressive bias of the forces that have led to the deconstruction of familial and social structure in India. She has shown a remarkable extension of maturity to venture into the new arena of narrative art and new techniques of expression. Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" narrates the story of simple hopes that have been frozen on the rooftop of the mid 1980s India. Set in different parts of world, the unlikely events of characters' collapse that inspired the writer were artistically narrated. In Anglophiliac family in Kalimpong, Indian girl lives with the remains her Cambridge-educated grandfather. The cook who has been relegated to be treated even less than Mutt; the retired judge's dog is another image of suffering and humiliation. Sai's first love; the Nepalese math tutor becomes seduced by the masculinity of the GNLFF and leaves her spiraling into heartsickness, anger, and frustration. Biju, the Indian illegal immigrant, realises the trauma of his uselessness that chases him in an alien land. The writer to whom every word in the story mirrors her attachment to India; the homeland, effectively conveys the difficulties involved in the subjugated's efforts to make their voices heard. Obviously these men who try to recuperate their status get frustrated as their approximation to "masculinity" is not perfect. All the male characters in the novel are disturbed and have lost the ability to belong to their own masculinity. The evaluation of the novel selected The evaluation of the novel selected for the study began with a probe of whether the postcolonial condition can lead to a sense of loss in masculinity. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, where masculinity is a central feature, shows that natives who cannot fully free themselves from the western colonial hegemony continue to play shadow roles both at home and abroad. The main goal of this study has been to discuss how masculinities are constructed within the Indian context and also to explore the emerging trends of postcolonialism and feminism in Indian literature. The study also serves to expose some of the common difficulties that Indian men have to face as they try to free themselves from the confining grip of the hegemonic configuration. To achieve these objectives, I set my work as follow: the introductory chapter, with its cross-cultural overview, serves to show that this study is embedded in the Indian postcolonial socio-cultural context. I also give a brief overview of feminism to enunciate the co-ordinates within which the study has been done.

REFERENCES:

- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge.
- Cohen, R. (1994). *Frontiers of Identity: the British and the Others*. London: Longman
- Cohen, R. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: UCL Press.
- Cronin, Michael (2006). *Translation and Identity*. London and York: Routledge.
- Desai, K. (2006). *The Inheritance of Loss*. Open Road+ Grove/Atlantic.

Mishra, Panka (2006)j. Wounded by the West. Rev. of *The Inheritance of Loss*, by Kiran Desai The New York Times Book Review.

Mishra, S. (2006). .Diaspora Criticism. .Edinburgh University Press.

Nayar, P. K. (2008). Postcolonial Literature: an introduction. Pearson Education: India.

Pathak RS. (1999). Modern Indian Novel in English. New Delhi: Creative Books

Shuval, T. J. (2003). Diaspora migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm.

