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THE THEME OF HYBRIDITY IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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ABSTRACT

A renowned Indian English author, Kiran Desai was born in Chandigarh on 3rd September, 1971. As the daughter of a great Indian English author, Anita Desai, Kiran established herself as a great English novelist. After fourteen years of birth in India, she moved to England with her mother and thereafter only one year later settled in USA. In her own life she herself gone through different culture, she lived in three different cultures, which later became the main theme of her fiction. This experience of hybridity is prominent in her novels. Her both novels send back a mirror image of cultural mixture to what we call hybridity. Natalya Lusty defined- *Hybridity is a cross between two different races, plants or cultures.*¹ Hybrid means nothing but the mixture of two or more things and here we are discussing the mixture of cultures. Kiran Desai published two novels- the first one, *Hullabaloo in Guava Orchard* was published in 1998 and got a little attention from critics and readers; but her second novel published in 2006, *The Inheritance of Loss* was widely praised by critics and readers and also ranked as international best seller. It was this great work for which Kiran received Man Booker Prize of 2006 and also National Book Critics Fiction Award of 2006. Pankaj Mishra commented on it in New York Times in the following words- *ALTHOUGH it focuses on the fate of a few powerless individuals, Kiran Desai's extraordinary new novel manages to explore with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence.*²

Key-words: Hybridity, cultures, immigrant, anglicized, obsession.

The Inheritance of Loss is a literary miracle, deals with the lives of immigrants and the effects of cultural hybridity on its characters. It focuses on the stories of Biju, Sai, Jemubhai and others. Desai truthfully portrayed the mixture of different cultures and its effects on her characters. Biju is the son of Cook, who is born and brought up in India but for the betterment of life now immigrated to USA and living there as an illegal immigrant. Sai is a young Indian orphan girl born and brought up in Darjeeling and now settled in the hills of Kalimpong with her anglicized maternal grandfather Mr. Jemubhai Patel, who is completely obsessed with the western way of

life. The Cook, Biju's father has cultural conflict because of his attraction of American life and the internal diversities in Indian culture. Gyan, Sai's tutor and love, who is a Nepalese guy has torn between the Indian and Nepalese cultural conflict. Each and every character of the novel is riding on the two boats of the cultures. This cross in the cultures to which we call as hybridity is causing nothing but only disturbances in their lives.

Biju and Sai are two most important carriers of this theme. Biju is torn between two far away cultures- one is Indian till the time he lived and the second is American culture where he is trying to

live now for the betterment of life. Inspiring from the travelogue tales about the American life, Biju moved to USA; but when he reached there then he came to know that whatever is imagined by him through that tales is completely false and the reality is very different than that. The harmony between two cultures stated in the travelogues is nothing but a big lie, which is believed by him and also by his father and all Indians, who are dreaming to work in America for the betterment of life. Here we come to know that wither this dream of success is influenced by the 'American Dream' of success, if it is that then definitely there must be failure. Many American playwrights deal with this false dream in their works. Continuously working on ill-paid jobs and living as an illegal immigrant, Biju came to know that the picture of American society portrayed in the travelogues is a sweet lie. The reality is that it is the hardest for Indians to live the satisfactory life in America; the extra-ordinary life is far away it would be like a dream which never comes true. Desai depicted the real situation through following lines:

Slipping out and back on the street. It was horrible what happened to Indians abroad and nobody knew but other Indians abroad. It was a dirty little rodent secret.³

Here we come to know that the thinking of not only Biju's father but also every Indian is completely wrong. Everyone in India speaks about American dream and has false assumptions of Biju's success in USA. But the reality was astonishing which we can know from this statement. In reality Biju had to work at shady restaurants washing dishes so that his identity as an illegal immigrant should be hidden. This fact was not about Biju only but about most of the Indians who rushed to America for an instant success.

Another major vehicle of this theme is Sai, a young orphan girl living with her grandfather, Jemubhai Patel. Sai is living in India but she is the most complex character dealing with the theme of hybridity. Sai is living with Jemubhai who has obsession of western culture and so he wanted everything in his house in the western manner which has strong influence on Sai. Sai spent her childhood in Darjeeling which was very different than that of this Kalimpong. But Sai was also

affected by the western life. And in many sense she is anglicized. Another thing is that Jemubhai's cook who is dreaming about goodness of the American society and also has the knowledge of different cultures in India, but then also he is follower of the Indian culture and he is Sai's companion at home. Third person related to Sai and who has strong impact on Sai is her Nepalese tutor and also her love, Gyan. In this way Sai is possessed with different cultures. Having tangled in between these different cultured people Sai's character became more complex and stong about the theme of hybridity. Then also she was trying to be alienated from these cultural conflicts and many a time she communicated about it to Gyan and the Cook. Cook once commented:

Everyone knows. Costal people eat fish and see how much cleverer they are Bengalis, Malaylis, Tamils.⁴

Sai, haven't affected with this and even she cleared to the Cook. It indicates that she didn't think about the internal cultural conflict; but then also the impact of Jemubhai and Gyan played crucial role in her life.

Most hybrid character of the novel for the readers is Jemubhai Patel, a retired Chief Justice now settled in the hiss of Kalimpong. Jemubhai was completely obsessed with the western way of life and he is a blind believer of the western culture. He was born and brought up in India but after marriage moved to England for study and adopted the western culture leaving behind his wife and his Indian culture. Though he calls himself as a true westernized person but the western society never accepted him. He was only a hybrid for them. After returning to India he became a rigid western, he hates Indian. He couldn't give up his obsession of the western culture. Here too he was fond of western way of life. He uses knife or folk to eat chapatti. His anger about the Indians is stated by Desai in the following lines-

How dare he go for marriage? Is that the way to run a business? The fool Why can't the cook make something?⁵

This is the statement of Jemubhai when he heard that there are only biscuits in the home and the baker is not here, he has gone for his daughter's

wedding. Being angry on it he stated it. It was not the anger only about the baker but about the Indian society which he hates a lot.

Gyan, a Nepalese youth is also struggling between two cultures and became part of the Gurkha Movement for getting a separate place for their own culture. They also wanted their own and pure culture to be developed, not in a hybrid way.

To put in a short, Desai dealt sharply about the hybridity of cultures. She stated that Indians have the fascination of the western culture on the basis of the tales, they learnt from others. She warned her fellow men not to trust in it because reality may be different, like the experiences of Biju. And she also attacked the people like Jemubhai who are culminating the sacred flow of culture with their western philosophy of life. Throughout the novel she tried to inform her Indian readers that we our self are responsible for the hybridity and it never bring satisfaction in the life.

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