

Cultural Impact on the Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai

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Abstract: Kiran Desai is one of the talented and ambitious younger Indian diasporic writers who have a significant role in Portraying and reflecting the difficulties and complexities of the experiences of the immigrants in literature. She belongs to the second generation of Indian diaspora. Her own experiences of living in India, England and USA as well as her complicated educational background in these three countries brand her not only as a distinctive and typical Diasporic writer, but also as a product of multiculturalism. Kiran Desai, the winner of the prestigious Man Booker Prize 2006 for her second novel "THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS (2005)" Created literary history by becoming the youngest ever woman to win the prestigious prize at the age of 35. The story moves between New York and Kalimpong with scenes that contrast the Life of illegal immigrants in New York and the growing unrest in Kalimpong. Kiran has a wider span about life and society and handled Globalisation, Multiculturalism, Immigration, Westernization, Post – colonialism, terrorist- violence, Racial- discrimination, alienation, Exile etc. To sum up, the novel deals with the conflict of culture, on the global level; and on the personal level it deals with the internal conflict of identity (the past and present). In THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS, Desai tries to capture the pain and dilemma of an immigrant.

Keywords: Cultural clash, loneliness, westernized Indians, Immigrants.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kiran Desai, an Indian –American writer, was born in 1971 in New Delhi, India. She spent her childhood there before moving to England when she was 14. After a transient stay in England for a year, she immigrated with her family to the United States, where she finished her schooling in the state of Massachusetts. Later Desai entered Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University for further study of creative writing. She took two years off to write her debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Kiran Desai painted the plain and quirky characters in this novel, and it was published in 1998.

Kiran Desai, the winner of the prestigious Man Booker Prize, 2006, for her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss (2006)* created literary history by becoming the youngest ever woman to win the prestigious prize at the age of thirty-five. In *The Inheritance of Loss* Kiran Desai treats with tremendous insight, sensitivity, and often piercing irony, topical issues related to politics and terrorism as well as immigration, globalization, multiculturalism, colonial neurosis, identity-formation and subjectivity, and the nationalist, gender, cultural, ethnic and class differences that inform these processes. From a supremely funny and engaging novel in her joyous debut, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard (1998)*, Kiran Desai moved on to write *The Inheritance of Loss* where the prevailing mood is one of implacable bitterness and despair.

II. THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

The novel "*The Inheritance of Loss*" is an authentic study of human relationship bedevilled by exile and cultural encounters. Those human beings who are not enjoying their life seem to adhere to their cultural instinct and they detached from their real nature. This made a negative impact in their whole life and leads to cultural deformity when these people happened to live in a new world; they have to construct their own world based on their acquired culture and civilization.

The novel brought her come to literary attention, winning the Betty Task Award. Desai's second novel *The inheritance of loss*, taking her 8 years to finish, was presented to the public in 2006 Man Booker Prize, and Desai is the youngest female winner ever. In 2007 the novel won another fiction award from National Book Critics Circle. After winning the Man Booker Prize she was right at the point of beginning her career.

The novel is set against the backdrop of the agitation for Gorkhaland in the north eastern hills of Darjeeling, close to the borderland with Nepal. There are stories within the stories depicted in numerous vignettes. Set in 1980s, the novel gives a graphic account of a cross section of Indian society in characters like Jemubhai Patel, a former judge, his teenaged granddaughter Saia and their cook, Panna Lal who live in a house in the north east Indian town Kalimpong, Biju, the cook's son, Gyan, Saeed, Haresh Harry and the two sisters, Lolita and Nonita. All these figures are the inheritors of loss, in terms of dislocation of place, wealth and progress. They are all transformed from their 'native' identity into something quite different, a 'westernized native'. Rather, they are negotiating with a state of non – identity.

III. CULTURAL CLASHES

Cultural Clashes is one of the most perspectives in Post – colonial theory. 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. At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief. There they shout at you openly on the street, 'Go back to where you come from'". (TIL 134) He tells Biju that he learned a phrase by which responded to their insults. He said, "Your father came to my country and took my bread back". (TIL 135) This man spent eight years in

Canterbury and therefore he can compare the atmosphere towards immigrant in these two countries.

One can have a feeling that Desai wants to point out difference between America and England from the immigrants' point of view. It is apparent from his speech that immigrant suffer from racial prejudices in both countries.

Another problem presents the fact that Biju deals with his religious beliefs. The Brittany restaurant offers menu consisting of steak and that poses a problem to him. "Holy cow unholy cow .Biju knew the reasoning he should keep by his side"(*TIL 135*).

The visitors of the restaurant were not only Americans but also Indian businessmen eating steaks. He held them in scorn and they knew that but they didn't care about it. Biju thought that "one should not give up one's religion , the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No no matter what. You had to live according to something. You had to find your dignity"(*TIL 136*) In this multicultural conflict ,Biju decides to hold on to his Hindu religion and this time it is him quit his job.

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? Most of the time it is the servant that steals". (*TIL 18*)

This multicultural conflict, describing the judge's experience from abroad, counts among the most important in Desai's novel. It is the judge from whom the other characters lives uphold. Desai describes the judge as somebody who is strongly affected by his experiences. He leaves his home for the first time at the age of twenty. In 1939, he departs from Piphit and reaches Liverpool at first and then he leaves for Cambridge. However he leaves his hometown with the strange feelings. He knows nothing about the world outside. When Jemubhai arrives in Liverpool, he notices that a porter carrying passenger's bags is white. He doesn't understand that "a white person picks up a brown person's bag!"(*TIL 38*) Desai wants to point out the Jemubhai's innocence. As an offspring of colonial legacy, it seems that he believes that white people are superior to brown.

The life in England surprises him. " It took him by surprise because he'd expected only grandness, hadn't realized that here, too, people could be poor and live unaesthetic lives."(*TIL 38*) He isn't much impressed by the new atmosphere, but he doesn't make a good expression either. Nobody wants to rent him a room. He must visit twenty-two homes before he finds the accommodation. One can see that this is the first clash with the British culture. He experiences the first feeling of being immigrant and that inescapably forms his personality. 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. However, they are so much interested in their love that they do not take any notice of changing events. The Nepalis call for their own state and they start revolution. The revolution gradually results in the series of strikes and roadblocks. Finally, people in Kalimpong are terrorized by GNLF, they live without supplies of water, gas, kerosene and electricity. Desai also describes how these riots influenced behaviour of people against each other. The relationship between Sai and Gyan comes to an end.

CONCLUSION

The novel admirably throws light on the split personalities of the diasporians, who are pulled forward and backward by the adopted culture, and then, by the native culture. What they become in the process is a disillusioned lot. Biju, the protagonist of this novel, is a symbol of the breaking apart of the dream that America is for a majority of Indians. His return to India to is marked with his robbing of everything that he had earned. He is brought home, in bare clothes, in which he had left this country. The fate comes full circle. He has seen the world, but it has only impoverished his basic stock. At the end of the novel, Biju knows he belongs to the country whose hold he has doubted. In giving up what might be gained, both Sai and the cook's son, Biju, inherit loss, but that loss will prove a lasting gain of illuminating experience. All the characters in *Inheritance of Loss* long for identity, for love and acceptance in an alien land. But they hardly are able to locate where they belong to since postcolonial hybridity is, in the words of Radhakrishnan, "a frustrating search for constituency and a legitimate political identity. They have developed a sense of loss, though in different degrees. The characters are all victims of the so called postcolonial dilemmas. However, eventually it is in Biju that the reader finds some hope of 'true' happiness in his supposedly reunion with his father.

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