

The Influence of Global Issues in the Select Novels of Kiran Desai in the Presentation of Characters

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"The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind."
Kiran Desai

ABSTRACT

Most of the Desai's characters have been stuck by alienation or dislocation as mentioned earlier. The main characters the judge, Sai, and Biju live in two worlds: the Indian class system and the Western world. Every day these two worlds are associated in their social interactions, their expectations and anticipations. Characters that are introduced continues the patter of the last i.e. 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. A sensitive response to the diasporic challenges characterise Kiran Desai's fictional world. Moreover, she is an intelligent and erudite novelist embracing the cross currents of her multi-cultural milieu. She is dedicated to the art of fiction, the voices and visions of the new generation of world citizens experiencing a set of values in an age of globalization and pursuing their ambitious aspirations in the midst of contemporary challenges of life.

Keywords: expectations, diasporic, multi-cultural milieu, social interactions, globalization

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I. Introduction

Kiran Desai says, "The characters of my story are entirely fictional, but these journeys (of her grandparents) as well as my own provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this I wanted to capture. The fact that I live this particular life is no accident. It was my inheritance." Jemubhai Popatlal Patel is an Anglicized Gujarati Judge, who could neither assimilate into the cultures of his origin because of his desire to mimic the English colonial identity nor could he fully don the much coveted Western identity.

The interaction of the characters, their cultures and motives, the crisis faced by them are not given much attention. Her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* depicts a group of "lost" people and the state of their lives, and how they lost themselves in the course of pursuing their cultural identity in the process of globalization. A mixed cultural climate opens up new vistas of communication and dialogue in this cosmopolitan world. As a result, diasporic reciprocation has become one of the recurrent themes in post-colonial world literature. The history of migration is the history of alienation and its consequences.

For every freedom won, a tradition is lost. The history of migration is the history of alienation and its consequences. For every freedom won, a tradition is lost. His convent educated granddaughter, Sai Mistry, is his true heir in that she is a misfit in both the East and the West, and life at Kalimpong fills her with the fear of being left on the shelf. Their cook, Panna Lal, grudgingly works for the judge and waits to be liberated by his son, Biju, who, he believes, will make it big in America. The novel traces the process of the judge's displacement from centers of power to its ignominious periphery in a well-structured combination of stories from his past and the present experiences in India and England. Though Desai allows her protagonist Sai to experience romance, friendship, trust and betrayal she empathies her a lot. Sai experience romance with a young tutor, who has conflicting loyalties to progressive thuggery and conservative decency. She learns to cope with compassion and rejection, and to comprehend the reasons for prejudice; she learns as well that to accept the prejudice she has come to comprehend a continuation of that prejudice.

Internal conflicts are complicated elements in the novel exemplified through the characters such as Saeed. He certainly thinks people have a choice. He strongly encourages Biju to change the way he thinks and to accept change. Sai seems to do likewise with Gyan, challenging him to recognize the contradictions in which he finds himself and not to see them as problems. She also resists becoming an anglophile who despises Indian culture like the judge, who also demonstrates a degree of agency, actively maintaining his staunch rigidity and suppressing his own potential for change. Saeed succeeds in New York precisely because differences do not bother him. His (Saeed's) attitude towards his religion illustrates how he manages to avoid the kinds of internal conflict that paralyze Biju. When explaining why he does not eat pork, Saeed tells Biju, "First I am Muslim, then I am Zanzibari, then I will be American" (The Inheritance of Loss 136). [5] V.

Globalization and Multi-Cultural Identities are taken as giant and vague concepts that are supposed to have meaning. Desai's concept of a new society rather the world is a messy arena for bigoted politics. The people have to compromise circumstances into fate as to fit the weird world. Thus, freedom to them is a luxury that is shared with a loss of certitude. Desai takes as her landscape the air of India rather than its ground soil. She tries to depict the essence of a state shadowing its descendants. Her grasp is on the inheritance India bestows. Thus the theme of rootedness or lack of it is entwined in the novel.

The crux of *Inheritance of Loss* lies in its exploration of the ambivalence that rules the national discourse about globalization. Homi K. Bhabha's essay, "Dissemi Nation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," explores this issue at length. Bhabha emphasizes how the ambivalence between the pedagogy and performance of the narrative of Nation problematizes formation of social authority as it pertains Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss: Elements of American Dream and Globalization*. Generally to a "people" who "represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within population" (297).

Desai contributes to debates about American Dream, Globalization and Identity in *The Inheritance of Loss* by advocating neither the preservation of cultural distinctiveness nor assimilation, but rather ambivalence and flexibility. She shows that the real issue facing post-colonial and immigrant people are not whether they should assimilate but how clinging to cultural certitude leads to disaster. Kiran Desai presents the craze for western values, manners, language, and glamorous life-style.

Desai's fiction is fascinating as she portrays and presents various themes in the broad perspective of globalization as it exists in the contemporary society. Sensitive issues like hybridity, insurgency, immigration, intercultural communication, identity crisis, loneliness, multiculturalism, racial discrimination, social realism, and search for home also find expression within the ambit of her novels. Her work also focuses on the suppression of women in India.

The impact of, consumerism, modernization and globalization is manifested in all walks of Indian life. Despite political freedom, cultural slavery is directly manifested through some of her characters. Consequently, they can neither assimilate the new culture nor can they give up their original culture in totality. Kiran Desai's works present not only a kaleidoscopic picture of people from different countries, their struggles, conflicts, dreams and frustrations, but also a mature understanding of life at various levels. Most of the characters of Desai's have been stuck by alienation or dislocation. The main characters the judge, Sai, and Biju live in two worlds: the Indian class system and the Western world. Set against the backdrop of rising insurrection in Nepal, the present novel also traces lives of people who are forced to confront their colliding interests with the encounter of the anarchy and chaos in the surroundings. The novel highlights the differences and similarities between the Nepali immigrants in India and Indian immigrants in the USA.

The story of *The Inheritance of Loss* is about a teenage Indian girl, Sai, living with her Cambridge-educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, in the town of Kalimpong a small town in northern India beside the Himalayas. Before living with her grandfather, Sai lived in a convent school. Her convent made her a westerner and a foreigner in her own land. At the convent school, she learned English as well as Western values and appreciation of all things English. She is strong and ambitious. Sai is the exact facsimile and the living personification of rootlessness in the modern society.

When Sai's parents' love affair came to the notice of the Judge, Sai's grandfather he simply disconnected his relationship with his daughter. Her father an aspiring astronaut, who was about to be the first Indian to fly into space was killed in a road accident in Russia, making her an orphan.

Sai learns about her privileged life and she feels guilty. She falls in love with Gyan, her mathematics tutor, though he is from a lower class. But Gyan, the descendant of a Nepali Gurkha mercenary, hates the bourgeois life style of the judge and Sai. He considers Cho Oyu, the house of the judge as symbol of colonial hangover. He was astonished and surprised the way Sai was keen to celebrate Christmas. He burst out one day, "Why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindus and you don't celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New year." (Desai: 163) To him Sai happens to be "are flection of all the contradictions around her." (Desai:262) He thought that some people like Sai and the judge even after independence still under the influence of colonial rule. He is caught between Sai's Love and GNLf, but finally felt his association with a group of ethnic Nepalese insurgents is more important than his passion for Sai. The

angry departure of Gyan predicts the permanent loss of Sai's love and also lover. Desai in a parallel narrative brings out the predicaments of Biju, the son of Sai's grandfather's cook, an illegal immigrant in New York. Most of the time, besides survival, Biju's main challenge is dodging the authorities, moving from one ill-paid job to another. His utmost desire in life is to obtain the green card in America.

"He retreated into a solitude. The solitude became a habit and it crushed him into a shadow" (Desai:39).

The judge becomes a victim of double consciousness which means division of identity into several facets. "He envied the English He loathed Indians" (Desai:119). The Judge looks at the English as someone superior and this attitude puts him in a postcolonial dilemma that aggravates his ambivalent nature. He gets recruited as an Indian Civil Service member and tries to become an official keeping up the British standards. He works at being English with fear and hatred, but he wants to maintain a false pride throughout his life by concealing his real identity. The acceptance of cultural hierarchy leads to some enduring personal dilemmas resulting in identity crisis. He follows the British culture blindly. Jemubhai takes revenge on his early confusions and embarrassments in the name of keeping up standards. He wants to keep his accent behind the mask of silence

It clearly shows his mindset that Britain represents a society superior to that of India. Homi Bhabha maintains that the powerful influence of a different culture will cause a tension between the desire of identity stasis and the demand for a change in identity; and mimicry represents as a compromise to this tension (Bhaba: 86).

'Mimicry of the center', as Ashcroft claims, is "the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become 'more English than the English'" (Ashcroft: 4).

The same is the case with the judge. He studies hard only to get more acquainted with Western culture and tries to adopt the British standards in his daily life. He takes tea every afternoon, tries to speak English like a native speaker, covers his brown skin colour with the powder puff. He is always in a confusion, a struggle of identity. All of his efforts to find a place among those who are in the center are futile. Though he holds a highly prestigious position like ICS, he has to work only to reinforce the domination of Britain. Sai is also a victim of circumstances. She lost her parents in an accident in Russia when she was in a convent in Darjeeling. So, she has already tasted bitter feelings of separation and supplant. She arrives at the house of her grandfather, a retired Judge whom she has never met before.

Sai's desire to achieve a kind of emotional bond with her grandfather, also fails, for he himself is supersede emotionally and physically. The tension between wanting to belong to his own native land and a foreign culture at the same time, is the usual post-colonial dilemma. The first evening when Sai was at Cho Oyu at her grandfather's home "she had a fearful feeling of having entered a space so big it reached both backward and forward"(Desai: 34).

Sai's disportation from the comforts of a convent school in Darjeeling to the lush, misty Himalayan region of Kalimpong in North Eastern India, where a growing Nepalese insurgency is about to untangle her life further, brings a lot of havoc in her life. Gyan, Sai's mathematics tutor, it is displacement from Nepal that makes him irresolute. He also faces the problem of identity as he loves Gurkhaland but does not fight for it. His love for Sai is also ambivalent and uncertain. The love between Sai and Gyan though flowers in the beginning, it dies when Gyan joins the insurgents and stops coming to see her. Eventually he felt that Sai is more English than native. He found out that she could speak only English and pidgin Hindi. She is confined to only high-class.

The presentation of the character is same is the case with the judge. He is always in a dilemma, and he used to have a struggle of identity. He used to study hard only to get more acquainted with Western culture and tries to adopt the British standards in his daily life. He generally takes tea every afternoon, tries to speak English like a native speaker, covers his brown skin colour with the powder puff. Though he holds a highly prestigious position like ICS, he has to work only to reinforce the domination of Britain. Sai is also a victim of crisis of fate.

Sai lost her parents in an accident in Russia when she was in a convent in Darjeeling. So, she has already tasted bitter feeling of loneliness. She arrives at the house of her grandfather, a retired Judge whom she has never met before. Sai's desire to achieve a kind of emotional bond with her grandfather, also fails, for he himself is displaced emotionally and physically. The tension between wanting to belong to his own native land and a foreign culture at the same time, is the usual post-colonial predicament. The first evening when Sai was at Cho Oyu at her grandfather's home "she had a fearful feeling of having entered a space so big it reached both backward and forward"(Desai: 34).

Desai often uses the binary opposites like arrivals and departures, hope and hopelessness all part of the postcolonial confusion. Sai's expatriation from the comforts of a convent school in Darjeeling to the lush, misty Himalayan region of Kalimpong in North Eastern India, where a growing Nepalese insurgency is about to unravel her life further, brings a lot of havoc in her life.

She is confined to only high-class social circle. Her inability to eat food with hands, her fancy for English vegetables peas and beans and her fear of Indian vegetables makes him hate her. Her visits to temple are

only to appreciate their architectural elegance and Gyan thinks that she should be ashamed of for her lack of nativity.

II. CONCLUSION

Desai deftly shifts between the first world and the third exposing the pain of exile, the uncertainties of post-colonialism and the aspiration for a better life. Desai throws light on larger questions of rights and identities including those of women. She remarks on the subjection of women in India with special reference to the shattered relationship between the judge and his wife, Nimi. She has spent nineteen years within the confines of her father's compound. The judge always prefers to be treated like a Westerner. A woman is a dawn of light where all the darkness disappears. She is the sun that enlightens everyone and beholds the ability to vanish all the fear that grows in darkness of mind. Women are essentially the origin of life. No one can cast a doubt on the substantiality of women that they are the ultimate creators of this very existence.

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