

CULTURAL ENCOUNTER IN KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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Abstract

As a 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 individuals. Her novel "The Inheritance of Loss" deals with her own situation of migrancy, expatriation and alienation from the mother country. Through the characters, she gives how her own dual Indian- American upbringing which results in despair. Living between East and West and the introduction of western elements in a country creates a cultural clash. The diasporic Indian writers have generally dealt with characters from their own displaced community but some of them have also taken a liking for Western characters and they have convinced in dealing with them. This paper tries to explore how the meeting of East and West culture brings complications in the life of individuals.

Key words: *cultural clash, loneliness, westernized Indians, immigrants.*

Introduction:

The modern diasporic Indian writers can group into two distinct classes. One class comprises those who have spent a part of their life in India and have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. The other class comprises those who have been bred from childhood outside India. They have had a view of their country only from the outside as an exotic place of their origin. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement whereas those belonging to the latter group finding themselves rootless. Writers like Kiran Desai reflect India wonderfully in their novels.

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.

We are living amidst the fragmented world and have to play different roles in each day. Badal Sircar rightly observes, "I am fragmented man living in a fragmented world full of contradictions". Each and everyone have embedded in a particular social, cultural, social, institutional or ideological context. A pride in one culture gives them the sense of historical and social rootedness whereas a weak and fractured sense of identity is isolated and confused. These people have to assume a dual culture and dual loyalties. They have to struggle between the forces of modernity and tradition. These individuals afflicted with the sense of loneliness, the process of finding their identities must be a matter of intense struggle with a self, with tradition, with the wonders and horrors of new cultures with growing aspirations hopes and desires.

His relation to the society forms a people's alienation and pessimism due to dislocation in life and morbidity of temperament. However, Desai presents a situation where one's society keeps on changing day by day. The absence of an address protests to have fixed identity. As man is having a limited existence, he has to keep something behind him to remind

him. The individual has to live according to the societal norms. This endeavour will be falsified in certain cases, as there is an inner self against him. It creates the loss of faith in one's own country and its values.

The Insolent treatment of westernized Indians and traditional Indians:

As Sai is from a multi-religious background, she would like to celebrate Christmas, she says, "If I want to celebrate Christmas, I will, and if I don't want to celebrate Diwali then I won't. Nothing wrong in a bit of fun and Christmas is an Indian holiday as much as any other" (p.163). Gyan is of the opinion that only one's own tradition and culture could shape their personality. So he disgusts says, "You are all slaves to western culture". His inability of proving his own identity in society makes him to hatred towards all other cultures.

People emigrate to an alien country for multiple reasons-lure of money or other opportunities for education and employment, religious, persecution, political asylum, cultural perspectives and motives or it may be a combination of all these. The individual struggles a lot because of loneliness, freedom, etc. The culture shock and the cultural confrontation, the efforts made for culture assimilation and acculturation all these are portrayed in these novels. Due to Immigration, each character in this novel has to face cultural encounter. Biju who works as an illegal immigrant humiliated as he is from the third world countries. Biju at the Stars and stripes diner: "All American flags on top, all Guatemalan flag below. Moreover, one Indian flag when Biju arrived (p.21). Sai who brought up in western culture enjoys her food by using fork and knife where in it is hatred by Gyan who is a Nepali tutor. The two Bengali sisters Noni and Lola, who returns from France, are suffering from the

encroachment of their land by GNLF. They rushed out:

"This is our land."

"It is not your land. It is free land," they countered, putting down the sentence, flatly, rudely.

"It is our land. It is unoccupied land".

"We'll call the police".

They shrugged, turned back and kept on working". (p.240)

Noni's complaint has not taken as a serious one and Pradhan has mocked them as they are having the French name to their house. Another victim who has to suffer in cultural encounter is Father Booty, the Swiss Christian. He is running a milk dairy for his livelihood and helps in the development of the hills than any other locals. He did not intend to return to his native, but he is compelled by Gorkhas to run away from thereby depriving his properties to a mere amount. They threaten Father Booty by saying "I have arranged it and you have no choice. You are lucky to get what I am giving you. You are residing in this country unlawfully and you must sell or lose everything" (p.222)

This novel revolves around the western culture, to which Jemubhai, the protagonist exposes his passive acceptance while Biju, another central role, resist it actively. Desai weaves the weight of colonial history with its slow burn of humiliation and creates a rich tapestry of characters that live with questions of identity alienation, exiles at home as well as abroad. The travel between east and west is an accident in this novel. She portrays the lives of Indians who were engaged in struggles to make their lives secure. Biju the son of Jemu's Cook, ekes out of an existence as an undocumented worker in New York. Biju came to the

States thinking he could achieve the American dream, but the reality is quite different. Biju is part of the tribe of Indians that keeps shifting from one lowly paid job to another in the hope of getting the allusive green card-the final symbol of having made it. Even as the Cook extols the virtues of America as a land of opportunities, little does he know the harsh truth of his son's banal fugitive-like existence that happens in many Indian's life. Every day it brings more despair than hope and life seems to be an endless sufferings.

People like Biju hop from one bad job to another, always, in despair for the green card. Biju's life is a juggling act and not at all far from the poverty had his father believed he has escaped. In addition, he bears the weight of terrible loneliness and does not know how to relive in alienation. The west no longer has the privilege to tell the reality. The east has its chance to tell its version of reality and truth at last. The poor have been marginalized for centuries. No matter what their dreams and aspirations, no matter how hard they work always remains the same. The cook's son Biju had gone to the U.S.A. in order to earn money and become rich. The U.S.A. is known as the land of the free, a place of opportunity. It holds promise, keeps poorer nations and individuals 'in thrall' due to its superior economy. However, here too the poor have a raw deal and remain marginalized. The Cook, very unaware of Biju's situation, thought one day his son would accomplish all though Biju can afford to eat Basmati rice in the U.S.A., which is a rare treat for people of his class in India but he cannot afford a doctor in New York City when he breaks his leg. Kiran Desai deals a terrible blow on American dream of the Indian immigrants as she traces Biju's return to India, penniless and demented. The pathetic re-union of Biju and his father towards the end of the novel is a crushing, ironic commentary on the illusions that

postcolonial India cherishes on America as the ideal land of the future.

The Harassment of cultural clash:

The feeling of class and cultural differences plays its part in destroying the individual lives. Gian hates Sai for being a westernized Indian. More than the hope and longing, it is the inheritance of the loss of hope, the loss of innocence and happiness. Jemubhai is treated like strangers who do not belong to their own world and community. Jemubhai cannot protest the image of his race and ethnicity that figures in the mind of the Europeans. He works hard to prove his skill and occupy a recognizable place among his classmates. He retreats into solitude, the solitude habit, the habit becomes the man and it crushes him into a shadow. Everywhere Jemubhai finds disgust and hatred by almost all the persons. He grows stranger to himself than to others around him. He forgets how to laugh, clears the written test cannot impress Viva voce because of his Indian race. His examiners chuckle at his peculiar native accent and pronunciation. Forty-two are selected for the ICS. New list Indianize the service, Jemubhai finds his name at the very bottom of the page. He runs home with arms folded, gets immediately into bed, and soaks his pillow with his weeping. He lies there cry for three days and three nights. Jemubhai weeps because he can impress one only through his pen and not through his face and voice for it becomes ludicrous to the Europeans. In a colonial setting a man from the colonized country can occupy a position and establish himself only by being identitiless and voiceless. He cannot change the image of the Oriental people that figures in the mind of the Europeans.

Not only Jemubhai gets this double standard and biased treatment in England, but Biju, who goes to America to earn his livelihood, also finds the same disgusting

attitude and ill-treatment from Americans. Everywhere he has to bear the racial discrimination. Like Jemubhai, he cannot survive in the hammer of the politics of racialisation. She wants a man from the proper parts of Europe who at least has something in common with them like a religion and skin colour. Several restaurants where Biju works display racial differences. A man who belongs to a poorer European country and is most common in skin colour and religion occupies a lower position. However, a person who comes from east or another colonized country can secure only the lowest position. It is noteworthy that Biju, like Jemubhai, always secures a lowest rank in position. Like Jemubhai wanders from door to door to rent a room, Biju finds no establishment in job, and if gets, it is always disgusting and humiliating.

There is a loss at all levels, personal, social, political and cultural. The novel abounds with multiple episodes about the Indian's futile attempts to 'become' the superior. Jemubhai Patel, educated in the Imperial west declares his wife 'unsuitable' for himself because that way he can homogenize himself to the processes of cultural imperialism and keep up with his pretensions. The Judge, under the influence of his own colonized mindset and the capitalist forces of cultural, political and linguistic imperialism, transforms from the status of the 'brown other' to that of a 'sahib' and the price he pays for it is so heavy that being foreigner in own country. The cultural imperialists work with all their energy to create a sense of negation of the indigenous self and as soon as they succeed in achieving this objective, they are two neither-nor positional in the postcolonial, globalized world. The forces of globalization and cultural imperialism intrude into the everyday life of the 'colonized other,' as is evident in Lola and Noni's. In both places, New York and Kalimpong, Indians live parallel lives, conflicted by class and

nationality. It has brought into one class of Indians; people like the Cook and Gyan find the vestiges of colonialism in their unchanging poverty, in the unreachable power imbalance.

It is the handiwork of cultural imperialism when two neighbours living in Kalimpong get bitter over their differing affiliations to the old and the new imperialistic forces. Under the influence of cultural imperialism, their next generation has literally become the mouthpiece of the imperialist west. Lola, Noni and Mrs. Sen are the representatives of a postcolonial middle-class discard their own cultures for the sake of success; these women represent all the middle-class people from poorer nations whose eyes are foggy with the dollar dream. Cultural imperialism creates class differences and alienation of self as is evident from Lola and Noni's story and the Judge's story respectively. Cultural imperialism manifests itself in various hues when the formerly colonized postcolonial indigenous self is made to feel inferior because of the food she takes or the language she speaks. Desai's characters, placed in the postcolonial India as well as New York, are in a state of suffering because of their belief in the imperial propaganda.

The rich and the mighty enjoy an upper hand in all matters and miss no opportunity in staking claim over the wealth that should naturally and equitably fall to the share of all those who are born on this earth. They spend this wealth on the enhancement of the means of physical comfort and personal glory. The poor, on the other hand, are forced to live from hand to mouth notwithstanding their diligence and austerity. So the rich grow richer and the poor poorer. The Cook represents the downtrodden. In spite of his old age the cook serves the judge with sincerity, devotion and commitment. He is doomed to live with a few cheap a domestic item of Judge's. The insensitive

of Judge has clearly seen through the behaviour of Judge with Cook. It is quite strange that in spite of his arrival from poor family, the Judge developed hatred for the poverty-stricken people after he had left India. The Cook bears all mutely because he is without money. The heart is melting when the tribes of Zanzibar search Saeed at Tarts Bakery. The gate of bakery is closed to them, so is the gate of fate. Even Saeed is not ready to help who belongs to his own community. The overthrown of the downtrodden has clearly seen here. The harsh reality of the life of poverty is constricted to the dream-like luxuries of the life of prosperity.

The author records the suppressed anguish of the illegal immigrants in New York in the novel "The Inheritance of Loss". Sai experiences, cultural estrangement. She fails to adjust with the Eastern ways. Her Anglophile grandfather Justice Jemubhai Patel is a retired Chief Justice, an inheritor of English hyphenated identity. Sai is doomed to live with the judge and his poor Cook, whose son Biju, symbolically represents the second wave of undocumented immigrants. She detects the sense of loss of the dispossessed and the pangs felt by separation. The novel examines the different phase of Indian migration to the European countries. The first wave of migrants reaches there for higher studies. In 1939, Jemubhai Patel leaves for Cambridge for education. The Diaspora depicted in the novel shows that voluntary migration for studies to European countries affected the culture of the Indian people. The Judge is a living example of the life stunted by the encounter with the west. The atmosphere of loss and displacement spreads all over Cho Oyu. Jemubhai keeps alive an unhealthy contempt for his Indian heritage.

The recurrent theme of the novel is the anxiety of being a foreigner. The judge returns with hatred for Indian culture. He treats his wife with contempt and banishes

her from his life. The uneducated Cook prepares western food for Jemubhai but often fails to adjust with judge. Through Biju, the author tries to show the humiliation experienced by the people who reach America in search of a better future. The immigrant has to deal with various people and unfamiliar problems. Desai asserts that India is a land of multiculturalism. Sai a product of multiculturalism fails to keep the relationship with Gyan, who hates western style. As virtually torn between two cultures and Indian heritage, all the characters in the novel remain a dispossessed soul. Sai who is living with Anglophile grandfather loves Nepalese Maths-tutor who accuses her of being like slaves. Desai's characters have been stunted by their encounters with the west. These Indians are unwanted anachronistic in postcolonial India, where long suppressed people have begun to awaken to their dereliction to express their anger and despair.

The characters are not aware of the fact that they alienate or are being alienated. They seem to be alienated not only socially, but also psychologically. He exhibits a general dislike for his family, including his wife, community and anyone who was not white. He feels himself a foreigner. His cynicism slowly transforms into a complete hatred for her. He criticizes her every move. The refusal to acknowledge the presence of sincerity, human virtue, love or altruism is shown by Jemubhai. His attitude when he threw the food packet given by his mother into the sea reveals this. A general dislike in Jemubhai leaves no scope for sharing Sai's care. Social status and a sense of inferiority complex drive him aloof from the bonds of love. Cultural alienation is not only drawing the characters into the barrenness of human relations and emotions, but a sense of despair and decay runs through the houses.

Conclusion

The author focus on many westernized Indians like Jemubhai, Sai, the Cook, Noni and Lola. The culture of the west has penetrated into the lives of Indians as well as traditional Indians show their hatred towards western culture leads to clamour in an individual's life. The ill-treatment of Indians is depicted through the humiliation of Jemubhai in England. However, Jemubhai's adoration towards the west is shown in his hatred towards Tagore's poems and the condemnation of his wife Nimi for welcoming Nehru at the railway station. Through the character of Biju, the writer gives a deplorable picture of Indians living in America. As an illegal immigrant, he suffers a lot. He returns home penniless. The incorporated portrayal of India and West is clearly shown through the characters by Kiran Desai. Her characters are stubborn and arrogant, often refusing to cast off the strictures of culture, yet continuing to struggle with loss, poverty, and the trappings of their social class. The character is felt and unmoored, and frequently struggling to survive in the modern world, unsure of whether they will ever see the benefits and profits of globalization. The meeting of the East and West brings change, but not always progress.

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