



*Singaporean Journal of Scientific Research(SJSR)*  
*An International Journal (AMIJ)*  
*Vol.9.No.1 2017,Pp.xx-xx*  
*available at :www.iaaet.org/sjsr*  
*Paper Received : 29-03-2017*  
*Paper Accepted: 20-04-2017*  
*Paper Reviewed by: 1.Prof. Cheng Yu 2. Dr.M. Akshay Kumar*  
*Editor : Dr. R. Rameshkumar*

---

## **A Study of Culture in Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of loss"**

T. Sivakumar,  
Asst. Professor of English, S.S.B.S.T.A.S College, Mailam.  
Villupuram Dist. 604 304.  
e-mail: sivasugan135@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The Modern international expatriate Indian novelist, Kiran Desai experienced displacement, dislocation and cultural clash. In her novel, she writes about the cultural hybridity of the postcolonial migrant and the deplorable condition of the individual. "*The Inheritance of loss*" deals with her own situation of migrancy expatriation and alienation from the mother country. In her novel the character shows the Indian American culture. The Diasporic Indian writers have generally death with characters from won displace community. The inheritance of loss deals with a number of present day issues such as economic, inequality, poverty etc. The Novel is set in Kalimpong situated at the foot of Mount Kanchenjanga in the north eastern part of India. it explores the lives of characters who are trapped in india's class system. This paper tries to explore how the meeting of East and West Culture brings complications in the life individuals.

Key Words: Hybridity, Expatriation, Diaspora, Class system.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Culture is the centre of a society and without culture no society can even exist. Man is born in the environment of culture. Eastern Culture generally refers to the social norms of countries in for East Asia ( Including China, Japan, Vietnam) and Indian sub- continent. Kiran Desai's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* lucidly demonstrates the socio-political situation in Kalimpong. It is a brilliant study of Indian socio-cultural scenario in its transitional phase. In fact, significant social changes have occurred in India due to the people's craze for western values, manners and life-style; impact of modernization, consumerism and globalization. As a

diasporic writer Desai presents the characters who fail to assimilate new culture and give up their original culture in totality.

## 2. POST COLONIAL CULTURE IN INDIA

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. Once he had rightly said: "Terrible to be a poverty stricken man, terrible, terrible, terrible..." (IL 34). The glimpses of loss can also be seen in Lola's life. She lives a quiet life with her sister Noni but the tumult that arises in Kalimpong leaves a lasting impression on her. She mourns the loss of her husband. The GNLFF attacks on her Mon Ami and her property. They also humiliate her in insulting words like: "I am the Raja of Kalimpong. A raja must have many queens"... "dear aunty, would you like to be the fifth? (IL 244). Though Father Booty is a Swiss, yet he regards himself as an Indian foreigner. His property has been confiscated by a Nepali doctor. In this novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, the young people lose their sense of inheritance, belonging, their culture and their original home. In fact, the loss is not only faced by one generation but by the three generations which have been depicted in the novel.

Longing is perhaps the emotion that the characters cherish in this novel. They long for home, they long for love, and they long for acceptance- yet rarely are they skilled at locating any of the above. As we make our journey through the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, we feel that Desai cultures and mildly exposes the vanity and hypocrisy embedded in their attitude to life. Immigration problem is one of the most striking problems. Most of the Indians and Third World Citizens face such problems in Europe and America. Biju, Saeed, Harish Harry, Saran, Jeev, Rishi, Mr. Lalkaka, and thousands of Africans, Latin Americans and Asians working in American and Europe experience the bitter struggle of the immigrants. In fact, Kiran Desai has a passion for reforming the system to dispel the hardships of the migrant people. It is significant that the description of nature and landscape occupies a large chunk of the novel. It extends from Manhattan to the Himalayas; it is central to Piphit, Kalimpong, Cho Oyu, and the beauty of Darjeeling. Kanchenjunga's majestic peaks symbolically present the pinnacle of her vision. Kiran Desai's love of landscapes of India speaks of her fine aesthetic sensibility.

## 3. MULTICULTURALISM IN INHERITANCE OF LOSS

*"Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society".*

Multiculturalism also is directly related to global shifts of power, population, and culture in the era of globalization and "post-colonialism," as nations around the world establish independence in the wake of the decline of Western empires (whether European, Soviet, or American). Globalization transformed previously homogeneous cities or regions into complex meeting grounds for different ethnic, racial, religious, and national groups, challenging the political and cultural system to accommodate this diversity.

When Jemu goes to England, he is already married to a woman who remains at home in India. When he comes back, trouble is immediately apparent in their relationship —she steals a powder puff from his luggage, enchanted with its softness and foreign smell and, when he

discovers the theft, he beats and then rapes her (p. 169). This is a totally disproportionate reaction, but Jemu is not really reacting to the theft of his powder puff, he is reacting with frustration to the fact that his time abroad has left him a "foreigner" (p. 167) in his own community. "She who had made them laugh at him," he thinks of his wife, "this illiterate village girl" (p. 169). Not unexpectedly, their relationship remains ugly, and Jemu spends little time in the house. When he does return from work, "he found his wife rudely contradicting his ambition" (p. 169). He is upset by many of her personal habits, naming off "her typically Indian bum," the "pungency of her red hair oil," the "tinkle tonk of her bangles," her "gaudy" yellow and pink clothes, and even the fact that she uses the toilet in an incorrect manner (pp. 172-3). Everything that he finds fault with is an Indian habit, and they are all signs of her lack of Westernization and ignorance of English manners and ways. His reactions to her ignorance eventually turn violent and:

'She soon realized that whatever she did or didn't do, the outcome was much the same. His hatred was its own creature; it rose and burned out, reappeared of its own accord, and in her he sought only its justification, its perfection. In its purest moments he could imagine himself killing her'. (p.305)

Again, the intensity of this reaction is unjustified, but it stems from the same source—his anger at himself for being unable to integrate into English culture, but also unable to adjust to the Indian way of life. He has become a hypocrite and a foreigner everywhere, and his deepest fear is that this will be uncovered. His father's visit uncovers this fear directly, as he urges the judge to reconcile with his wife. Angry, he tells Jemu, "It was a mistake to send you away. You have become like a stranger to us" (p. 306). Jemu reacts with extreme anger, since now "He had been recruited to bring his countrymen into the modern age, but he could only make it himself by cutting them off entirely, or they would show up reproachful, pointing out to him the lie he had become" (p. 306). The lie, of course, is the fact that all of his "advancement" and education had been attained at the cost of the community — even his ticket to England was a part of his wife's dowry — but now Jemu adds nothing to the lives of his people and his family, instead judging them by inappropriate Western standards. By sending his wife away, Jemu symbolically rejects his family and culture, and can never re-join his community.

#### 4. WESTERN CULTURE'S SUPREMACY

The term 'Western Culture' has come to define the culture of European countries as well as those that have been heavily influenced by European immigration, such as the United States, according to Khan University.

In different ways, most of the novel's characters hold the belief that Western (especially British) things are superior to non-Western (especially Indian) things. Sai's belief comes about through her education. At a British-run orphanage, they had taught her, most of all, that "cake was better than *laddoos*, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi" (p. 30). This education serves her well in an unexpected way when she moves in with the judge. Since the judge had scorned his wife and his entire community for their lack of education, he was worried that Sai "would incite a dormant hatred in his nature" (p. 210). Sai's education, though, makes her "more his kin than he had thought imaginable. There was something familiar about her; she had the same accent and manners. She was a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns, an estranged Indian

living in India. The journey he had started so long ago had continued in his descendants" (p. 210). The judge accepts Sai because she is partially Westernized, just as he has become, and therefore he can relate to her as a fellow "foreigner" in their own country. Their attitudes illustrate the internalized oppression of the colonial system — that in order for a people to be successfully colonized, they must be convinced that they are inferior to the colonizing force and better off under foreign control.

Even the cook, who has no aspirations towards Westernization beyond the comforts of owning an alarm clock or a television, is disappointed when he begins working for the judge. It was "a severe comedown, he thought, from his father, who had served white men only. The ICS was becoming Indianized and they didn't like it, some of these old servants, but what could you do?" (p. 63). His concern is not with Western culture, but with the status accorded to working for a white man, showing his desire to be rooted in the wealth and regard that Westernization brings, rather than any inherent value in Westernization itself. "We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race." (**Kofi Annan in cultural diversity**)

Noni and Lola, when they come to realize how their poor neighbours have always felt marginalized by their wealth, see that their markers of conspicuous consumption are the same as their markers of Westernization: "It *did* matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice-and-dal country; *it did* matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening, even one that sparked and shocked; *it did* matter to fly to London and return with chocolates filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not" (p. 242). The attitudes of Noni, Lola, and the cook are less a mark of internalized oppression than they are a pragmatic attempt to gain access to the wealth of the West, but they are still viewed by those around them as a betrayal of Indian culture and a capitulation to Western values.

Jemubhai Patel in *The Inheritance* right from his early days in London kept up with English standards to avenge his complexes and embarrassments. Desai writes, "He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become; he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both." (Desai 119) The conflict of English values is discernible in the personality of Sai as well. Her restlessness, her search for stability, her yearning to belong to a family is the outcome of the suppressed atmosphere she has to live in at Cho Oyu. Jemubhai observes at a point in the novel that Sai like him is an "estranged Indian living in India." Desai writes, Sai thought of how it had been unclear to her what exactly she longed for in the early days at Cho Oyu, that only the longing itself found its echo in her aching soul. The longing was gone now, she thought, and the ache seemed to have found its substance. (Desai 223)

In the character of Sai, we encounter a different female at different stages in the subtle, complex and traumatic process of becoming a woman. In each stage, the exhilarating sense of possibility clashes with the debilitating sense of loss. She feels lonely, alienated and yearns to be part of a family full of love, warmth and activity. In a restaurant, "Sai felt suddenly bereft and jealous of these children... why couldn't be part of that family? Rent a room in someone else's life?" (Desai 213)

## 5. CONCLUSION

Desai chooses cultural reflection to tell the aspects of multiculturalism through the story of *The Inheritance of Loss*. She presents before us two categories of people- illegal immigrants

in the USA and a group of Indians settled down in a hill town. Characters of both these worlds are confronted with the challenges of a cultural society. Desai exposes how the ethnic identity becomes a threat on the way to multiculturalism. She succeeds in exposing certain aspects of cultural authority.

### **WORK CITED**

1. *The Inheritance of Loss* [2006] Penguin Books India New Delhi.
2. Jayarajan, Uma. "John Peter Peterson or Jemubhai Patel?: The Uncanny Doubleness and "Cracking" of Identity in Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*". *Asiatic*, Vol. v, No.1, June 2011.
3. Chaturvedi, A.K. *Tribals in Indian English Novel* (2008). Atlantic Publishers India New Delhi.