



# CHARACTERIZATION OF FAMOUS FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECT NOVELS OF KIRAN DESAI

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## ABSTRACT

Kiran Desai, the prestigious Man Booker Prize winner for *The Inheritance of Loss* has achieved the world wide appreciation and made a place for herself. In this novel she has raise many issues like women's quest for identity including postcolonial themes. The present research papers' motive is to trace Desai's description of the position of women in the society and even in the higher and sophisticated class. She has created the women characters with little politeness and meekness with some energetic sparks too. in 'The Inheritance of Loss' all female characters are portrayed as successful in holding their position in a male dominated society. And she successfully shows how they are pressurized to consider subjugation against men. Despite it she has proved that the the women of India has succeeded in redefining herself which results that women have come a long way indeed and tightly holds the flag of feminism projecting their female characters with rights and liberty.

Keywords: female characters, pressurized, subjugation, feminism.

## Introduction

Feminism implies the women's demand for equality, equality for power, right and opportunity. Opportunities for these have gifted men by birth but females have to struggle to obtain. And it is not necessary that they must succeed but sometime they may fail. But failure does not mean to quit but stands unpredictable to face obstacles in own way with new energy, guts and confidence. To achieve this confidence and equality women are stepping out of the right sex roles allotted to them historically. They

falsified the tennysonian separation of roles: “Men for the field and women for the hearth, Man for sword and for the needle she” (Alfred Tennyson, 2007, pp. 427).

Such types of thoughts keep women back imparting rights to men to dominate them. A female is always shown in relationship to male. Man considers himself subject and woman is the other: “She is called ‘the sex’ by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex absolute sex, no less, she is the incidental, the inessential. He is the absolute, she is the other” (Simone De Beauvoir, 2011, pp. 87).

Desai has pictured a number of female characters with various colors that shows the successive generations of women. Detailed descriptions will throw adequate light on Desai’s pursuits regarding women. Sai’s grandmother Nimi belongs to first generation, Lola, Noni, Mrs. Sen and Sai’s mother included in women of second generation and Sai herself comprises the woman of third generation in the novel IOL. On the other hand, in the novel HGO Pinki’s grandmother is an example of first generation woman, Kulfi (Pinki’s mother) shows second generation woman and last but not least Pinki herself shows the third generation woman like Sai.

Kiran Desai in both of her novels (HGO, IOL) has explored basically two types of women; one described as illiterate class, rustic and traditional and the second educated and urban ladies. Nimi in IOL and Pinki’s grandmother in HGO represent first category and Noni, Lola, Sai and Kulfi (an explorative character) shows second. The women of first category are shown as subjugated by the patriarchal setup whereas second demonstrates life of freedom, liberation and meaning. Desai has covered three generations to depict the odyssey of women from subjugation to liberation. Desai has described each female character very skillfully with a specific nature. Here we discuss each female character of Kiran Desai’s both novels one by one in detail.

Desai has described very skillfully that seeking promising career people migrates to Europe, USA, England, London etc. but under the effect of multiculturalism they start to loss their own identity and culture, and example of such type of character is Jemubhai Popatlal Patel a retired judge who suffers lots in England, oppressed and humiliated there but he always tries to hide his embarrassment behind a façade of “Keeping up Standards” (Kiran Desai, 2006, pp.119).

While the fact reveals that only for financial support to go abroad he marries Bela Patel. To incur a luxurious dowry their marriage was a negotiation. The dowry included gold, cash, rubies from Burma, emeralds from Venezuela, uncut Kundan diamond, a chained watch, and woolen clothes and in a crisp envelop a ticket for passage on Strathnaver from Bombay to Liverpool. Through the character of Bela Desai exemplifies the reality of female subjugation. The judge is attracted and fascinated with his young under aged wife in the beginning. “While the family was out selling the jewels for extra money, he offered her a ride on his father’s Hercules cycle.....they went faster and faster, between the trees and cows, whizzing

through the cow pats. Jemubhai turned, caught quick sight of her eyes-oh, no man had eyes like these or looked out on the world this way....their hearts were left behind for an instant, levitating amid green leaves, blue sky” (102). Bela is only fourteen years old when she marries to Jemubhai Popatlal Patel and so terrified that she pleads to be spared the wedding night. So with the creation of this female character Bela, writer tries to highlight the Indian tradition of early marriage.

Child marriage is very common in India and like a business deal with the bride's family responsible for the dowries must bring to her groom's family. On the day the couple marries, bride's name is changed and renamed as 'Nimi' from her birth name Bela within a minutes. Desai again shows the suppression of woman life in which they are not allowed to maintain their identity and dignity, they have no rights of their own existence, even their name can be changed if their husband wants. So renaming of a female foreshadows her own marginalization. As Bhagbat Nayak puts it: “In the male dominated society where laws for women are made by men in its social matrix, a husband stands as a sheltering tree under which a woman proved her strength through her suffering”

Narrative Style in *The Inheritance of Loss* strikes us most is her observation of minute details of characters at every nook and cranny of their living space. In fact, sustained vigour of her narrative keeps the reader spell bound. The exposition of the novel's setting and characters in the background of Kanchenjunga and its majestic summit is a fascinating portrayal of Nature's beauties and bounties. The readers of Kiran Desai recapture this colourful picture in the first paragraph of chapter one. The metaphors flash in the locale of mountains and shadows. The description of natural scenery at the beginning of the novel brings freshness of thought and metaphor in the novel. The major theme running throughout the novel is one closely related to colonialism and the effects of post-colonialism. The loss of identity and the way it travels through generations as a bitter sense of loss. Being a young spirited novelist at the most conscious point of the age she highlights most of the outstanding issues and themes of contemporary society in her novel.

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* explores colonial neurosis, multiculturalism, insurgency gender-bias, racial discrimination, and impact of globalization. Above all, their bitter experience of immigration problems comes to sharper focus. The novel is a brilliant study of Indian Culture and its transitional phase. In fact, craze for the western values, manners, language, and glamorous life-style; impact of modernization, consumerism, and globalization is manifest in all walks of Indian life. It is pertinent to note that *The Inheritance of Loss* is a saga of loss that a human being has to face due to circumstances of his/her life. Most of the characters, especially the central characters have to face losses in life due to their diasporic existence. Sai, who has suffered the loss of her parents' death at her early age, and also, she is bereft of love and affection from her grandfather, the Judge. There is a love story of Sai and her Nepali mathematics tutor, Gyan. Their happy love story suffers a blow with the Nepal uprising – the result of a demand for a separate state for the Gorkhas by the GNLF. Their demand was “Gorkhland for Gorkhas” (IL126).

As a post-colonial novelist, Desai has depicted losses not only in the personal level but also in the larger ambit of the society. The seventeenth chapter of the novel pictures the poverty stricken tribals of Zanzibar. The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is a thought-provoking novel. It clearly shows that Desai's critical intelligence is a part of her erudition and experience. It is evident that, her novel encourages plurality of approaches to problems of globalization, modernity and immense possibilities of examining our value systems.

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Across the hall from Sai's room, the judge lies awake in bed as well. He realizes that Sai's arrival has upset him. He thinks of his own journey. The judge had left home at the age of twenty, with a black tin trunk just like the one Sai had. It was 1939, and he had traveled from his ancestral home of Piphit to the Bombay dock, then to Liverpool, and finally arrived at Cambridge.

The gifts that the judge's mother gives him reflect his new culturally hybrid life: they give him a dictionary, which will lead to his forsaking his own language; a sweater, which reflects a new climate; but they also give him a coconut, in the hopes that he will retain his religion. Jemubhai arrived at Cambridge, and when he tried to look for a room to rent, he was turned away several times. One woman, Mrs. Rice, finally accepted him, desperate for the money. Twice a day she gave him cold food. Eventually he worked up the courage to ask her for a proper hot dinner. She told him that she and her husband don't eat much for dinner either, but that evening he found baked beans on toast that she had left for him.

The cultural bias of the British comes out in even fuller force when Jemubhai arrives in Cambridge. Residents will not take him in simply because he is Indian, even forgoing a source of income. This is true of Mrs. Rice as well, but she is simply more desperate for the money. This treatment is a direct extension of Indians being treated like second-class citizens under colonialism.

Jemubhai began his studies at Fitzwilliam, spending most of the day working so as to avoid the humiliations of being a foreigner. He grew completely solitary, barely speaking. He began to find his own skin odd, and his own accent strange. He forgot how to laugh. He washed obsessively, trying to keep from being accused of smelling strange. He felt barely human. In the present, the judge turns on the light, frustrated that he cannot fall asleep and instead is reliving a nightmare.

During his time at Cambridge, the judge had internalized the bias of the British. In adopting their values, he came to hate himself and his own culture, leading to his complete isolation. He never truly recovers from this isolation, eventually walling himself into Cho Oyu and only enjoying true companionship with a granddaughter who was raised in a similar fashion. In the morning, the judge instructs the cook to bring Sai to meet her new tutor, Noni. On the road to Noni's house, the cook points out the neighbors' houses to Sai. Their nearest neighbor is Uncle Potty, a gentleman farmer and an alcoholic. There is also his friend Father Booty, who runs a Swiss dairy, and who drinks each night with Uncle Potty. Lower down the hill live two Afghan princesses who were given refuge by Nehru when the British ousted their father. In another smaller house lives Mrs. Sen, whose daughter, Mun Mun, had gone to America.

Each new character that is introduced continues the pattern of the last: Each of these people is wealthy, foreign, or educated, and most of them are some combination of the three. They profit from the social system as it currently stands, and though most of them do not remember the experiences of colonialism, all of them benefit from the newer system of globalization. Finally, they reach Noni's house. She lives in a rose-covered cottage named Mon Ami. Her husband (Joy deep) had died of a heart attack, and so Noni moved in with her sister. They live on Lola's husband's pension, but still needed more money to pay all of the people who work in their house—a maid, sweeper, watchman, and gardener. So, Noni agrees to become Sai's tutor, and over the years, the two sisters grow very fond of her.

Lola and Noni also continue the pattern of wealthy neighbors who have profited from globalization. It is never revealed exactly where Joy deep is from, but it is implied that he is from a Western country, and the two sisters are in their own way reliant on maintaining the appearance of leading a European lifestyle. Noni only takes up the job, in fact, in order to keep the servants that they have around the home.

Sai's routine continues in Kalimpong until she is sixteen. Noni and Sai ponder a physics textbook, until Noni feels a wave of exhaustion and they put the textbook aside. As the baker arrives with Swiss rolls and various cakes, Noni worries that Sai won't pick up social skills because she lives in a lonely house of only men. Sai explains that she doesn't mind it because the cook talks so much. As Sai grows closer to an age when she'll experience relationships and love,

Noni's concerns spring from a well-meaning place but ultimately one that's rooted in a misogynistic society. Her worries spring from her own experience, because she herself has felt lacking because she is alone, but at this point Sai has little desire to get married. Sai explains that the cook talks about his wife and Biju. Noni and Sai attempt physics a few more times, but to no avail. Noni tells the judge that Sai needs a more qualified tutor to continue her studies. The judge sends a letter to the principal of the local college, asking for someone to tutor Sai. In contrast to Noni's own story, it is impressive that the judge seems so bent on educating Sai. Again, this is a privilege that is rarely provided to girls in particular, except by those who are wealthy enough to afford it. By contrast, the judge and Gyan had been taught at the expense of their sisters' educations. The principal of the local school recommends a student named Gyan—who has finished his

bachelor's degree but hasn't yet been able to find a job—to be Sai's tutor. It takes two hours for him to walk to Cho Oyu, and at first, Sai is unwilling to be pried away from her reading.

The cook sets out study tools in a semicircle for Sai and Gyan, and this reminds him of the clinical atmosphere at the doctor's. He would emerge happily with his modern medicines but would inevitably run into other servants who counseled him to pray instead and squashed his faith in science. The cook's interest in modernity reappears here, but it is not without skepticism. In some ways, the cook is the character who is most cynical of globalization because he still retains his religious beliefs very firmly, and resists threats to those beliefs. Though it is not yet revealed that Gyan is Nepali, his inability to get a job is one of his primary motivations for joining in the GNLFF's cause—in order to create a place in which he feels valued and treated fairly

## Conclusion

In fact, poverty itself is a great loss of life. The natives of poor nations are also at a loss as they inherit poverty and ill-treatment in another country. The cook is badly treated by the Judge only because he is poor. All that he gets in lieu of his twenty-four hours of services is the little money that he spends on himself. The cook had to tolerate the rough behaviour of the Judge towards him. Though the two primary romantic relationships in the novel begin under very different circumstances, they both end in violence. In both cases, the relationships become more violent as the men become invested in political causes, drawing a link between the absence of women from the political sphere and the abuse of women in the home. When the women attempt to claim equal status to their male partners, this is viewed as an affront, demonstrating that the culture of violently-reinforced patriarchy has remained unchanged across these two time periods. In this way, Desai also suggests that this pattern of violence within supposedly loving relationships is a pervasive one, symptomatic of the culture at large rather than something specific to these individual relationships. Yet by revealing the women's concerns and portraying their suffering sympathetically, Desai is exposing and critiquing the root of misogyny not only in Indian culture, but in all patriarchal cultures. Thus, Kiran Desai's self confidence, committed views on terrorism and weaknesses of a poverty-stricken society are candid, bold and forthright. In addition to this, she focuses our attention on alienation, cultural clash, displacement, exile, exploitation, economic inequality, fundamentalism, globalization, hybridity, insurgency, immigration, loss of identity, loneliness, multiculturalism, poverty and racial discrimination

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